

**Workshop on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in ESCWA Region
Cairo, Egypt
3-6 December 2007**

Conclusions and recommendations

General

1. The participants expressed appreciation to the United Nations Statistics Division and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia for organizing the workshop and to the Central Authority for Public Mobilization and Statistics of the Government of Egypt for hosting it.
2. The workshop concluded that the timing of the workshop is very appropriate, given the fact that in a number of countries in the region initiatives are underway aimed at improving both the civil registration and vital statistics systems and that participants would benefit from acquiring a better understanding of international standards in these two areas. Similarly, participants concluded that the exchange of national experiences is crucially important and that provisions should be made for follow-up meetings at regular intervals.
3. The participants noted with satisfaction that the workshop brings together civil registrars and statisticians, thus providing an excellent opportunity to discuss issues pertinent to all sides in a direct manner. The workshop concluded that establishing a regional association of civil registrars and statistician should be considered as an option of introducing these exchanges on a more regular basis.
4. Assessing in general the state of art of the development of civil registration and vital statistics in the region, the workshop concluded that all the participating countries can be classified in four clusters. The first cluster consists of countries where civil registration is at high levels of coverage and the links with generating vital statistics are robust and functioning on a regular basis. The next cluster consists of countries where the civil registration is strong, but does not translate in reliable vital statistics due to inadequate coordination between the two. Cluster three would comprise of countries with weak civil registration, but strong vital statistics derived from special surveys and censuses. Finally, there are countries that are weak in both of these areas and require considerable support. In addition, some countries are having their civil registration in development phase and require further assistance in ensuring the quality of the system.
5. The workshop acknowledged the crucial interactive linkage of functioning civil registration system, accurate vital statistics, good governance and human rights. It emphasized the necessity to broadly advertise the negative impact that a non-functioning civil registration and lack of solid vital statistics have on exercising basic international human rights, specifically the rights of the child.

Address the issue of the necessity to establish coordination within the national statistics system regarding the provision of data to international agencies.

Civil registration

6. The workshop noted that registering crucial events in the life of an individual has a long tradition in the region. However, currently the civil registration systems are not equally developed and functioning throughout the region. While the coverage and registration of births is more or less adequate, this is certainly not the case with deaths. Special attention should be given to registering family formation and dissolution.

7. Throughout the region, the workshop noted, the registration of foetal deaths suffers from inaccuracy as a consequence of non-reporting. Recognizing the importance of this issue, the workshop recommended that countries follow international recommendations for registering occurrences of foetal deaths to the letter.

8. In most countries of the region the registration of deaths represents a specific challenge. The workshop recommended that the process of registration of deaths needs to be specifically targeted for improvement given the much lower coverage than in the case of live births. There are various reasons for the lack of registration of deaths, such as illiteracy, lack of incentives and of knowledge.

9. The workshop identified the higher non-registration of deaths of females as an area of special concern and in need of substantive improvement. In the context, the workshop recommended that all the countries should introduce disaggregating civil registration coverage rates by sex, thus pinpointing the major/minor civil divisions where the most immediate remedial actions are needed.

10. Aside from registering deaths in general, the workshop concluded that the registration of causes of deaths is also a deficient area in many countries. It recommended that a set of training courses in the use of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10) should be developed and undertaken in the region as this classification is not completely implemented throughout the region, including the implementation of the concept of underlying causes of deaths. Such training needs to be followed up at the small area level within each country to insure consistency and uniformity of ICD-10 implementation in all civil divisions.

11. Addressing the issue of the time prescribed by registration regulations between the moment of birth and the registration itself, the participants noted that in the case of unnecessary long period there is a danger not to register a live birth in cases when the newborn died shortly after birth. Therefore, allowing for a period of three months to register a birth often results in non-registration of a baby that died after a week. The workshop recommended that each country should revisit this provision in the civil registration legislation accordingly.

12. The workshop attributed crucial importance to the coordination at the national level between relevant institutions and ministries. This is especially the case regarding the links between civil registration administration and the statistical system, but is of no less importance in regard to other carriers of information. Thus the coordination should also involve other entities in countries that can be used as sources of data for vital statistics, such as population registers.

13. In the context of population registers, the participants concluded that a number of countries in the region are turning towards population registers as vehicles for improving civil registration. This approach is often combined with issuance of new identification cards, which can carry all the characteristics of a “smart card”, used for a variety of purposes, doubling as driver’s license, passport, money withdrawal card, and so forth. In developing these new registers, many countries in the region are resorting to assigning personal identification numbers to their citizens and building a full framework for establishing a set of registers for meeting various administrative needs; it certainly could be used for statistical purposes as well, vastly improving vital statistics.

