

**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,  
Group 2**

26 – 30 March 2018, Tunis, Tunisia

**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), and UNFPA, with technical contribution from United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and Statistics Norway. Representatives from civil registration offices, national statistics offices, ministries of health and identity management, forty-seven in total, from the following countries participated: Afghanistan, Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Pakistan, Qatar, Somalia, State of Palestine, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen. 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 16<sup>th</sup> goal "Peace, justice and strong institutions" and under the 17<sup>th</sup> goal "Partnerships for the Goals".
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 final draft of the *Handbook on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems: Management, Operation and Maintenance, Revision 1*. In this context, the workshop noted that migration – changing of place of usual residence – is not listed as internationally recognised vital event and urged considering the extension of internationally recommended vital events with migration in the next revision of international standards.
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 terms of achieving full compliance. These obstacles include, but are not limited to, the insufficient financial, infrastructure and technological resources (particularly in remote and rural areas), lack of legal framework, lack of awareness of the need to register vital events in the population at large and particularly in nomadic population, insecure conditions in parts of the country and especially the lack of coordination between stakeholders such as health institutions, civil registration, identity management agencies and national statistical offices.
5. The workshop also noted that armed conflict and conflict-related migration poses particular challenges for maintaining a universal civil registration and vital statistics system for a number of countries in the region. In this context the workshop highlighted the need for capacity building in terms of collection of vital event information during emergencies.

6. 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, ECA and UNSD.
7. 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.
8. 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 and internally displaced persons 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.
9. 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 in a number of participating countries it has already been successfully implemented, and other are either planning for implementation of such approach or are already in various phases of its development.
10. In that context, all the participating countries are employing efforts in terms of modernizing and digitizing 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.
11. 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.
12. 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 from the grass root level 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 also noted considerable difficulties encountered by a number of participants in attempting to enroll and log into the course. Participants requested to further develop downloadable materials to be used offline.
13. 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 a small number of countries, civil registration is the main source for vital statistics. However, in several countries, these statistics are compiled by health institutions; in one country vital statistics are produced on the basis of a handful of hospitals furnishing data, 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 in terms of capacity building by development partners and international

organisations 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.

14. Participants acknowledged the advantages of assigning a unique identification number at the time of birth registration to every resident. Indeed, a number of countries have already implemented this policy and have made use of it in the framework of e-government. Others are planning on following suit.

15. 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. Although some countries reported the practice of checks and balances, and almost all countries have conducted a rapid or comprehensive assessment, participants concluded that, in the attending countries, there is a need to intensify efforts to develop and implement quality assessment methods as these are far from being a routine operation.

16. 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.

17. 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. In this regard, the workshop acknowledged, with appreciation, the efforts and results in building capacity in countries with WHO/EMRO in the lead. It was also concluded that all efforts should be made, including the training of physicians on certifying cause of death, introduction of automated coding in line with international/WHO standards, and the assessment of the quality of the cause of death information, in all the participating countries.

18. In the same context, the workshop noted the usefulness of assessing the quality of coding of the causes of death using ANACOD and ANACONDA 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.

19. 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.

20. The workshop took meticulous note of the Guidelines and Template 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.

21. In the process of presenting the comparison of national practices with international standards in term of topics that are collected in participating countries, the workshop noted that the vast majority the topics meant to measure migration trends and patterns – such as place of birth and duration of residence, both core topics – are not represented.

22. 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.

23. The workshop highlighted that transmission of data among health, civil registration, statistics authorities and other relevant stakeholders should be at the level of micro data, rather than aggregated or tabulated data, in the spirit of enabling further quality checks and tabulations.

24. Participants urged UN agencies at country level to make all efforts to coordinate their activities and cooperation in order to avoid duplication and contradictions.