

Improving Philippine Civil Registration and Vital Statistics through Digital Transformationⁱ

Abstract

Digitalization is not new for the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA). Since 2000, a computerized civil registration system in the country was established when the then National Statistics Office partnered with Unisys Philippines under the Public-Private Partnership project for the development of the Civil Registry System-Information Technology (CRS-ITP). The CRS-ITP transformed the manual processing of civil registry documents and digitized its physical archiving using new technology. In September 2016, the PSA has entered into another Concession Agreement under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) project for the second phase of the CRS-ITP to improve the obsolete IT systems, to expand services through additional CRS outlets nationwide, to provide infrastructure for disaster recovery, and to extend value added services to the PSA clientele.

However, over the years significant technological advancements have gradually emerged and with the restrictions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic limiting face-to-face transactions with public and private establishments and in compliance to Republic Act No. 11032 or the Ease of Doing Business and Efficient Government Service Delivery Act, the PSA must persist to further improve its implementation strategies through digital transformation. Thus, upon the direction of the National Statistician and Civil Registrar General of the PSA, one of the major programs initiated by the Civil Registration Service is the “Digitalization of the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) System” as part of its major deliverables from 2022 to 2024. This project aims to further improve the efficiency of the delivery of civil registration services and vital statistics in the country.

Improving Philippine Civil Registration and Vital Statistics through Digital Transformation

I. Background

A. Administrative arrangements of the CRVS System

Various laws and directives were enforced to establish systematic functions and governance over the Philippine's Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System and since the enactment of Act No. 3753 or the Law on Registry of Civil Status in 1930 civil registration has significantly changed and more legislations were implemented to identify the specific functions of government bodies as stakeholders of CRVS. Under Republic Act No. 7160, civil registration is a devolved function of the Local Government Unit (LGU) under the duties of the city/municipal civil registrar while the National Statistician and Civil Registrar General (NSCRG) provides technical supervision over the Local Civil Registrars in the country. Republic Act No. 10625 or the Philippine Statistical Act of 2013 was signed into law on 12 September 2013. This law mandates the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) to carry out, enforce and administer civil registration functions in the country as provided for in Act No. 3753. In addition to these main functions, the PSA is the central repository of all registered vital events such as births, marriages, deaths, and other changes in the civil status of persons including reported vital events of Filipinos abroad and the registered marriages, divorces and conversions to Islam in the Shari'a Circuit Courts. Inherent to these functions is the copy issuance of certified copies of birth, marriage, and death certificates and other registrable documents and certifications.

B. Current Philippine CRVS Systems

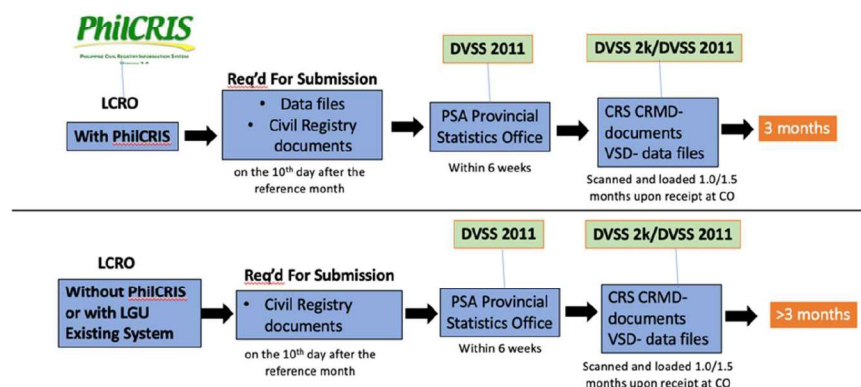


Figure 1. Overview of the Current CRVS Systems

Figure 1 presents the existing CRVS systems used in the country. The NSO then developed the Philippine Civil Registry Information System or **PhilCRIS** for use of the Local Civil Registry Offices (LCROs), solemnizing officers, medical records officers/attending physicians and other stakeholders in the data encoding, printing of the birth, marriage, and death forms as well as the data storage and easy query and retrieval for the demand on civil registration services at their own jurisdictions.

The first process flow presents those authorized LCROs to use PhilCRIS are required to submit the consolidated civil registry documents and data files registered in their respective city/municipality to the PSA Provincial Statistical Offices within the 10th day after the reference month. This is in consonance to the provisions of the Republic Act 7160 and the Implementing Rules and Regulations of Act No. 3753 (AO 1 Series of 1993). Generally, under this case, the processing time prior to availability of the civil registry document in the PSA database is three (3) months, while submission of data files used for generation of vital statistics is released monthly.

In order to address the demand for copy issuance of civil registry documents, advance endorsement of the copy of registered documents to the Civil Registration Service is available under the Electronic Endorsement process at the nearest CRS outlet or through courier to facilitate the issuance of documents' copy in Security Paper (SECPA).

