

## Concept Note

### South to South exchange: Improving storage and archival of civil registration records and documents

Dates: 1-3<sup>rd</sup> October 2018

Suva, Fiji

#### 1. Background

Civil registration is the continuous, permanent, compulsory and universal recording of the occurrence and characteristics of vital events pertaining to the population, as provided through decree or regulation in accordance with the legal requirements in each country. Civil registration is carried out primarily for establishing the documents provided for by law. Owing to its unique features including universality, compulsoriness and continuity, the United Nations recognises civil registration as the best source of vital statistics.

Vital statistics constitute the collection of statistics on vital events in a lifetime of a person as well as relevant characteristics of the events themselves and of the person and persons concerned. Vital statistics derived from the aggregation of individual records provide important insights into various health, demographic and social phenomena occurring in populations and subgroups of the population, including among others disease or injury causing the death as well as health hazards or lifestyles, such as smoking or obesity, which may have caused or contributed to the cause of death.

By nature, information collected from civil registration is of a personal nature. Protecting the privacy of individuals (from an aggregate (statistical) and individual records perspective) is one of the fundamental features of the system. This is critical to maximizing the completeness and accuracy of reported information; the public need to be confident that the information they provide is protected from any form of misuse and/or inappropriate disclosure. On the hand, the protection of privacy has to balance with enabling enhanced use of information for policy and planning.

Closely related to issues of confidentiality of personal information is the question of the storage and preservation of civil registration records and documents. Because of the futuristic and legal value that the records hold (to individuals, researchers and Governments), civil registration records and documents need to be maintained and protected from hazards such as loss or destruction. It is crucial that the records are securely stored and backed-up for any future references, while also ensuring that the back-up copies are closely protected from unauthorized disclosures of personal information as are the original records.

According to the United Nations<sup>1</sup>, protecting the confidentiality of vital data is a complex process which covers a range of related issues, including: (a) Legal requirements; (b) Employees' responsibilities; (c) Assurances of confidentiality given to registrants and/or informants; (d) Treatment of requests for information or copies of documents; (e) Treatment of vital data by institutions which have data-sharing agreements with the civil registration system, such as the Ministry of Health and national statistical organization; (f) Physical protection of records; (g) Permissible disclosures; (h) Unintentional disclosures through published vital statistics data; (i)

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<sup>1</sup> Handbook on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems Policies and Protocols for the Release and Archiving of Individual Records [https://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/SeriesF/SeriesF\\_70E.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/SeriesF/SeriesF_70E.pdf)

Potential disclosures through release of computer files for research purposes; (j) Potential interception of individual information from vital records during shipping or on-line transmission between local registration offices and the Office of the Registrar General among others. Designing comprehensive policies and protocols surrounding the access and confidentiality of individual data is a fundamental to guiding the operations of the civil registration system in any country. Moreover, appraising staff with the required knowledge and skill in this regard cannot be over emphasised.

In the Pacific, the capacity needs of countries range from securing civil registers, civil registration records and data from daily handling risks, to establishing secure means to preserve and permanently store old registration records. There are a number of countries that have reported to have lost civil registration records and documents during times of disasters, while a number continue to face challenges in handling old paper-based registers which are delicate to yet which need to be routinely referenced.

Establishing secure systems and processes for storage and archival of civil registration records is one of the priorities of the Pacific Vital Statistics Action Plan (PVSAP) implemented by the Brisbane Accord Group (BAG). This was among the key themes discussed at the last workshop of the Pacific Civil registrars, which focussed on strengthening the resilience of civil registration systems including from effects of disasters. This study exchange aims to reinforce the work of BAG and the Pacific Civil Registrars Network in this area, by providing the participating countries with an opportunity to learn from the experience of Fiji-which has recently embarked on a project to improve their civil registration storage and archival processes.

## **2. Objectives**

This exchange aims at strengthening the capacity of PICTs in record management. The project will provide an opportunity to civil registration officials of the participating countries to learn about key principles on the release and archival of Individual records and documents, including through learning from Fiji's recent record archival project, as well as practices undertaken by the National archives of Fiji and National Archives of New Zealand in document preservation and storage. The participants will also have an opportunity to learn about Fiji's birth and death registration processes through visiting civil registration office and sharing experiences with the country's civil registration staff.

## **3. Output**

Civil registration officials of the participating countries will benefit from practical guidance on how to improve storage and archival of civil registration records and documents. The exchange will endeavor to cover the technical, operational and logistical aspects of Fiji's record archival project including key successes and failures, which is crucial for countries that plan to embark on a similar project in the near future. The exchange will further appraise participants on key principles for record management, including innovative approaches that have been undertaken by other countries in the region to improve record management.

## **4. Tentative dates and venue**

Place: Suva, Fiji

Dates: 1-3<sup>rd</sup> October 2018

## 5. Participants

Two officials from the civil registration offices of Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Vanuatu and Samoa.

## 6. Organisers

The workshop is organised by the Brisbane Accord Group, in collaboration with the Pacific Civil Registrars Network (PCRPN), the National Archives of New Zealand, the Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (PARBICA), the National archives of Fiji, and the Ministry of Justice of Fiji. This activity is supported by funding for South – South exchanges provided by the government of New Zealand.

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