



Introducing United Nations Legal Identity Agenda

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United Nations Statistics Division

New York

Webinars on COVID-19 impact on civil registration and vital statistics

CARICOM countries

1 – 4 December 2020



Background

- ❑ Since 1948 the United Nations Statistics Division (United Nations Statistical Office at the time) has been mandated with providing methodological framework and international recommendations for civil registration and vital statistics
- ❑ Mandate based on the still-in-place model that comprehensive, reliable, regular, accurate and small area vital statistics can be derived only from a fully-functioning registration of all vital events occurring in the country
- ❑ Mandate was further extended by adoption of the International Programme for Accelerating the Improvement of Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems by United Nations Statistical Commission and Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) in 1991 and re-iterated in 1995, extended by the introduction of the UN Legal Identity Agenda in 2020



Principles and recommendations

The original version in 1953

- ❑ vital statistics system was defined as including the legal registration, statistical recording and reporting of the occurrence, and collection, compilation, analysis, presentation and distribution of statistics pertaining to vital events, which in turn include live births, deaths, foetal deaths, marriages, divorces, adoptions, legitimating, recognitions, annulments and legal separations
- ❑ essentially civil registration was defined as a part of vital statistics system



Principles and recommendations

The first revision - 1973

- ❑ vital statistics system, irrespective of how it is organized, is defined as the total process of (a) collecting by registration, enumeration or indirect estimation, of information on the frequency of occurrence of certain vital events, as well as characteristics of events themselves and of the person(s) concerned, and (b) compiling, analysing, evaluating, presenting and disseminating these data in statistical form
- ❑ introducing enumeration and indirect estimation – recognizing the reality of the lack of civil registration in many countries



Principles and recommendations

The second revision - 2001

- ❑ vital statistics system as the total process of (a) collecting information by civil registration or enumeration on the frequency of occurrence of specified and defined vital events, as well as relevant characteristics of the event themselves and of the persons or persons concerned, and (b) compiling, processing, analysing, evaluating, presenting and disseminating these data in statistical form
- ❑ omits indirect estimation – as *ad hoc* and temporary methods



Principles and recommendations

The third revision - 2015

- ❑ in the context of defining a system as a set of interacting or independent components forming an integrated whole and for the purposes for which these principles and recommendations are to be applied, the components of a vital statistics system are: (a) legal registration, (b) statistical reporting of, and (c) collection, compilation and dissemination of statistics pertaining to vital events
- ❑ focus on civil registration, back to 1953



Definition of the vital statistics system

- A system – set of interacting or independent components forming an integrated wholesome
 - Legal registration
 - Statistical reporting
 - Collection, compilation and dissemination of statistics pertaining to vital events



TARGET 16-9


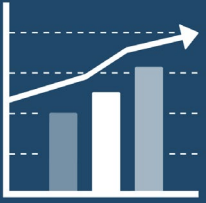
16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



PROVIDE UNIVERSAL LEGAL IDENTITY

TARGET 17-19

17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS



SYSTEMIC ISSUES

FURTHER DEVELOP MEASUREMENTS OF PROGRESS

The United Nations Legal Identity Agenda: *Fulfil the promise to Leave No One Behind*





UN Legal Identity Agenda

- Everyone has the right to be recognized as a person before the law, as enshrined in Article 6 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and a number of international human rights instruments
- To address this, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development established SDG Target 16.9 – legal identity for all, including birth registration
- Civil registration establishes the existence of a person under the law and is fundamental to granting legal identity
 - It is recognized as the ultimate source for production of comprehensive, regular and reliable vital statistics
- In an effort to increase civil registration coverage worldwide the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development established SDG Indicator 17.19.2 – proportion of countries that have achieved 100% birth registration and 80% death registration