At the PSA level, the Decentralized Vital Statistics System or DVSS are used for the processing of received civil registry documents at the provincial and central office, generally for the purpose of indexing necessary for the demand on copy issuances/certifications at PSA and the generation and dissemination of vital statistics. A newly developed system named Vital Events Information System under the Civil Registry System-Information Technology Project Phase II (CRS-ITP2) was piloted in August 2022 in selected Provincial Statistical Offices (PSOs) to replace these DVSS systems.

The second process flow presents those LCROs with no PhilCRIS or those with their own developed IT systems. Since they are not authorized to use PhilCRIS, additional tasks to be done at the PSA Provincial Statistical Offices is to encode all received civil registry

documents, prior to submission to the PSA Central Office. This takes longer processing time, especially those with high volume of registrations (i.e., Cebu, Davao, or other provinces with high population). Both copy issuance and authentication services and generation of vital statistics are therefore affected.

II. Digital Transformation in the Civil Registry System: 2000 to present

Digitalization is not new to the PSA. Since 2000, a computerized civil registration system in the country has started when the then National Statistics Office (NSO) partnered with the Unisys Philippines under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) project for the development of the Civil Registry System-Information Technology (CRS-ITP). The CRS-ITP transformed the tedious manual processing and digitized the physical archiving of registered civil registry documents using new technology.

A. Civil Registry System-Information Technology Project (CRS-ITP)

The CRS-ITP is a 12-year Built-Operate-Transfer (BOT) project of the NSO awarded to Unisys Philippines, selected through the BOT bidding process. The project was awarded in 1999 and commenced in 2000. The Project ended on March 31, 2012 however, a provisional extension of three (3) years and five (5) months was granted to Unisys starting on April 1, 2012 for the continued operation of the project while waiting for the public bidding on CRS-ITP2 to take place so as not to disrupt the delivery of public service.

CRS-ITP enhanced the delivery of civil registration services to the public, organized and managed a complete and accurate database of more than 100 million civil registry records of the PSA, minimized falsification and fabrication of civil registry documents with the introduction of the security features for the copy issuances, developed a secured database, and improved the computing capability of the then NSO. The CRS-ITP established forty (40) Civil Registry System (CRS) Outlets nationwide, developed the Batch Requests System or BREQS which allows local government units and private institutions to accept and release requests for copy issuance of civil registry documents in behalf of the agency, and implemented an online platform for securing requests for copies of civil registry documents.

Basic Services under CRS-ITP

- a. Copy Issuance – release of ~~for~~ copies of Birth, Death, and Marriage certificates upon receipt of requests from document owners or authorized representatives.
- b. Authentication - is the processing of requests for the PSA to certify the authenticity of the requester's copy of the civil registry document (CRD) issued by the Local Civil Registry Office (LCRO).
- c. Certificate of No Marriage/Advisory of Marriage- is the processing of requests for Certification of No Marriage (CENOMAR). If a record of marriage is found in the CRS database, an Advisory on Marriage (CEMAR) is issued instead of a CENOMAR;
- d. Agency Validation Service - is a service provided to different government agencies and stakeholders such as the embassies and government agencies i.e. DFA, AFP, GSIS, etc. PSA can retrieve the data from the CRS database by batch based on the agency's supplied requirement (data matching services).
- e. Electronic Endorsement - refers to the service wherein the Local Civil Registry Office (LCRO) forwards electronically a copy of the civil registry document to PSA Central Office for verification and approval. Approved documents are issued to clients in security paper.
- f. Electronic Annotation- Annotations are requested when a petition to change a details on the civil registry document. This applies to court decrees, legal instruments, supplemental reports and decisions on petitions covered by Republic Acts (R. A. No. 9048, 10172). Annotation are placed on the image of the original document and the result is an annotated document that is loaded in the CRS database for purposes of subsequent copy issuances.

B. Civil Registry System-Information Technology Project Phase II (CRS-ITP2)

In September 2016, the PSA has entered into another Concession Agreement under PPP project for the second Phase of the CRS-ITP to improve the obsolete IT systems, to expand services through additional CRS outlets nationwide, to provide infrastructure for disaster recovery, and to provide value added services to the PSA clientele.

1. Project Scope

- Takeover the Operations and Maintenance of the CRS-ITP system;
- Systems Development and Operations and Maintenance of the IT System;
- Construction of the 9-Storey CRS Building to house CRS including the Central Facility, the Primary Back Office and Central Outlet;
- Establishment of Disaster Recovery Facilities;
- Enhancement of the existing CRS Outlets and establishment of additional CRS Outlets;
- Operations and Maintenance of the CRS Building and the Back Offices, at least eighty (80) Service Outlets, and the Disaster Recovery Facilities;
- Refresh of the IT System; and
- Hand over of Project Assets.

