

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

30 August– 2 September 2016, Guatemala City, Guatemala

Conclusions and recommendations

1. The workshop was conducted in partnership with the Organization of the American States, the regional UNICEF office for Latin America and the Caribbean, the National Persons Register of Guatemala (RENAP), and the National Statistical Institute of Guatemala (INE). Civil registrars, statisticians and health professionals from the following countries participated: Anguilla, Belize, Bermuda, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Guyana, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, and Turks and Caicos Islands.
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. 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. The participants highlighted the fact that the Agenda directly positions accurate and complete registration as one of the main targets under the 16th goal “Peace, justice and strong institutions”, as well as under the 17th goal “Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development”.
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.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. 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 the health sector, and concluded this should be strongly emphasized and reflected in these conclusions and recommendations.
8. 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. In that context, the workshop recommends that the importance of a well-functioning civil registration system in terms of exercising basic human rights be placed in the forefront of the argument for improving civil registration.
9. 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.

10. 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.

11. The workshop debated 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 some of the participating countries. When available, the national coverage assessments vary considerably, depending on the source of the assessment. However, the workshop recognized and welcomed presentations of national efforts in assessing the quality of both civil registration and resulting vital statistics.

12. Also in that context – quality of vital statistics and validation for vital statistics production procedures, the workshop emphasized 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.

13. The workshop debated the consequences of delayed registration to the annual production of vital statistics – that is, should the production of vital statistics be put on hold for a certain period of time to allow the inclusion of delayed registration. It concluded that the most appropriate approach would be to publish statistics as soon as possible and label them “preliminary statistics”; the final data can be published later on, taking into account all delayed registrations in the meantime.

14. 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 needs 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.

15. Regarding the registration of births, in general, the workshop noted a steady and considerable progress over the past period of time; yet, it is still possible to identify pockets where the registration of new births falls short, resulting in the need to increase efforts in that respect.

16. In terms of registering deaths in general, the workshop noted that in a number of participating countries this issue represents a particular challenge, especially in rural and remote areas, where burials occur without any involvement from the authorities. The workshop recommended that specific solutions from several countries presented at this workshop (mobile units, training local people in registration procedures, introducing auxiliary registrars, etc) are considered for inclusion in the future improvements of national civil registration systems.

17. The workshop noted that the certification as well as coding of the causes of death represents still a considerable challenge for participating countries. In that context, the workshop concluded that there needs to be concentrated efforts from regional and international quarters that would place the

certification of deaths in the focus of the discussion regarding improvements of civil registration and vital statistics.

18. The morning session of the third day of the workshop consisted of a field trip and visit to the Registro Nacional de Personas (RENAP) of Guatemala. Officials from RENAP, INE, and the Ministry of Health of Guatemala provided a detailed demonstration of the process of registering vital events, forwarding the records for vital and health statistics compilation and production. The system in Guatemala 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.

19. 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.

20. 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.

21. 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.

22. The workshop noted that a number of participating countries had to undertake specific registration operations in border zones with their neighbors – as a result of frequent and undocumented crossings of people, thus putting an additional pressure on the registration system. These practices might be of use to other countries facing similar circumstances.