UN Legal Identity Agenda

- ❑ United Nations Legal Identity Expert Group
 - ❑ Established by the Deputy Secretary-General in September 2018
 - ❑ Co-chaired by UNDESA/UNSD, UNICEF and UNDP
 - ❑ Membership: IOM, OHCHR, UNECA, UNESCAP, UNFPA, UN Global Pulse, UNHCR, UN WOMEN, WHO WFP
 - ❑ Transitioned to the UN Legal Identity Task Force in December 2019
 - ❑ Four pillars:
 - ❑ Coordinated approach for implementation, focusing on developing and adopting operational definition of legal identity, developing coordinated strategy paper on achieving legal identity for all, formulating the UN Legal Identity Agenda, and producing UNCT Guidelines for Implementation of UN LIA at the National Level;
 - ❑ Evidence for Action, focusing on developing hard data for illustrating the costs of inaction, both in terms of securing legal identity for all as well as failing to properly monitor the implementation of 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, and on addressing issues related to legal identity in humanitarian settings
 - ❑ One Voice, focusing on developing guidelines for communication for development in the context of UN LIA for stakeholders at national level, ensuring promotion of UN LIA to as broad audience as possible by developing UN LIEG communication and advocacy strategy and ensuring the promotion of UN LIA at high-level events;
 - ❑ Financing the implementation of UN LIA, focusing on animating donors and establishing a Multi Partner Trust Fund.



UN Legal Identity Agenda

Definition of legal identity