2. CRS-ITP and ITP2 Accomplishments

The CRS-ITP 1 and 2 has improved the delivery of civil registration services as the agency has able to serve an increasing number of clients from 357,628 transactions in 2000 to 22,480,673 transactions in 2019. The demand declined during the pandemic with 11,725,106 transactions in 2020 and 14,432,964 transactions in 2021.

The percentage of transactions being served from the NSO/PSA-CRS databased (conversion status) increased from 50% in August 2002 to 95% in March 2009. This means that more clients are served within the day waiting time as the conversion status of records in the database increases. The computerized system had improved the processing time of requested documents for birth, marriage, and death certificates from 7-15 working days prior to CRS-ITP to 1-2 hours processing time and release within the day and the Certificate of No Marriage (CENOMAR) from 15 working days processing time to 1-2 working days.

As of September 2022, 9 new additional CRS Outlets are opened, these are located in Tarlac, Koronadal, Bohol, Abra, Malaybalay, Pagadian, Masbate, Tagum and Valenzuela City.

PSA piloted the CRS-ITP2 systems in Batch 1- CRS Outlets in July 2022: Six (6) Outlets located at East Avenue, Valenzuela, Olongapo, Puerto Princesa, Iligan, and Bacolod City. These Batch 1-CRS Outlets are issuing certifications in Security Paper (SECPA) with a QR code, a new feature in the CRS-ITP2. Likewise, PSA e-Verification App is already available for download at PSA website and App Store. This PSA e-Verification App is used to confirm the authenticity of the PSA-issued certifications and copies of civil registry documents and allows the public to validate the displayed information against the printed SECPA.



3. CRS-ITP2 Schedule of fees

The Concessionaire is making a profit based on revenue sharing generated from the CRS-ITP2 services as indicated below. The sharing is 54.5% for PSA and 45.5% for Unisys. The basic fees as are follows:

CRS-ITP2 Services	Schedule of Fee	
	CRS-ITP1	CRS-ITP2
Copy Issuance (Birth/Marriage/Death)	155	155
Authentication (Birth/Marriage/Death)	155	155
CENOMAR	210	210
CENODEATH	210	210
Premium Annotation		255
Viewable Online (B/M/D)*		130
Viewable Online (CENOMAR/CENODEATH)*		185
DocPrint*		80

DST=Php30.00 per copies.

4. CRS-ITP2 Infrastructure

a. CRS-ITP2 Infrastructure

The CRS System has several components:

- Central Facility
- Primary Back Office
- Secondary Back Office
- CRS Outlet Sites
- Cyber outlets (PSA Serbilis, PSA Helpline, among others)

The infrastructure of CRS-ITP2 includes the Central Facility, Back Offices (Primary and Secondary), Outlets, and Disaster Recovery (DR) Site. The Back Offices, Outlets, and DR Site are linked to Central Facility with redundant network connections.

The infrastructure setup of CRS-ITP2 is Hub-and-Spoke Model, wherein the Back Offices functions as the “hub” while the Outlets which use the services of the hub are the “spoke”. This model enables the segregation of tasks of the frontline and backend. Likewise, the same promotes the ability to achieve uniform set of service levels across the outlets nationwide.

b. CRS-ITP2 Expanded services

The effectivity of Republic Act No. 11032 or the Ease of Doing Business and Efficient Government Service Delivery Act of 2018 (ARTA) and the COVID-19 pandemic has been the catalysts for change as PSA encounter challenges in providing a responsive civil registration to its clientele using its own digitalization project (CRS-ITP2). Expanded services for civil registration were developed under the leadership of Undersecretary Claire Dennis S. Mapa to further improve the delivery of services and to be responsive to the new normal brought about by COVID-19 pandemic. These are:

- a. Full implementation of the PSA Civil Registration Services Online Appointment System in the CRS Outlets in February 2022 to manage the crowd, queuing of clients, and in compliance to IATF (Inter-agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-EID) guidelines and LGUs health protocols and social distancing policies.

- b. Alternative modes of payment at CRS Outlets thru cashless scheme via Paymaya (now Maya) and GCash including the digital payments via the Landbank of the Philippines.
- c. Use of the Happy or Not Online Feedback Solution to gather daily/weekly/monthly feedback in the CRS Outlets.
- d. Development of the E-cert by Pilipinas Teleserv and the Digital Copy Issuance by PSA Serbilis for Government-to-Government copy issuance transactions. These systems were developed by PSA and its partners primarily for government agencies such as the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) through the Philippine Embassies/Consulates abroad and other interested parties.
- e. Decentralized Copy Annotation Process allowing the Regional CRS Outlets to process requests for annotations of documents under the Republic Act No. 9048, Republic Act No. 10172, and Supplemental Report.
- f. Intensified promotion for accreditation of Third-Party Members (BREQS for Robinsons and other private accredited partners and LGU partners).

