

Workshop on the Operation of Civil Registration, Vital Statistics and Identity Management Systems and the Production of Vital Statistics Reports for the Eastern Mediterranean Region Countries

19 – 23 March 2018, Casablanca, Morocco

Conclusions and recommendations

1. The workshop was conducted by the United Nations Statistics Division in partnership with the World Health Organization's Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office (WHO/EMRO), Statistic Norway and UNFPA, with contribution from United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the Statistical Centre for the Cooperation Council for the Arab Countries of the Gulf (GCC-Stat). Representatives from civil registration offices, national statistics offices, ministries of health and identity management, thirty-two in total, from the following countries participated: Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Sudan. 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 regarding the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics 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. The participants highlighted the fact that the 2030 Agenda directly positions accurate and complete registration as one of the main targets under the 16th goal "Peace, justice and strong institutions" and under the 17th goal "Partnerships for the Goals".
3. The workshop welcomed the revised version of the *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System* underlining its importance in terms of setting international standards for civil registration and vital statistics as well as the final draft of the *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. These obstacles include, but are not limited to, the insufficient financial, infrastructure and technological resources (particularly in remote and rural areas), awareness of the need to register vital events in the population at large and particularly in nomadic population, and especially the lack of coordination between stakeholders – different components of the system, such as health institutions, civil registration, identity management agencies and national statistical offices.
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, with special emphasis on the support provided by WHO/EMRO, UNSD, GCC-STAT and UNECA.
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. In this context, the workshop noted that there is an increasingly large number of refugees in the region, thus putting additional pressure to civil registration systems in different countries. Participants highlighted the need to develop regional strategies to ensure that refugees have access to civil registration and related services, records and documents. They also acknowledged the responsibility of national statistical office in producing vital statistics on the entire resident population, irrespective of migration status.
8. The workshop took particular note of the holistic model for ensuring interoperability between civil registration, vital statistics and identity management systems, as presented in the international standards and handbooks, and concluded that participating countries are either planning for implementation of such approach or are already in various phases of its development.
9. In that context, all the participating countries are employing efforts in terms of modernizing civil registration and management identity systems. With these activities on-going, the workshop outlined the value of this and similar workshops for exchange of experiences and practices.

10. The workshop concluded that there needs to be improvement in the registration of marriages and divorces, as a number of countries have reported challenges in this respect. Accordingly, cooperation with statistical offices needs to be established in order to generate nuptiality and divortiality statistics.
11. 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. In that context, the workshop noted with approval the introduction of the E-learning Course on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems as presented by the United Nations Statistics Division, one of lead authors, together with the World Bank. Further, delegates requested the development of Arabic version of the E-Learning tool.
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 others generate only a few indicators based on alternative 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. There is wide variation in the attending countries in terms of interoperability, and participants emphasized the need of establishing protocols for data transmission among agencies with due respect for confidentiality.
13. The workshop acknowledged the need to regularly implement methods for evaluating the quality of both civil registration processes and the quality of the resulting statistics as presented in the international standards and guidelines. The participants concluded that, in the participating countries, there is a need to intensify efforts to develop and implement quality assessment methods as these are far from being a routine operation.
14. The workshop also noted that the 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, to compilers 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 ineligible entries, insufficiently 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 information, in all the participating countries.
16. In the same context, the workshop noted the usefulness of assessing the quality of coding of the causes of death using ANACOD, as developed by WHO and urged WHO/EMRO to consider implementing training courses for the countries in the region. The participants also took note of the features of IRIS, a computerized application for identifying the underlying cause of death and for coding it using ICD-10.
17. The workshop discussed at length the provision of national vital statistics to the United Nations Demographic Yearbook and concluded that not all the participating countries are in a position to provide all the statistics requested. Challenges refer to the fact that not all countries are producing vital statistics from civil registration and are, thus, unable to comply with the request from the United Nations. It was also emphasized that the United Nations Statistics Division has to make all efforts to establish contacts with appropriate focal points in the national statistical offices.
18. The workshop took meticulous note of the Guidelines for producing vital statistics report, the core topics and the recommended tabulations, as well as the best practices and advice for presenting relevant statistics and indicators. The ensuing discussion exposed a wealth of practices that aim at enhancing the presentation of vital statistics.

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.