- Legal identity is defined as the basic characteristics of an individual's identity, e.g. name, sex, place and date of birth conferred through registration and the issuance of a certificate by an authorized civil registration authority following the occurrence of birth. In the absence of birth registration, legal identity may be conferred by a legally-recognized identification authority; this system should be linked to the civil registration system to ensure a holistic approach to legal identity from birth to death. Legal identity is retired by the issuance of a death certificate by the civil registration authority upon registration of death

- In the case of refugees, Member States are primarily responsible for issuing proof of legal identity. The issuance of proof of legal identity to refugees may also be administered by an internationally recognized and mandated authority



UN Legal Identity Agenda

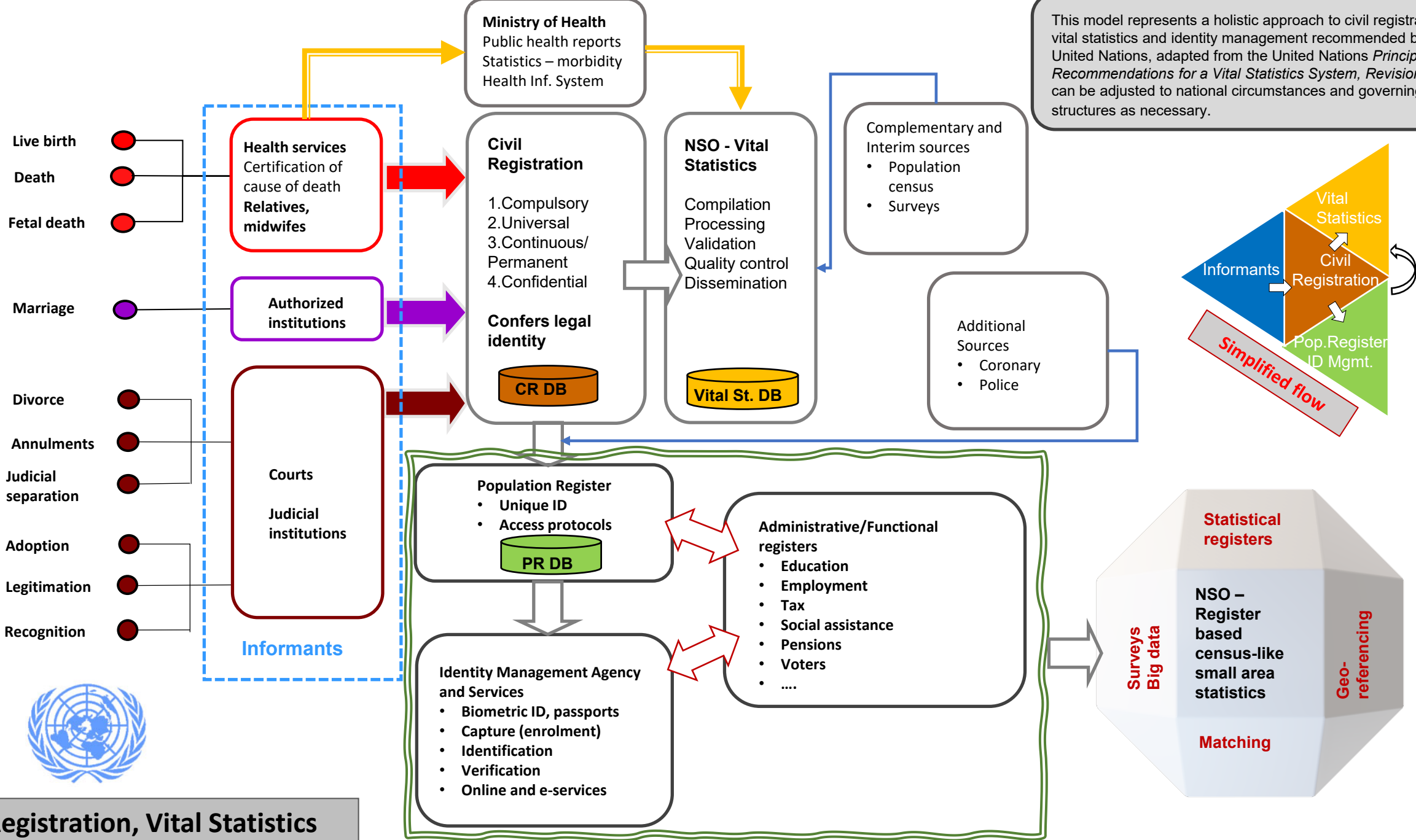
- ❑ The UN Legal Identity Agenda consists of the holistic approach to complete and universal civil registration of all vital events, production of vital statistics, the establishment and maintenance of population registers and identity management apparatus from birth to death, and there should be full interoperability between these functions in a simultaneous manner, according to international standards and recommendations, thus ensuring legal identity for all from birth to death
- ❑ All Member States should adopt and implement this agenda as a systematic and perpetual mechanism for ensuring legal identity for all
- ❑ UN LIA was launched in Rome, May 2019 at a conference dedicated to MDG 16
- ❑ Officially adopted as internationally recommended model by UN Statistical Commission in March 2020, and subsequently by ECOSOC in June 2020



