

CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS IN KIRIBATI

Kiribati (Republic of) comprises 32 atolls and reef islands, and one raised coral island, dispersed over 3.5 million square kilometres of ocean. It lies north of Tuvalu, Tokelau, Cook Islands and French Polynesia; east of Nauru; south of Hawaii; and west of South America.



Land area
(km²)
811

2020 mid-year
population estimate
118,700

Population growth
rate (%)
1.7

OVERVIEW

This civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) country profile for Kiribati is part of a series of country profiles for the Pacific Island region. The CRVS profiles consolidate knowledge shared by countries on the status of their CRVS systems in the recent past, including through government websites, published reports, media releases and presentations, and direct engagement between the authors of these profiles and in-country civil registration offices and health information offices. The objective of these CRVS country profiles is to provide a living resource (updated every 2-3 years) and quick reference point on the status and developments in CRVS systems in the Pacific Island region. The profiles provide an overview of the legislative, organisational and management frameworks of CRVS systems, registration processes, levels of completeness of birth and death registration, and the most recent developments towards improving CRVS systems. Whilst civil registration covers many vital events, these profiles focus on the registration of births and deaths, and collation of cause of death information. It is envisaged that these country profiles will serve as a fundamental tool in advocating for further investment in strengthening the coverage and completeness of CRVS systems across the Pacific Island region.

SOURCE OF BIRTH AND DEATH DATA

The source of figures in Table 1 (births) and Table 2 (deaths) is outlined below each table, with the full citation given in the Reference section at the end of the document. All figures were obtained from published sources or through direct contact with in-country civil registration offices and health information offices. The date figures were obtained through direct in-country contact is stated below the tables, and indicates when those figures were extracted from in-country databases.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Pacific Community and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) 2021. Civil registration and vital statistics in Kiribati. Noumea, New Caledonia: Pacific Community.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information please contact the Statistics for Development Division (SDD) – Pacific Community at: contact-sdd@spc.int; <https://sdd.spc.int/>

CRVS LEGISLATION, ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

Current legal framework governing birth and death registration

The recording and registration of births and deaths in Kiribati is governed by the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration Ordinance (1968); the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration (Amendment) Act (1997) (allowing registration of children born outside Kiribati); and the Births, Deaths and Marriages Registration (Amendment) Act (2007).

Agencies responsible for birth and death recording and registration

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services is responsible for the recording of births and deaths in health facilities and the community, with collation of these records at the national level undertaken by the Health Information Unit located on the main island of Tarawa. Responsibility for the civil registration of births and deaths is held by the Ministry of Justice, Civil Registry Office. The national Civil Registry Office is situated in South Tarawa, the capital of Kiribati, and is the responsibility of the Registrar General. In the outer islands (districts), including Tabuaeran and Teraina, registration of births and deaths is done by administrative social welfare officers; except in Line and Phoenix Islands (Kiritimati Island) where registration is done by two permanent civil registration officers. The national office and all district offices are responsible for printing and issuing birth and death certificates when required by customers.

National CRVS committee and CRVS action plan

Kiribati has a CRVS Committee comprised of the Civil Registry Office, the Health Information Unit, and the National Statistics Office. The CRVS committee is chaired by the Ministry of Justice. A CRVS Rapid Assessment was conducted by the committee in February 2013, and a CRVS Comprehensive Assessment was undertaken in 2013–2014 (both using the University of Queensland/WHO tools). An initial broad stakeholder meeting was held with Brisbane Accord Group (BAG) support in Tarawa in September 2013 to review the concepts and aspects included in the comprehensive assessment. The Kiribati CRVS Committee, with the assistance of in-country partners and a series of technical assistance visits from SPC and BAG partners, subsequently worked through the questions of the comprehensive assessment. These workshops and technical assistance visits resulted in the publication of the Kiribati National CRVS Improvement Plan 2016–2020 (UNESCAP 2017).

National ID systems

In 2018 the National Identity Act (2018) was approved, and in 2019 Kiribati implemented a national ID system that is linked to the civil registration birth database. All persons require a birth certificate to be registered in the national ID system but there is currently no link with death registration. It is anticipated that the national ID system will have a positive impact on strengthening the civil registration system, including attracting resources to procure a more robust IT system for civil registration.

