



# **Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Civil Registration and Production of Vital Statistics**

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## UN Legal Identity Agenda – Impact of COVID-19

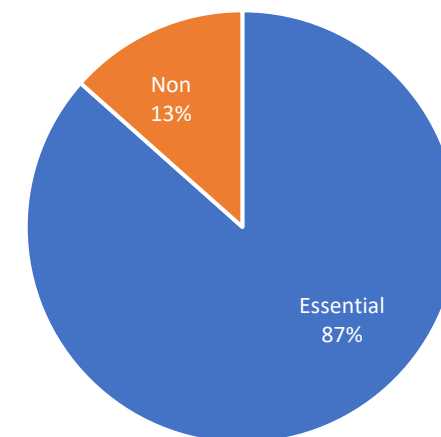
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- ❑ Starting in February 2020 the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19 illness and may result in serious clinical condition and ultimately death triggered a series of measure in most countries of the world
- ❑ Those measures, intended 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



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- 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?





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- ❑ 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>.



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- ❑ 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



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- ❑ 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)



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- ❑ 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/>



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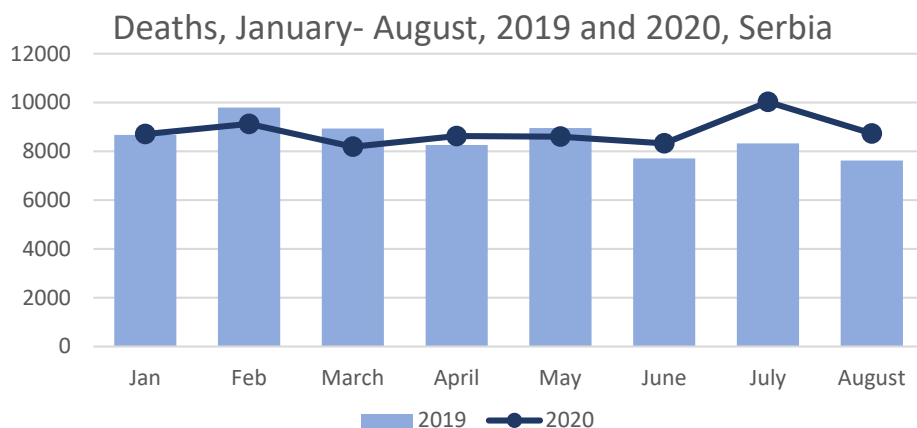
- ❑ Two major observations emerged in this process
- ❑ The first refers to the fact that the registration of vital events, primarily of births and deaths, decreased noticeably in a majority of participating countries, as a consequence of difficulties and obstacles in ensuring regular functioning of the 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





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- ❑ 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](https://unstats.un.org/legal-identity-agenda/documents/Excess_deaths.pdf)