UN Legal Identity Agenda

- ❑ This model is being introduced and implemented in a number of countries instituting the holistic approach to this process by linking
 - ❑ **Civil registration** function which is distinct as its procedures for issuing legal tenders related to civil status of individuals require adequate and strict protocols. The establishment and maintenance of population registers, in this model, go hand in hand with the civil registration function
 - ❑ **Vital statistics** function remains with the national statistical authority, which is responsible for producing regular vital statistics based on records submitted by the population register and/or the civil registration agency
 - ❑ **Identity management function** is firmly incorporated by accessing the population registers and issuing biometric identity credentials at different points in a lifetime of an individual

This model represents a holistic approach to civil registration, vital statistics and identity management recommended by the United Nations, adapted from the United Nations *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 3.*; it can be adjusted to national circumstances and governing structures as necessary.



Civil Registration, Vital Statistics and Identity Management System



UN Legal Identity Agenda – Methodological framework

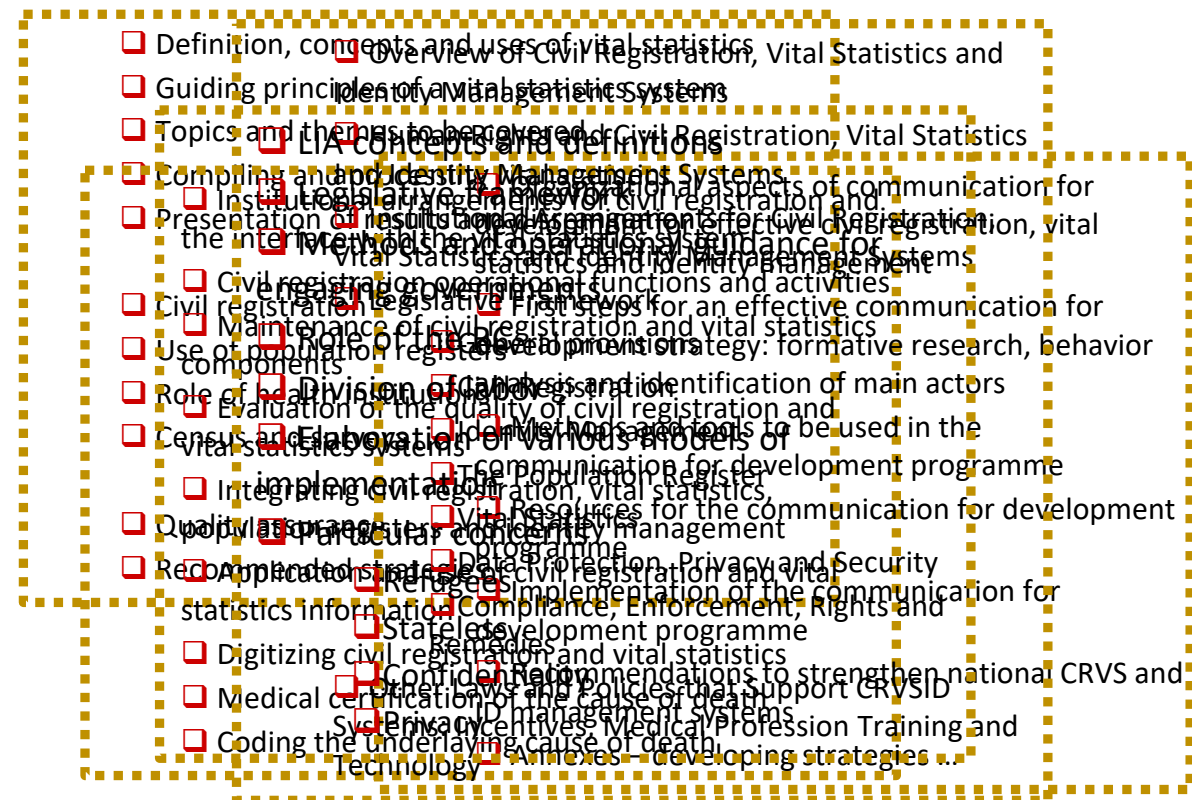
Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics Systems, Revision 3, United Nations, 2014

Handbook on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems: Management, Operation and Maintenance, Revision 1, United Nations, 2018

Guidelines on the Legislative Framework for Civil Registration, Vital Statistics and Identity Management, United Nations, 2019

Handbook on civil registration, vital statistics and identity management systems: Communication for development, United Nations, 2019

Implementation of the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda: United Nations Country Team Operational Guidelines, United Nations, 2020





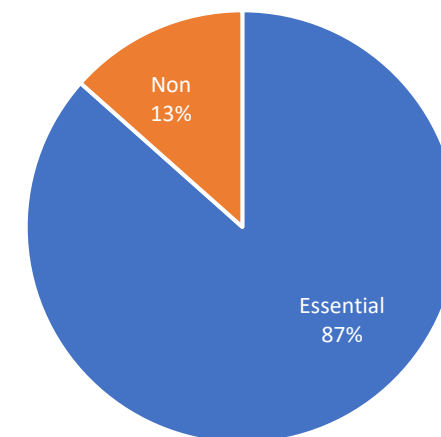
UN Legal Identity Agenda – Impact of COVID-19

- ❑ Starting in February 2020 the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19 illness and may result in serious clinical condition and ultimately death triggered a series of measure in most countries of the world
- ❑ Those measures, intended to prevent the spread of the virus among the population, shut down a long list of economic, social and government activities
- ❑ Impact on the functioning of civil registration was also considerable and it was compounded by stretching the capacity of national civil registration systems to register increased number of deaths while at the same time ensuring that registration operations are maintained