REPORTING AND REGISTRATION OF BIRTHS

Recording births at health facilities and registering births at the civil registry

Informants of a birth (i.e. usually the mother, father or a relative) are required to register the birth in the district where the birth occurred. A birth notification form issued at the health facility where the birth occurred is the main document required to initiate the registration process. The district registration office databases are not electronically linked to the national database. The district offices send the birth notification form and the details of the birth registration to the national Civil Registration Office for filing and inputting into the national system. The Civil Registration Office opened a registration desk in the maternity ward of the national hospital in Tarawa (Nawerewere Hospital) in 2014, and in Betio in 2017. Births are recorded by a registration clerk into an electronic Microsoft Access database at the hospital, and a birth certificate is issued immediately to the family.

The electronic databases at the hospital are not linked to the national Civil Registration Office, but a copy of the databases is sent at regular intervals to the national Civil Registration Office for collation and validation. For births on the outer islands, a nurse on each island assists in filling out the birth notification and the parents (or another informant) then present the birth notification to the district registration office. For births outside hospitals or without a nurse in attendance, the district nurse or a nearby hospital/clinic should be notified of the birth and assist in registering the child. A Microsoft Access database is used at the national level in the Civil Registration Office, and in the district registration offices.

Timeframes and costs

The law requires that every child born in Kiribati be registered within 10 days of delivery (Ministry of Justice, 1977). Birth registration and a printed birth certificate are free of charge before the child is 12 months old, after which a late registration fee of KID 6.00 must be paid to register the birth. A fee of KID 3.00 is charged for a printed birth certificate.

Standard, on-time birth registration	no charge
Late registration (> 12 months)	6.00 (KID)*
Birth certificate printed (≤ 12 months)	no charge
Birth certificate printed (> 12 months)	3.00 (KID)

*The applicant is required to bring evidence, such as a baptismal certificate, a birth notification or a vaccination card, to support the applicant's identity. The court charges KID 2.00 and the Civil Registry Office charges KID 4.00.

Tasks that require a birth certificate and incentives (financial or other) for completing the birth registration process

A birth certificate is required for enrolment in school, to vote, to apply for a scholarship to study abroad, to apply for some jobs within Kiribati and abroad, to open a bank account and access a loan, to place a claim for birth-rights property, to apply for a passport and a government-issued ID card, and to obtain a marriage licence (Ministry of Justice 2018a).

Registration process for births occurring overseas

Any child with either one or both parents who are I-Kiribati, born outside Kiribati, may be registered in the Kiribati civil registry upon presentation of the original copy of the birth certificate obtained abroad, or a certified copy. There are provisions in the legislation to allow registration of a child for which the foreign birth certificate cannot be located or does not exist in order to minimise the number of stateless children.

REPORTING AND REGISTRATION OF DEATHS

Recording deaths at health facilities and registering deaths at the civil registry

Death registration should be conducted in the district where the death occurred. If the death occurred within a health facility, a Medical Certificate of Cause of Death (MCCD) must be provided by the informant to facilitate the registration process. Civil registration services for deaths are provided at the national hospital in Tarawa (Nawerewere Hospital), and in Betio. In order to complete the registration for deaths that occur outside health facilities without an MCCD, the informant is required to provide the district registration office with a copy of the death advertisement with the Broadcasting and Publications Authority, or the burial certificate completed by a pastor or a priest.

Timeframes and costs

The law requires that every death in Kiribati be registered within five days (Ministry of Justice 1977). Death registration and a printed death certificate are free of charge within 12 months of the death. After 12 months, the death cannot be registered without the written authority of the registrar general and in such a manner and subject to such conditions as may be prescribed. A KID 15.25 late registration fee must be paid, and a printed death certificate incurs a KID 3.00 charge 12 or more months after the death.

Standard, on-time death registration	no charge
Late registration (> 1 year)	15.25 (KID)*
Death certificate printed (≤ 12 months)	no charge
Death certificate printed (> 12 months)	3.00 (KID)

*The court charges KID 11.25 and the Civil Registry Office charges KID 4.00.

Tasks that require a death certificate and incentives (financial or other) for completing the death registration process

A death certificate is required for inheritance of land, property and estates of deceased persons; compensation; and to apply for re-marriage (Ministry of Justice 2018b).

Registration process for deaths occurring overseas

Where a person of I-Kiribati descent has died outside Kiribati, the registrar general may, on application by a family member of the deceased and payment of a prescribed fee, register the death in the Kiribati civil registry upon presentation of the original death certificate, or a certified copy.