III. Digitalization of the Philippine CRVS – 2022 to 2024

The COVID-19 pandemic has shifted the way PSA delivers civil registration services to the general public and the release of vital statistics data for monitoring and policy formulation purposes by the government and other private sectors. During the height of the pandemic in 2020, the PSA released weekly and monthly data on births, marriages, and deaths, including COVID-19 causes of deaths. This data are important to the government to monitor and plan for health actions related to the pandemic. Given the CRVS current system and its legal framework, there was a big challenge to respond to the needs for CRVS data. There is a need to upgrade the existing CRVS systems.

It was also observed that more clients shifted to avail of the online services of the PSA through the PSA Helpline and PSA Serbilis and other channels. Although there was a decreased in the demand for civil registry documents such as births, marriages, and deaths certificates during the pandemic, PSA was faced with a challenge as the increase of “online sellers” for fraudulent or tampered documents and illegal online civil registration services such as “delayed registration”, “temporary corrections”, and “PSA Pasilip”.

The PSA-issued documents and certifications are therefore being questioned for its validity. This resulted to the increase of validation services from government agencies and foreign embassies to check if these civil registry documents submitted to them are authentic, which is an additional workload to the agency.

Digitalization is necessary to upgrade the existing CRVS systems to be responsive to the new normal and in compliance to the Ease of Doing Business law.

The PSA has incorporated “Digitalization of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) System” as part of its major deliverables for 2022 to 2024 to further improve the efficiency of the delivery of civil registration services in the country. This project is to be implemented in three (3) components and is to be simultaneously done in 2022 to 2024, until completion of the full digital transformation. This initiative of the PSA was identified as one of the strategies to attain the goals for the Philippines’ CRVS Decade 2015-2024 as follows:

1. Universal civil registration of births, deaths, and other vital events;
2. All individuals with legal documentation to claim identity, civil status, and ensuring rights; and
3. Accurate, complete, and timely vital registration are produced and disseminated.

The project also aims to develop an interoperable system for PhilSys and CRVS.

The proposed project involved three (3) Components:

Component 1: Review/updating of the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of Act No. 3753 or the CRG Administrative Order No. 1, Series of 1993

Component 2: Development of an Online Platform (i.e., Enhanced Philippine Civil Registry Information System or e-PhilCRIS and notification of Vital Events system) that will digitalize the civil registration and processing from the sources, i.e., hospital, clinics, barangay secretaries to the Local Civil Registry Office to the PSA Central and Field Offices. This digitalization project also includes

development of an interoperable system for CRVS and PhilSys Identification System.

Component 3: RA 9048/RA 10172 System Digitalization

Adopt appropriate technology in the processing of RA 9048/10172 petitions including development of an automated system that will minimize dependence to physical copies of petitions. It is also aimed that acted petitions shall be digitally archived and stored in a secure location to prevent potential data loss due to ordinary wear and tear.

Currently, average processing time due to heavy dependencies on manual process is at 62 days. There is also a struggle in monitoring of filed petitions as the current system has limitations on the reports generated. Accessibility of documents has been a continuous challenge as there is no digital copies stored. In such a case, reliance to manual retrieval of documents as it may deem necessary has been always the process.

The RA 9048 and RA 10172 digitalization is proposed to have these features: online submission of petitions, upgraded database, use of easy tracking and monitoring of petitions, and decentralized functions for the review of petitions at the PSA field offices.

C. PSA Digital Transformation Target Initiatives for 2022-2024

The Target deliverables for this digitalization are:

1. Enhanced Philippine Civil Registry Information System (e-PhilCRIS).
 - a. Version 1.0- Birth and death for hospitals/clinics/institutions
 - b. Version 1.1- Marriages for churches, temple, mosques, etc.
 - c. Version 1.2 – LCRO Full version for Birth, Marriage, Death and Foundling
 - d. Version 1,3- Sharia Courts (marriages, divorces, and conversions to Islam)
 - e. Version 1.4- Philippine Foreign Service Posts (ROM, ROB, ROD)
2. Development of the Notification of Vital Event that link data from barangay level to the Local Civil Registry Offices.
3. Revised CRVS Handbook for Health Workers (births, deaths, and fetal deaths).

4. Integration of PhilSys ID and CRVS -the objective is to issue a PCN upon registration of birth to the child and capturing data of PhilID and linking with the parent/s information in the child's birth certificate.
5. RA 9048 and RA 10172 digital transformation (enhanced system for online processing of petitions).

With these initiatives, additional resources are required to establish an online platform and provide the needed IT infrastructure not only at the PSA but with the LGUs.

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