14. The workshop noted with concern that civil registrars are not fully acquainted with statistical definitions of major vital events, such as births, deaths, marriages, annulments, and so forth. It recommended that training programs in basic vital statistics definitions and concepts should be developed at national level. Conversely, statisticians must be included in refreshment courses for civil registrars.

15. In regard different techniques that were developed to check on the quality of civil registration systems, the workshop recommended that an appropriate set of checks and balances must be an integral part of all civil registration systems in the region.

16. On several occasions during the workshop, participants raised the issue of developing, in the spirit of South-South cooperation, a uniform regional set of forms for registering vital events. This conclusion was further reinforced by identifying the fact that, although homogenous in terms of language, civil registration terms remain vastly different. Consequently, the workshop recommended that all effort should be geared toward developing uniform regional forms, or, short of that, a harmonization of terms, definitions and concepts, providing for intra-regional comparison.

Vital statistics

17. Vital statistics are derived from variety of sources in the countries in the region. Some countries are deriving these statistics from the well-functioning civil registration system. Yet another set of countries is using specialized surveys and censuses, while other use censuses. There are also examples of countries using all three in order to double-check the accuracy of data. Consequently, the workshop concluded that there is a significant variation in national capacities to produce reliable, accurate, regular and up-to-date vital statistics. In certain cases, the introduction of civil registration-generated vital statistics started only a few years ago (Oman, 2004). The participants recommended that the

development of vital statistics needs constant monitoring at the regional level to ensure more efficient bridging of the gaps between countries in the region.

18. It was also noted that the computation of rates needs to be approached in a careful manner, given the fact that some of the countries host significant numbers of young, single foreigners. For example, including them in the denominator for computing age-specific fertility rates distorts the results; foreign-born usually do not give birth, but are included in population figures. The workshop recommended that, in some cases, it would be appropriate to display rates broken down by citizenship.

19. As far as variables are concerned, the workshop concluded that several non-core topics in the *Principles and Recommendations for Vital Statistics System, Rev. 2*, birth order and economic characteristics of the mother are of particular interest to the countries in the region. It recommended that the countries consider incorporating these in their civil registration systems.

20. The workshop concluded that indirect methods of generating vital statistics are applied in quite a number of countries. It recommended that a project of collecting all national experiences using indirect techniques for estimating vital statistics should be initiated as a basis for assessing the feasibility of these approaches in the region.

21. The workshop noted that there are instances, at the national level, of disseminating greatly different vital statistics by various data collectors. In addition to confusing general public, such practices adversely affect the credibility of statistics. The workshop recommended that there is a necessity of introducing a joint body, such as a committee, that will coordinate the dissemination and consistency of vital statistics.

Demographic Yearbook and provision of data

22. The workshop noted that the level of response rates to the United Nations *Demographic Yearbook* is adequate for the table at general level, that is, for total number of vital events and crude rates. However, the response rates tend to decline with the level of detail requested. The workshop recognized that statistical authorities of participating countries should make every effort to improve this response rate.

23. Simultaneously, the workshop also concluded that national statistical authorities in the region find themselves very often overburdened by the request for data and by voluminous questionnaires sent by international data collectors. In that context, the workshop recommended that United Nations Statistics Division should address this issue in appropriate fora.

24. In that context, the workshop concluded that there are instances that the solicitation of data by international users often bypasses the statistical authorities, resulting in the inconsistencies in data for the same variable and for the same country. Such statistics find their way in various international overviews and tend to confuse users as they may differ considerably from nationally published figures. Therefore, the workshop recommended

that all efforts should be made to ensure that all the data request are channeled through only one competent national agency, the national statistical authority.

25. In addition, the workshop strongly emphasized the need to ensure that all the figures provided to international collectors be accompanied by meta-data that will clearly outline the methodology used as well as all the accompanying footnotes and explanation.

26. Given the fact that many countries in the region hosts a large proportion of non-citizens which might show different demographic patterns from citizens living in the country, it was suggested that international agencies should consider collecting and disseminating data for both citizens and non-citizens.

The way ahead

27. The workshop concluded that it is necessary to develop a multi-year project aiming at improving civil registration and vital statistics in the region. The project has to have clear objectives, divisions of labor and outcomes. It should include a comprehensive review of the state of the art of these components by the United Nations Statistics Division and ESCWA. The starting point should be the report and findings of this workshop.

28. The workshop also requested ESCWA to work toward establishing a regional mechanism for supporting the improvement of demographic and social statistics, dissemination of pertinent data and ensuring the regional harmonization. The modalities of such a mechanism will be elaborated within the Statistical Committee of ESCWA.