UN Legal Identity Agenda – Impact of COVID-19

- ❑ In an effort to illustrate the enormous challenges civil registration faces in times of emergency, and to develop a set of guidance and recommendations to countries, the UN Statistics Division, as a co-chair of the UN Legal Identity Agenda Task Force, initiated a survey in April-May 2020 to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the functioning of civil registration worldwide. The survey included the following four questions:
 - ❑ 1. Is civil registration considered an essential service in your country? Namely, in a number of countries affected by COVID-19 pandemic only the employees of essential services are required to report for duty, while non-essential services' employees are requested to stay at home in order to minimize the spreading of the virus.
 - ❑ 2. What are the impacts of COVID-19 on the registration of vital events and the functionality of the civil registration authority, in general?
 - ❑ 3. What are the working arrangements being implemented or planned to be implemented during the current or possible upcoming COVID-19 containment period to ensure continuity?
 - ❑ 4. How is your office addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the registration of vital events? What are the recommendations to the civil registration offices to ensure that all births, deaths, marriages and other vital events are registered during this time?





UN Legal Identity Agenda – Impact of COVID-19

- ❑ Replies were received from 67 countries/areas, available at: <https://unstats.un.org/legal-identity-agenda/COVID-19/1>.
- ❑ Detailed discussion and display of replies is presented in the UNSD paper *Civil registration: Maintaining international standards in emergencies*, at: <https://unstats.un.org/legal-identity-agenda/documents/CR-ER.pdf>.
- ❑ Even when designated as an essential service, the particular and strong set of measures aimed at mitigating the impact of the pandemic and the spread of the disease had nevertheless adverse impact on the functioning of civil registration and the registration of vital events occurring in the country/area
 - ❑ The lockdown or the limitations in terms of public transport
 - ❑ Reluctance of people to visit government offices such as civil registration office for fear of contagion
 - ❑ Staggered working hours of the civil registration offices
 - ❑ Much lower registration of vital events even in the circumstances of being designated as an essential government service
- ❑ However, the importance of designated civil registration as an essential service cannot be overemphasized and it was strongly recommended by *Maintaining civil registration and vital statistics during COVID-19 pandemic*, United Nations Legal Identity Agenda, United Nations, New York, 9 April 2020, at: <https://unstats.un.org/legal-identity-agenda/documents/COVID-19-Guidelines.pdf>.



UN Legal Identity Agenda – Impact of COVID-19

- ❑ The survey documented that countries around the world introduced a set of measures intended to enable the functioning of civil registration in the COVID-19 pandemic
 - ❑ Less rigorous interpretation of rules and procedures for registering the occurrence of a vital event
 - ❑ Focusing on registering births and deaths as a primary concern and postponing the registration of other events
 - ❑ Instituting and deploying coordination mechanisms at local level that bring together different institutions involved in the registration process
 - ❑ Measures for maintaining physical distancing and other protective protocols
 - ❑ Waiving of the fees and simplification of the registration processes



UN Legal Identity Agenda – Impact of COVID-19

- ❑ Yet another set of actions has been identified as introduced in a number of countries in attempting to ensure the registration of vital event to function even in times of pandemic and these refer to online registration
- ❑ **Computerization** of civil registration is one of the major international recommendations, as contemporary requirements placed on the civil registration system in terms of providing services to the population and the technological environment call for complete and comprehensive computerization of all registration operations and production of vital statistics
- ❑ The computerization of civil registration is even more imperative taking into consideration that other government functions are increasingly relying on computer technology, reflecting the development of so-called e-government - with the introduction and the massive use of the Internet, populations expect similar functionality in the delivery of services by the government as well
- ❑ Data collected indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic certainly acted as a catalyst in this respect - a number of countries either introduced or strengthened online applications for registration of vital events (Rwanda, Costa Rica, Georgia)
- ❑ The fact that computerizing civil registration is critical in consistently meeting international standards of universal and mandatory registration of all vital events occurring in the country in normal circumstances and even more so in times of disasters is further supported by examples of countries that did not report adverse impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in discharging regularly the registration services to the population - these countries' computerized civil registration systems, with minor adjustments, were able to function without interruption (Bahrain, New Zealand, Republic of Korea)



