

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“Meeting of the Civil Registrars of South Asia”

Annapurna Hotel, Kathmandu, Nepal

24-25 July 2018

From 24-25 July 2018, a group of professionals engaged in civil registration in South Asia met in Kathmandu, Nepal, for a meeting co-organized by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) in South Asia and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia-Pacific (ESCAP) titled the *“Meeting of the Civil Registrars of South Asia”*. The group comprised twenty-two government experts from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, as well as representatives from UNICEF, ESCAP, UNHCR, UNSD and the World Bank. In addition, government representatives from Namibia, New Zealand and Thailand, and four independent consultants attended.

The meeting was organized to (i) discuss areas of common concern for the civil registrars; (ii) identify where there is mutual benefit for the civil registrars to collaborate across borders; and (iii) provide a forum to share innovative practices. The meeting aimed to (a) provide input into the design of the mid-term review of the Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific (2015-2024) and (b) consider the creation of an informal network of professionals who work in civil registration in the eight South Asian countries.

Participants were informed about the global and regional situation of civil registration, including the *“Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System”*, the Asia-Pacific CRVS Decade 2015-2024, and recent progress on birth registration. The group explored what is ‘identity’ and discussed efforts to link civil registration with a country’s identity-management system. Government experts shared their experiences with national civil registration and vital statistics coordination mechanisms, cross-border collaboration and the relationship between civil registration and civil identification. The group exchanged challenges and opportunities in each of these areas.

Coordination

The successful implementation and maintenance of a national civil registration and vital statistics system in large measure hinges on systematic and active coordination among the civil registration office and other ministries and departments that directly or indirectly support or benefit from the system. The inter-dependent nature of civil registration functions in collection, registration and transmission of vital event records, demands close and continuous coordination and collaboration at all levels of administration. Coordination should not be an afterthought but must be addressed early on. Beyond government coordination, the meeting recognised the importance of development partners and donors aligning their support to government priorities. The participants recognised the importance of using registration data for vital statistics production by national statistical offices and international development partners.

All countries present at the meeting have coordination mechanisms in place, with the government ministries and administrative levels involved, and degrees of formality varying and reflecting the civil registry structure of the country. Challenges faced by one or more countries include: data security, inefficient bureaucracy, technical infrastructure and connectivity, geography, the limitations of current

legislation, the low profile of civil registration in the government structures, and lack of human capacity. That said, coordination has facilitated the coverage of civil registration, interagency coordination, and the provision of international support.

Cross-border collaboration

High migration rates and cross-border movement was the backdrop for a dedicated session on cross-border collaboration among civil registrars and registries. Vital events for a single person may occur in different countries. Events of family members in one country may impact on a person who is residing in another country. Concrete examples of registrations with an international element were provided along with the solution implemented. Examples included Afghanistan's collaboration with Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, UK, Canada, Sweden, etc. as well as many examples from South-East Asia of how to reach and include the refugee and stateless populations. Depending on the situation in the countries involved, political agendas, common interests, personal contacts, professional relationships (not necessarily at the top level) as well as legislation and regulatory frameworks, different approaches should be taken. To be effective, a level of trust must be established between the registration systems.

The meeting emphasised beginning small to breed greater successes in the future. The meeting identified several common challenges to cross-border collaboration between civil registration offices including: privacy and security of individual data, the financial and human resource costs, limitations in the legal frameworks and political will. The group articulated the differences between data sharing, verification and authentication, and noted that different countries in the region have different approaches to each of these areas. It was agreed that the benefits of cross border collaboration, such as better service delivery to resident and migrant populations, provision of clear documentation for those who are affected by events that occur in another country, and cost-effectiveness in delivery of registration services, fully justify efforts to overcome these challenges.

Relationship between civil registration and civil identification

With the need for a secure and efficient identification management system, the meeting discussed the relationship between, and uniqueness of, civil registration and civil identification systems. Both are primary registers as they provide the institutional anchoring for the verification and authentication of identities through the identity credentials they issue, with civil registration being the necessary foundation of any civil identification system. The systems and related responsibilities may or may not be in the same institution; in any case, a trustworthy relationship between the two protect the individual and facilitate the provision of services to citizens. Both are integral to a national identity-management system; a system, which needs to be tailored to each country context and capacity and with clear governance rules.

In the region, all countries have civil registration and civil identification systems at different stages of development. In strengthening the relationship between the two it is important to consider the institutional, administrative, legislative, and ICT frameworks. Challenges faced include technology development, the different resources available for the two systems, the governance rules and legislative frameworks, and the human resource capacity. Security is a key consideration, noting it is 'when it will be hacked' rather than 'if'. With increased focus and resources being directed to civil identification, there is a risk that it may crowd out civil registration; jeopardize the sustainability and integrity of both registers; and that the importance of the legal identity of people, especially children, which is provided by civil registration, may be lost. The focus on the identity management systems are an opportunity to improve civil registration systems. There are many opportunities for closer

coordination between civil registration and civil identification, such as the use of a common unique identity number in both civil registration and civil identification documents, use of similar infrastructure and registration processes, and the possibility for interconnection and interoperability around the commonly needed data to complete both civil registration and civil identification.

Civil Registration Network (CR8)

The value of cooperation and communication between civil registration professionals across South Asia was acknowledged throughout the meeting. The participants saw value in having the ability to easily coordinate with the other registrars in the region and to exchange experiences and good practices. A network would have a common platform to facilitate the communication. One of the themes of the group could be developing compatible procedures and templates across the countries. The network would provide inspiration, and positive peer pressure to accelerate improvements. There is an opportunity to capitalise on existing events and programmes that may support an informal network and/or be a place where the network may gather.

NEXT STEPS:

- 1) Participants committed to continue the collaboration and information exchange through an informal professional network comprised of those who work, or have worked, with civil registration from the eight countries in South Asia and other entities.
- 2) A core group of a chair, deputy and secretariat was established to initiate the network, with Homayoun Mohtaata (chair), Anir Chowdhury (deputy) and Kendra Gregson (secretariat) volunteering for an initial period of up to one year. The acceptance of the membership of this initial group was endorsed and applauded by the meeting.
- 3) The task of this initial core group is to develop a workplan, create a list of priority themes for the network to focus on, identify events where CR8 members may gather, develop an initial platform for communication, and define indicators to measure the success. Further, the group is to explore a potential event during the Pakistan civil registration summit in November 2018.
- 4) Participants are interested in further discussing: national coordination mechanisms; cross-border collaboration of civil registrars; the relationship between civil registration, civil identification, vital statistics and health information systems; and the use of ICT in civil registration. Each of these need to be further articulated.
- 5) Participants recognised the importance of having 'ambassadors' from other networks such as PCRN (Jeff Montgomery), AeHIN (Boonchai Kijjanayotin) and Latin America (Mia Harbitz will provide the introduction).
- 6) UNICEF and ESCAP agreed to circulate and publish the three background documents and conclusions and recommendations, incorporating the input from the Meeting.
- 7) The meeting will forward the conclusions and recommendations to the Regional Steering Group for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific for information and consideration for the agenda of the mid-term review of the Regional Action Framework on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Plan.