

## Workshop on the Operation of Civil Registration, Vital Statistics and Identity Management Systems for South American Countries

30 October – 3 November 2017, Bogota, Colombia

### Conclusions and recommendations

1. The workshop was conducted in partnership with UNICEF and Bloomberg Philanthropies and supported by ECLAC, PAHO, the Organization of American States and the office of the National Registration of Civil Status of Colombia. Representatives from civil registration offices, statistics offices, ministries of health and identity management from the following countries participated: Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela. 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.
2. 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 and PAHO's Regional Plan of Action for Strengthening Vital and Health statistics (PEVS). 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".
3. 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 as well as the draft *Handbook on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems: Management, Operation and Maintenance, Revision 1*.
4. 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 achieve full compliance.
5. The workshop acknowledged, with appreciation, the activities of regional and international organizations in supporting efforts to institute holistic civil registration, vital statistics and identity management systems in participating countries. In this context, it raised concerns in terms of the fact that the Statistical Conference of the Americas has not established a working group on vital statistics.
6. 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 individuals and the overall functioning of the government, aside from its role in the production of reliable, regular and comprehensive vital statistics.
7. Visible and tangible improvement of civil registration procedures, coverage, timeliness and quality has been noted in almost all of the participating countries albeit the levels of modernization and effective 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 and management identity systems. With the modernization of civil registration and identity management in full swing, the workshop outlined the value of this and similar workshops for exchange of experiences and practices, and laying ground for a more successful South-South cooperation.

8. One of the major components of the modernization refers to updating the legal framework, and, the participants noted, that often represents a significant obstacle. Thus, it was concluded that this issue of adjusting the out-of-date legal framework should be clearly emphasized in these recommendations and submitted to the capitals.
9. Almost without exception, the workshop noted, modernizing civil registration and identity management relies of the automation of the processes, documents and certificates. While relying only on digitized records certainly is a cost-savings approach, the workshop noted, issuance of hard-copy certificates should not be excluded altogether as it may represent an excellent backup in case of disaster.
10. In the context of undergoing modernization and accompanying adjustments, the participants outlined the need for constant training within the national civil registration, vital statistics and identity management systems and concluded that it should be strongly emphasized and reflected in these conclusions and recommendations.
11. The workshop pointed out challenges that 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 so forth; the participants expressed appreciation for the exchange of national protocols and experiences.
12. In terms of capabilities of countries to produce reliable, accurate and regular vital statistics from civil registration, the workshop noted that the process of producing vital statistics differs from one country to another. In several countries, these statistics are compiled by health institutions; in other statistics are derived from civil registration and compiled by the national statistical service; and yet in another those statistics are generated from other sources, mainly surveys and censuses. In that context, the workshop concluded that all effort should be undertaken to ensure the production of reliable, accurate, comprehensive and regular vital statistics from the civil registration, applying the holistic approach to ensure interoperability among the civil registration, health, vital statistics and identity management functions.
13. In terms of vital statistics dissemination, the workshop outlined the need to explore contemporary approaches in the form of maps, interactive database and use of social media. A particular emphasis was placed on the dissemination of micro-data, as it is rapidly becoming a regular demand form users. In that context, the workshop noted the reference to the international standards contained in the principles and recommendations for population and housing censuses for the 2020 round. Another critical point discussed by the participants was related to the timeliness of dissemination of vital statistics, as it is often made available to users with a significant delay.
14. The workshop also noted that health sector, in general, and health institutions, in particular, play a significant role in all participating countries, from being informants on the occurrence of vital events, being authorized registrars, to collectors, compilers and disseminators of vital statistics. Thus, the workshop outlined the need to ensure full coordination among different functions as a matter of priority. Such coordination at the national level among institutions responsible for civil registration, vital statistics, public health and identity management successfully operates fully in just 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. Certifying and coding of the underlying cause of death represents a particular challenge in almost all participating countries, the workshop concluded, due to a number of reasons, starting from reluctance of the physicians to be involved in the process, ineligible entries, lack of trained coders, to name a few. Thus, it was concluded that all efforts should be made, including the introduction of automated coding in line with international standards, and the assessment of the quality of the cause of death statistics, in all the participating countries.
16. The workshop outlined the difficulties in the number of countries related to the phenomenon of late registrations. While the usual deadline of official registration of vital events, such as births, is in general well defined, that is not usually the case with late and delayed birth registration. It was also outlined that the number of late registrations is an indicator of the efficiency and the functioning of the system.
17. In that context, the workshop concluded that there is a need for a more sustainable approach to advocacy and communication related to the necessity of recording vital events as the lack of awareness leads to either late registrations or no registrations. The essential focus of these efforts should be on providing incentives in different formats, rather than resorting to fines and other sanctions.
18. In terms of assessment of the coverage of civil registration in the participating countries, the workshop noted that the under-registration estimates produced by different regional and international organizations in some cases vary significantly; and in almost all cases differ from national under-registration rates. Thus, it was outlined that national authorities should introduce quality and under-registration assessment methods as a routine procedure and ensure that these are part and parcel of the regular vital statistics dissemination.
19. The morning session of the fourth day of the workshop consisted of a field trip and visit to the headquarters of the National Registration of Civil Status of Colombia (RNEC). RNEC, the National Administrative Department of Statistics, the Ministry of Health and the Institute of Forensic Medicine provided a detailed demonstration of the process of producing vital and health statistics, as well as challenges. The participants expressed their most sincere appreciation for outstanding hospitality and comprehensive overview of the functioning of the system.
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 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. One of the participating countries, for example, is instituting multi-lingual

registration process in order to meet the needs of indigenous people and honoring their languages.