UN Legal Identity Agenda – Impact of COVID-19

- ❑ Another considerable source of data in assessing the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the functioning of civil registration and the production of the resulting vital statistics consisted of a set of webinars developed by the UN Legal Identity Task Force, the Global CRVS Group and the UN regional commissions, covering Asia and the Pacific, Africa and Latin America
- ❑ These webinars provided an opportunity for civil registration authorities in these regions to exchange experiences and practices in terms of functioning in times of the pandemic
- ❑ Approximately fifty countries participated in total and the deliberations and relevant documentation illustrate the difficulties and obstacles encountered on daily basis in discharging registration services – all proceedings are available at: <https://unstats.un.org/legal-identity-agenda/events/>



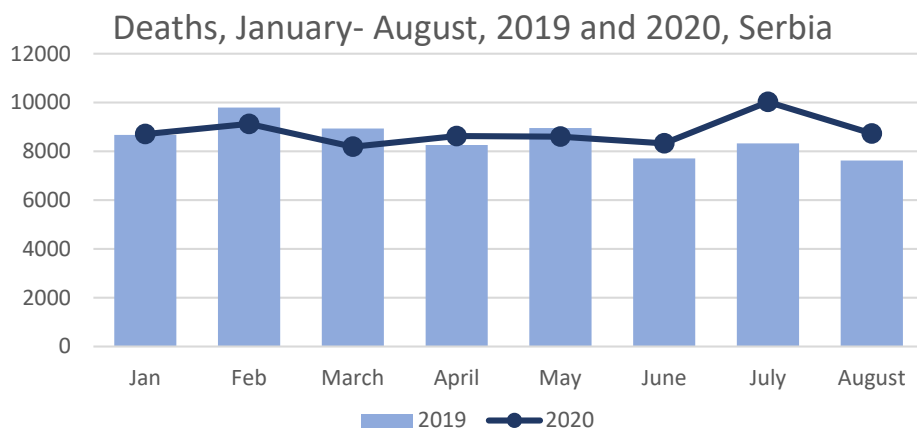
UN Legal Identity Agenda – Impact of COVID-19

- ❑ Two major observations emerged in this process
- ❑ The first refers to the fact that the registration of vital events, primarily of births and deaths, decreased noticeably in a majority of participating countries, as a consequence of difficulties and obstacles in ensuring regular functioning of the national civil registration system
- ❑ The population, fearful of being exposed to the virus, was reluctant to approach civil registration offices to register the occurrence of births and deaths
- ❑ Locking down the people at their homes also resulted in major difficulties in terms of reaching a civil registration office - even once reached, the office may have been completely closed or working reduced hours
- ❑ Simultaneously, the decrease was also due to the fact that in a number of countries the links between health institutions and civil registration that were functioning in normal circumstances, either weakened or broke altogether as a result of partial or full closure of civil registration offices and moving to telecommuting as one of the measures aimed at mitigating exposure to the virus
- ❑ Albeit many and varied actions were undertaken, the data from countries participating in these webinars document a decrease in the numbers of registered births and deaths



UN Legal Identity Agenda – Impact of COVID-19

- ❑ The second observation refers to the fact that in the countries that were able to maintain steady functioning of the civil registration system the number of registration of deaths displays significant increase compared to the same period in the previous year
- ❑ These “excess deaths” require considerable investigation as they can be attributed to the COVID-19 disease only in an indirect manner and in a certain percentage that needs to be further established and analyzed - due to lockdowns and in general avoiding visiting clinics and hospitals for illnesses other than COVID-19, a proportion of “excess deaths” may have occurred for lack of treatment of certain diseases in times of pandemic.
- ❑ An illustration, available at: https://unstats.un.org/legal-identity-agenda/documents/Excess_deaths.pdf



Focusing on deaths, data display that the number of deaths was almost the same in January 2020 compared to January 2019, in February and March 2020 it actually declined – the 2020/2019 index being 93 and 92 respectively – in April it went up and in May it went down. However, from then on, in June, July and August, the number of recorded deaths in Serbia went significantly up – 8 per cent, 20 per cent and 15 per cent respectively.

Altogether, compared to the first eight months in 2019, the total number of deaths registered in Serbia in the first eight months of 2020 totaled 2,071. At the same time, since the beginning of the pandemic until the end of August, the health sector of Serbia reported 713 deaths due to COVID-19.