

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

1 – 4 December 2015, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago

Conclusions and recommendations

1. The workshop was conducted in partnership with the Organization for American States and Pan-American Health Organization with support of the Sub-regional Office for the Caribbean of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. Civil registrars and statisticians from the following countries participated: Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Lucia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago. Five countries had participants both from the Civil Registration authority and National Statistical Office (Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Jamaica, and Suriname), while seven had representatives only from the National Statistical Office (Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, Saint Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago).
2. The participants expressed their appreciation for the organization of the workshop and emphasized that it was quite timely taking into consideration the momentum that is being built 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. 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".
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 workshop took note of the regional initiatives undertaken under the PUICA programme of the Organization of American States and expressed its expectation that the programme will continue to provide support in terms of technical assistance for civil registration and vital statistics within the framework of the international standards in the future as well.
6. Similarly, the participants noted efforts by PAHO in providing regional programmes in support of health statistics, in general, and the certification of the causes of death, in particular.
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 and accurate figures between civil registration and vital statistics.
8. The workshop recognized the set of handbooks accompanying the *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 3*, as relevant and valuable reference.
9. 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.
10. In terms of capabilities of countries to produce reliable, accurate and regular vital statistics from civil registration, the workshop concluded that in most attending countries such capabilities are

in place; however, there is plenty of room for improvements in all segments of the functioning of these systems. The workshop noted that very small number of vital events occurring in some of the countries may have adverse effect in terms of justifying the modernization of the processes. In most of the countries manual and direct collection of information on vital events from relevant institutions is still the method of choice – as time consuming and error-prone as it may be. In a few of the participating countries, the workshop noted, the civil registration is fully functional and efficient; yet, this does not necessarily result in generating vital statistics.

11. In terms of certifying the causes of death on a regular basis, the workshop concluded that there were several issues that need to be addressed. Coding of causes of death is one of them. The workshop emphasized that the training in coding the causes of death provided by PAHO/WHO usually targets Ministry of Health professionals, irrespective where the actual coding takes place. The workshop concluded that often the medical practitioners do not complete adequately the medical certificates of death, thus hampering the coding process and its accuracy. Also, in order to avoid stigma that accompanies certain causes of death, in a number of participating countries the coding is purposely misleading. In the same context, the workshop noted that there are challenges in implementing the software for coding causes of death and noted the availability of the virtual course for training in certification of causes of death developed by PAHO.
12. In a number of countries, the cause of death is regularly part of the official death certificate, resulting in the fact that this information enters the public domain, albeit not in line with international recommendations regarding the privacy and confidentiality of such information. The workshop concluded that this should be brought for discussion at the national level so that national practices can be adapted to international standards. Also, that would make misrepresenting causes of death unnecessary.
13. The workshop noted that the international standards call for free registration and first certificate of vital events and acknowledged that this is not the case in all the participating countries where fees can be significant. The workshop also took note of the international recommendations regarding the organization and funding of civil registration as being part of the regular government functioning and civil service – which is not always the case in the region.
14. 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 (or ever) in the participating countries. Consequently, the participants noted the need to identify the most appropriate of the presented methods and consistently implement it 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.
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 improved 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. Also, as far as the legal framework for civil registration and vital statistics is concerned, the workshop noted that there is a need to revisit national legislation to ensure better interaction between civil registration, health institutions and official statistics and avoid conflicting and different definitions of both the vital events and their characteristics.
17. The workshop outlined that the under-reporting of vital events is particularly high for registration of deaths, as a result of a number of peculiar circumstances in some of the participating countries. The workshop concluded that this is already a concern that is being more or less addressed by national authorities; yet, it still is a considerable obstacle.
18. The workshop noted that reporting of vital statistics to international organizations – primarily the United Nations Statistics Division – is not at par and concluded that each participating country will address this issue subsequently upon return to their capitals. At the same time, the workshop urged the United Nations Statistics Division to double its efforts in communicating with participating countries, taking into account small size of their national statistical offices and rotation of staff.
19. The workshop concluded that there is a need for much closer joint activities at the regional level in the area of civil registration and vital statistics. In that context, it recommended that the CARICOM Secretariat and the OECS Commission explore the possibility of elaborating projects that would benefit all the countries in the region; that would include developing and sharing specific products – computer applications for entering and processing of registration records, uniform birth and death registration forms and accompanying legislation, to name a few.
20. 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.
21. 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.
22. Finally, the workshop agreed on the need for the highest political support for the implementation of the international standards presented by UNSD, and the improvement of the quality and coverage of civil registration and vital statistics.