

Workshop on *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 3* for South American Countries

9 – 12 November 2015, Santiago, Chile

**Conclusions and recommendations**

1. The workshop was conducted in partnership with CELADE, the Population Division of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, with collaboration of the National Institute of Statistics of Chile, the Ministry of Health of Chile, and the Service of Civil Registration and Identification of Chile. Civil registrars, statisticians and health professionals from the following countries participated: Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela. Organization of American States also participated.
2. The participants expressed their appreciation for the organization of the workshop and emphasized that it was very timely taking into consideration the momentum that is being building in regard to the improvement of civil registration in the attending countries.
3. In that context, the participants outlined that the workshop is timely also from the point of view of the adoption of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the role it assigns to statistics in general and vital statistics in particular, as well as the adoption of the Montevideo Consensus and its Operational Guidelines. The participants highlighted the fact that the Agenda directly positions accurate and complete registration as one of the main targets under the 16<sup>th</sup> goal “Peace, justice and strong institutions”.
4. The workshop welcomed the revised version of the *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System* underlying its importance in terms of setting international standards for civil registration and vital statistics. The United Nations Statistics Division took note of the countries’ preoccupation for thoroughly reviewing the quality of the *Principles and Recommendations* translation into Spanish.
5. In that respect, countries mainly discussed issues related to continuous vital statistics on births and deaths, rather than derived indicators on fertility and mortality.
6. In that context, the workshop noted that the topic of deaths occurring during pregnancy, birth or puerperium is presented in the recommendations as a non-core topic for statistical collection from civil registration – thus putting it in the non-priority category. Recognizing the importance of the topic in the region, the workshop concluded that the certification of the causes of death in the participating countries is not yet in such a shape to allow for generating these statistics with adequate quality, and requested CELADE to initiate the procedure for emphasizing the need for maternal mortality to be recognized as a core topic for regional purposes.
7. The implementation of the international standards is recognized as a goal for all participating countries; nevertheless, there are difficulties and obstacles that vary from one country to the other, in order to accomplish identical figures between civil registration and vital statistics.
8. The workshop recognized the whole set of handbooks accompanying the *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 3*, as relevant and valuable reference. It also requested that in the updates and forthcoming revision a more comprehensive elaboration of the role of health sector not only as informants in the civil registration process, but also as main users of resulting statistics be considered.
9. Visible and tangible improvement of civil registration procedures and coverage has been noted in almost all of the participating countries albeit the levels of modernization and functioning of

these systems in different countries were not at the same level. Irrespective, all the participating countries are implementing efforts in terms of modernizing civil registration systems. In that context, the participants outlined the need for constant training within the national civil registration systems and concluded this should be strongly emphasized and reflected in these conclusions and recommendations.

10. The workshop re-iterated the importance of civil registration for a whole range of issues, including the exercise of basic human rights, assigning legal identities to all the citizens and the functioning of the government, aside from its role in the production of reliable, regular and comprehensive vital statistics.
11. The workshop pointed out challenges the registration process and protocols in the region are facing in connection to the emerging new family arrangements and reproduction practices; this refers to same-sex marriages and related child adoptions, surrogate motherhood and contemporary techniques for insemination and so forth. Consequently, it urged regional institutions to initiate the development of guidance for registration of these occurrences. Also, the workshop noted with concern that the issues of identifying usual residence in the process of civil registration represent equally a considerable challenge – thus the need to develop more refined methods for collection and validation of entries in that respect, to comprehensively train civil registrars in the subject.
12. In terms of capabilities of countries to produce reliable, accurate and regular vital statistics from civil registration, the workshop identified four distinct clusters: 1) countries that fully developed an integrated system of generating vital statistics from civil registration with direct support of the health sector; 2) countries that successfully developed and modernized their civil registration system in recent years but that did not fully incorporate the vital statistics and health components, 3) countries that generate vital statistics completely through the health sector, and 4) countries that do not generate vital statistics, but only estimate indicators on mortality and fertility using a combination of sources such as population and housing censuses and demographic surveys.
13. The workshop debated at length the issues regarding the assessment of the coverage of civil registration. It noted the methods for assessing the coverage of civil registration as contained in the *Principles and Recommendations* and concluded that direct methods described therein were not implemented recently in the participating countries. The current national coverage assessments vary considerably, depending on the source of the assessment. Consequently, the participants noted the need to identify the most appropriate of the methods and consistently implement in each country. Participants also expressed their interest in having training at the national level on specific methodologies for assessing the quality of their civil registration data and the consequent generation of vital statistics.
14. In terms of validation for vital statistics production procedures, the workshop emphasized several points. The first refers to the need to develop precise and sophisticated edits in order to minimize inaccuracies in resulting statistics, especially when data entry from paper forms is involved. It also outlined the need to accompany all disseminated statistics with full explanations related to the quality of data and applied validation protocols, enabling users to have a more complete understanding of the data – essentially outlining the importance of transparent overview of the production process.

15. Coordination at the national level among institutions responsible for civil registration, vital statistics and public health successfully operates in only a few participating countries – yet, when functioning, clearly results in excellent quality and timeliness of vital and related health statistics. Therefore, the workshop concluded that each participant need to deliver a straightforward message to heads of their institutions in terms of workshop’s recommendations to initiate formation or consolidation of such cooperation at home.
16. The participants acknowledged the Montevideo Consensus while also mentioning that it does not cover all topics of interest; and welcomed the regional programmes operated by Organization of American States aimed at improving civil registration in the region, as well as other regional initiatives, such as RELACSYS spearheaded by PAHO.
17. The morning session of the third day of the workshop consisted of a field trip and visit to the Demographic Statistics and Census Office of the National institute of Statistics of Chile (INE). INE, the Service of Civil Registration and Identification and the Ministry of Health provided a detailed demonstration of the process of producing vital and health statistics from civil registration. The system in Chile is an excellent example of implementation of international standards as presented in the *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 3*. The participants expressed their most sincere appreciation for outstanding hospitality and comprehensive overview of the functioning of the system.
18. In delivering their presentations on the major obstacles related to the functioning of civil registration systems and the production of vital statistics, as well as responding to regional initiatives, the workshop concluded that for all participating countries these obstacles are well known and are being addressed at the national level.
19. In the process of presenting the comparison of national practices with international standards in terms of topics that are collected, the workshop noted that in the vast majority of countries the topics designed to measure migration trends and patterns – such as the place of birth of the mother and the duration of residence of the mother, both core topics – are not represented.
20. In that context, it was also clearly outlined that the non-core topic on ethnic or national group – as defined in the *Principles and Recommendations* – is of utmost importance in participating countries. Thus, the workshop recommended that CELADE continues to provide technical assistance on this subject matter.
21. It was seen that some countries need to establish a procedure, through agreements, in order to strengthen civil registration and vital statistics in border zones.
22. The workshop noticed that the requirement of some international organizations, such as the World Health Organization, of submitting documentation only in English has detrimental effects on coordination at the international level, and on the capacity of countries to inform advancements and to provide metadata with respect to their statistics and indicators.