COLLATION AND CLASSIFICATION OF CAUSE OF DEATH

Process for coding death certificates

Coding of cause of death is done according to ICD-10 at the national level. Coded data are not reintegrated with the district records. The quality and completeness of cause of death data vary significantly across districts.

Training and resources for cause of death certification and coding

In December 2018, one medical doctor from Kiribati travelled to Tonga to participate in a three-day regional training workshop on medical certification of cause of death. The workshop was coordinated by SPC and supported by BAG partners. In August 2017 and October 2016, WHO supported the training and capacity-building of doctors on medical certification of cause of death, training of clinical coders on medical terminology, and improving the quality of data and health information reporting systems in Kiribati.

COMPLETENESS OF CIVIL REGISTRATION DATA

The completeness of birth and death registration can be estimated by comparing the number of births and deaths in the civil registry with the number of births and deaths recorded by the health system, enumerated during national censuses, and estimated by international agencies. In some countries in the Pacific region, the births and deaths of citizens overseas can be registered in the civil registry. For the purpose of estimating completeness, it is best that these overseas births and deaths are not included in the civil registry figures, since the other sources to which they are compared, such as health records, do not include overseas events. In Kiribati, overseas births and deaths can be registered in the civil registry (see sections above on registration processes for births and deaths occurring overseas), and we have not been able to determine if these overseas events have been included in the figures from the civil registry displayed in the table below. If overseas events have been included, the estimates of completeness for the civil registry will be higher than if overseas events were excluded.

Table 1 shows that between 2012 and 2018, the estimated completeness of birth registration when compared to health records has varied from around 70% in 2012–2013, up to 86% in 2015, and around 75% during 2016–2018. Comparison with the 2014 census shows an estimated completeness of around 76%, and comparison with the SPC projection for 2018 indicates a completeness of around 78%.

The completeness of birth registration in Kiribati has also been estimated by periodic population sample surveys. During the past decade there has been a social development indicator survey (SDIS) and a demographic and health survey (DHS) conducted in Kiribati. These surveys ask the mother or caregiver of children aged under five

years whether their child's birth has been registered with a civil authority, and the DHS also asks if their child possesses a birth certificate. The 2018–2019 Kiribati SDIS found that, of the 2,179 children aged under five years included in the survey, 91.6% were reported to have had their births registered with a civil authority (Kiribati NSO 2019). And the 2009 Kiribati DHS found that of the 1,143 children aged under five years included in the survey, 93.5% were reported to have had their births registered, and 36.5% were reported to possess a birth certificate (KNSO and SPC 2010).

Table 1. Completeness of birth registration data

Year	Source of births				Completeness of birth registration		
	Civil Registry ^a	Health ^b	SPC projection ^c	Census ^d	Compared with health	Compared with SPC	Compared with census
2018	2,529	3,398	3,261	-	74%	78%	-
2017	2,333	3,069	-	-	76%	-	-
2016	2,169	2,788	-	-	78%	-	-
2015	2,117	2,456	-	-	86%	-	-
2014	2,114	2,628	-	2,779	80%	-	76%
2013	1,684	2,518	-	-	67%	-	-
2012	1,855	2,692	-	-	69%	-	-
2011	2,364	-	-	-	-	-	-
2010	2,131	-	-	-	-	-	-

Sources: ^aObtained directly from Kiribati Civil Registration Office 09.04.2021. ^bObtained directly from the Health Information Unit on 23.09.2020. ^cCalculated from 2018 crude birth rate (Pacific Community 2018a) and 2018 population projection (Pacific Community 2018b). ^dThe 2015 census was conducted partway through the year, so the most recent year for which births were enumerated in full was 2014 (Ministry of Finance 2016). Completeness was calculated by dividing 'Civil Registry' by 'Health', dividing 'Civil Registry' by 'SPC projection', and dividing 'Civil Registry' by 'Census'.

For deaths in Kiribati, an assessment of completeness cannot be done at the present time because deaths in the civil registry are tabulated by year of registration, rather than by year of occurrence (e.g. date of death). To be able to estimate completeness, the figures for deaths need to be available by year of occurrence to be comparable to health, census and SPC projections. For this reason, Table 2 does not contain figures for deaths from the civil registry. In addition, the source of the figures for health suggests that deaths outside health facilities are sometimes not captured by the health system, especially on South Tarawa and Betio (UNESCAP 2020). The figures for health are therefore likely to be an underestimate of the true mortality level.

