

Workshop on the Operation of Civil Registration, Vital Statistics and Identity Management Systems for East Asian Countries

13– 17 November 2017, Hanoi, Viet Nam

Conclusions and recommendations

1. The workshop was conducted in partnership with UNICEF and Bloomberg Philanthropies and with contribution from ESCAP, WHO and the World Bank. Representatives from civil registration offices, national statistics offices, ministries of health and identity management from the following countries participated: Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam. 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 in regard to 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, as well as the adoption of the ESCAP CRVS Decade “Get everyone in the picture” for Asia and the Pacific. The participants highlighted the fact that the 2030 Agenda directly positions accurate and complete registration as one of the main targets under the 16th goal “Peace, justice and strong institutions” and under the 17th 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 draft *Handbook on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems: Management, Operation and Maintenance, Revision 1*.
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 order to achieve full compliance. These obstacles include, but are not limited to, the lack of adequately trained personnel and manpower in general, financial and infrastructure resources, long term political commitment, awareness of the need to register vital events in the population at large, and coordination between stakeholders.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. 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 participating countries are either planning for implementation of such approach or are already in various phases of its development.

8. In that context, all the participating countries are employing efforts in terms of modernizing 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.
9. One of the major components of the modernization refers to updating the legal framework, and, the participants noted, that often represents a significant obstacle. Thus, it was concluded that the issue of formulating new laws or adjusting an out-of-date legal framework should be clearly emphasized in these recommendations and submitted to their respective governments. Coupled with this, the workshop expressed the need to having clear guidance embedded in the normative framework with respect to amendments of civil registration records, and preservation of paper files.
10. 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 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.
11. 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 several countries, these statistics are compiled by health institutions; in other statistics are derived from civil registration and compiled by the national statistical service; 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 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.
12. The workshop underlined the fact that users are constantly requesting various formats when it comes to the dissemination of vital statistics; it was concluded that all efforts should be made to meet these requests and to develop and publicize protocols for the use of vital statistics microdata, as well.
13. 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, being authorized registrars, to collectors, compilers and disseminators 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.
14. In that context, the workshop outlined that the Ministries of Public Security or other relevant ministries play a particularly important role as agencies in charge of operating identity management systems and that coordination requires additional effort as well as clear legislative

mandate in terms of establishing routine interaction and exchange of information and records, paying due regard to confidentiality.

15. When discussing international definitions of vital events and the accompanying standards, the workshop noted that in some cases the definitions and classifications used by different institutions in the same country differ; it was also noted that there are instances where the definition of a specific vital event used by a country differs from the one internationally recommended. It was concluded that all efforts should be made and discussion initialized in an harmonization effort.
16. 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, insufficient trained coders, to name a few. Thus, it was concluded that all efforts should be made, including the introduction of automated coding in line with international standards, and the assessment of the quality of the cause of death information, in all the participating countries.
17. The workshop noted with support the initiatives for introducing verbal autopsy in the participating countries in an attempt to improve cause of death statistics and to overcome the lack of cause of death certification in particular areas. In doing so, the workshop noted international recommendations that verbal autopsy can be used for cause of death aggregates only and not at the individual level, as an underlying cause of death certified by a trained medical professional can. It was also noted that introducing verbal autopsy in the country requires careful planning, training and implementation taking into consideration cultural and customary circumstances.
18. The workshop concluded that there is a need for a more sustainable approach to advocacy and communication related to the necessity of recording vital events as the lack of awareness leads to either late registrations or no registrations at all. The essential focus of these efforts should be on providing incentives in different formats, rather than resorting to fines and other sanctions.
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. 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.