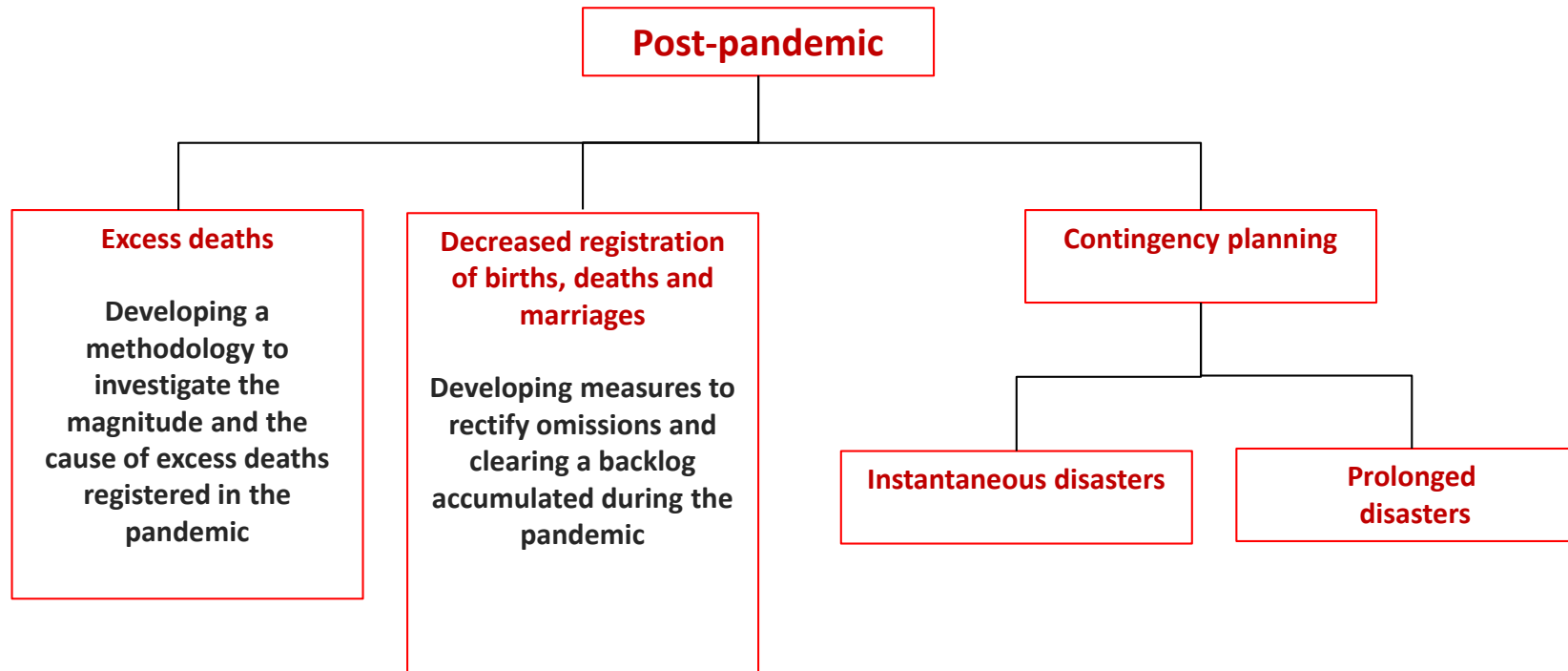


Focusing on deaths, data display that the number of deaths was almost the same in January 2020 compared to January 2019, in February and March 2020 it actually declined – the 2020/2019 index being 93 and 92 respectively – in April it went up and in May it went down. However, from then on, in June, July 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-193.



## UN Legal Identity Agenda – The way forward





## Excess deaths

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- ❑ In a number of countries civil registration recorded an increased number of deaths so far in 2020 compared with previous years
- ❑ Hence the need to investigate excess deaths in terms of volume and cause of death in an attempt to provide answers concerning COVID-19 mortality and its impact on overall structure of mortality due to delayed treatment of various illnesses
  - ❑ Developing technical mechanisms and procedures and promoting harmonization and common methodological approach in analyzing and interpreting excess deaths
  - ❑ Putting in place and harmonizing data from health institutions, civil registration, funeral homes or similar, religious institutions
  - ❑ Undertaking detailed analysis of mortality statistics time series in terms of assessing the changes caused by the pandemic
- ❑ On 19 February 2021, the UNDESA/WHO Technical Advisory Group on COVID-19 Mortality Assessment conducted its first meeting – investigating excess deaths

<https://www.who.int/data/technical-advisory-group/covid-19--mortality-assessment/membership>

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## Decreased registration of births, deaths and marriages

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- ❑ Considerable number of countries reported that the registration of major vital events decreased during the pandemic
- ❑ Rectifying this might involve the following – the list is not meant to be exhaustive
  - ❑ Developing and launching a broad publicity campaign emphasizing the need to register births and deaths that occurred during the pandemic and were not reported nor recorded
  - ❑ Adjust the operations to accommodate the additional reporting and clearing of the backlog (extend working hours, increase the number of staff ...)
  - ❑ Re-establish the links with the health sector and national statistical office to ensure the production of reliable statistics to quantify the cost of the pandemic in terms of lives and years lost
  - ❑ Eliminate fees for late registration and extend the deadlines for registration of births and deaths



## Contingency planning

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- ❑ In the post-pandemic time countries need to develop detailed and comprehensive contingency plans in case of disasters, albeit not all disasters are similar, hence the distinction
- ❑ Instantaneous disasters here refer to the occurrence of events that cause instant destruction and harm, such as earthquakes, tsunamis, flooding and similar
- ❑ In the case of these disasters, national civil registration service needs to develop comprehensive instructions to maintain the registration of primarily births and deaths that may include
  - ❑ Guidelines for establishing procedure for abbreviated registration of deaths, featuring, for example
    - ❑ Expanding the list and eligibility of informers
    - ❑ Establishing process/waivers for missing documents
    - ❑ Suspend fees
  - ❑ Similarly, for births
  - ❑ Ensure the immediate deployment of registrars in the affected region to ensure delivery of services



## Contingency planning

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- ❑ In addition to the measures elaborated for instantaneous disasters, the contingency planning for prolonged disasters, such as COVID-19 pandemic and similar epidemics that are expected to extend over a period of time, might take into consideration
  - ❑ Developing a detailed contingency planning document that would address multitude of topics
  - ❑ Revisit legislative framework for civil registration to assess the need to adjust it in terms of contingency planning
  - ❑ Institute and test various solutions to ensure the functioning of the civil registration services in times of prolonged movement restrictions, for example, and all logistical challenges such as the number of personnel, working hours, protection measures ...
  - ❑ Ensure that the government treats civil registration as an essential service that needs to operate in all circumstances and to provide appropriate resources for contingency planning and implementation



## Contingency planning

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The most critical, crucial and imperative undertaking in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic in terms of enabling universal registration of all vital events occurring in the country refers to the **digitization of the civil registration and vital statistics system and apparatus** as this has proved to be unique factor to ameliorate the impact of this pandemic and to also ensure that the civil registration is firmly embedded in the legal identity management model the United Nations calls to be implemented in all Member States by 2030