Table 2. Completeness of death registration data

Year	Source of deaths				Completeness of death registration		
	Civil Registry ^a	Health ^b	SPC projection ^c	Census ^d	Compared with health	Compared with SPC	Compared with census
2018	-	636 [^]	792	-	-	-	-
2017	-	726 [^]	-	-	-	-	-
2016	-	636 [^]	-	-	-	-	-
2015	-	612 [^]	-	-	-	-	-
2014	-	650 [^]	-	-	-	-	-
2013	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2012	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2011	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2010	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Sources: ^aFigures obtained directly from the Kiribati Civil Registration Office on 19.11.2020 are tabulated by year of registration, and are not suitable for presentation in the table. ^bHealth Information Unit, obtained directly from the Kiribati Civil Registration Office as part of the UNESCAP Midterm Questionnaire. [^]The source of these figures suggests that deaths outside health facilities are sometimes not captured by the health system, especially on South Tarawa and Betio, and therefore these figures for health are likely to be an underestimate of the true mortality level (UNESCAP 2020). ^cCalculated from 2018 crude death rate (Pacific Community 2018a) and 2018 population projection (Pacific Community 2018b). ^dThe 2015 census did not ask questions on all-age mortality, and therefore could not be used to estimate the completeness of death registration. Completeness could not be calculated without figures from the civil registry.

PUBLICATION OF CRVS DATA AND REPORTS

The national Civil Registration Office routinely compiles tabulations of registered births and deaths by year of registration. Whilst there is no established practice of regularly sharing these data with the National Statistics Office (NSO), in 2018 the Civil Registration Office, in collaboration with the NSO and the Health Information Unit, produced a national CRVS report covering birth and death registration data for 2012–2014 (Govt Kiribati 2018).

RECENT INITIATIVES AND PLANS TO STRENGTHEN CRVS

1. During 2020, mobile birth registration campaigns continued in Kiribati, targeting children who had never been registered. There were no costs for late birth registration or for obtaining a printed birth certificate during these campaigns.
2. During 2020, refresher training was provided to nurses who are responsible for filling out birth notification forms, in order to help ensure that these forms are filled out correctly, and to familiarise nurses with CRVS legislation regarding birth registration.
3. In July 2020, an IT officer was recruited to work in the national Civil Registry Office in South Tarawa to scan every register book into the system, and to provide other technical assistance such as repairing computers and reviewing IT security. Funding for this position has been provided by UNICEF.
4. Upgrading of the current Microsoft Access civil registry database to an SQL database is ongoing, as is also linking individual records within the database (e.g. linking births with deaths and marriages). Following completion of the upgrade, all certificates will be printed with security features such as a watermark and a QR code (quick response code) which can be scanned from a phone. It is expected that this upgrade will be completed and ready to use by civil registry staff by the end of 2020. UNICEF has provided support for this work through the Child Protection Programme.
5. The civil registry is planning to establish linked electronic registration systems to the outer islands to facilitate better communication between the national and district offices, and to improve record management.
6. In 2019, the government of Kiribati implemented a national ID system which is linked to the civil registration birth database. All persons require a birth certificate to be registered in the national ID system. There is, however, currently no linkage with death registration. It is anticipated that the national ID system will have a positive impact on strengthening the civil registration system.
7. In December 2019, the Kiribati Civil Registry Office (KCRO) entered into a “twinning” program with the New South Wales Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages. The objectives of the twinning program include: (i) assisting the KCRO to develop and implement its National CRVS Strategy; (ii) improving the rate of birth and death registration; (iii) establishing a mentoring program for key staff in the NSW Registry and Kiribati Civil Registry; (iv) strengthening overall registry practices of the Kiribati Civil Registry; and (v) developing a program to promote awareness among government and the community on the importance of CRVS to support security and planning more broadly (Australian High Commission 2019).
8. In December 2018, one medical doctor from Kiribati travelled to Tonga to participate in a three-day regional training workshop on medical certification of cause of death. The workshop was coordinated by SPC and supported by BAG partners.
9. In 2017, the Civil Registration Office opened a birth and death registration service desk at the national hospital in Betio. This has been useful in improving registration completeness.
10. In 2017, Kiribati revised its death certificate to align to the WHO recommended standards.

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