

## Syrian Arab Republic

### History and legal framework for the civil registration system<sup>1</sup>

1. Civil registration started in 1914 in Syria during the rule of the Ottoman Empire. In August 1914, the first law to regulate civil registration in the Ottoman State was issued, which provided for the continuation of the registration of births, deaths, marriages, divorces, changes of residence, corrections to records and so forth to the existing records of a census undertaken in 1904. This law also included regulations and organizational procedures for civil registration, how to organize the civil register and the data it contains, measures for preparing certificates of birth and death and notification of marriages and divorces and for recording vital events taking place abroad, recording a transfer of residence, and recording of official reports on the discovery of foundlings. It also provided for deterrent penalties for violations related to civil status, especially for crimes of forgery, failing to register, failing to report a change of address, penalties to employees who fail to register an event on time, etc.
2. After the detachment from the Ottoman rule, a comprehensive population census was carried out in 1921. Data were collected on a house to house basis and verified. After all the information was put down in the records, three copies were made of each kind of record. Private individuals were permitted to verify the data in the copy given to the elder in the family. After the work of the census-taking was finished and the records were closed, a population law was issued in 1923. It was the first civil registration law in the country that laid down the procedures to be followed in registering the vital events of birth, death, marriage and divorce; in correcting records, in recording a place of residence, in obtaining identity cards, and in punitive measures arising from civil status violations and crimes against the records and files.
3. Subsequent decrees passed in April 1926 and 1931 provided more specifications to handle the population records in each municipality, gave alternate informants for registration of births, provided guidance for handling special cases of births and deaths occurring in hospitals and other institutions, etc. However, the Civil Status Code No. 376 of 1957 was passed and cancelled all prior decrees. This code is still extant, although it has been amended numerous times in the past years, it has firmly established some bases and procedures which serve as a foundation for the legal and administrative framework of the present civil registration system.

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<sup>1</sup> Some information was obtained from the Report on civil registration and vital statistics in Syria – an insert to the Report of the International Seminar on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (November 2000).

4. The registration of birth, death, marriage and divorce and provision of all related documents are the responsibility of the Civil Registration Office of the Ministry of the Interior. Registration Offices were distributed throughout the country and were provided with registration files for the recording of births, deaths, marriages and divorces in the town and the villages of the jurisdiction. From then on, towns have sent to the Ministry of Interior the information on the four types of vital events.

#### Organisation of the civil registration system

5. Currently, the Civil Registration Authority (Under the Ministry of Interior) in Syria has the responsibility for registration of births, deaths, marriages, divorces, naturalizations, corrections to the records, issuing of ID cards building and maintaining a database for civil registration, and producing vital statistics and population statistics. Syrian Embassies and consulates gather this information for Syrian citizens who are temporarily abroad. A copy of each record is sent to the Civil Registration Authority in Damascus, from where it is sent to the registrar in the place where the individual's record is kept.

6. For non-citizens, the civil registration office also needs to send a copy of the registration record to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For vital events happened abroad, the law requires that notifications have to be sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In reality, however, this is rarely done.

7. Currently there are 14 offices in *Governorate* capitals, 48 *mintaq*a offices, 166 *nahiya* offices and 34 new *nahiya* offices. All the registration offices follow the same procedures and use the same forms for the records, certificates, documents and the data that are related to their work in receiving and recording vital events.

#### Technical aspects of the civil registration system

##### *Informants*

8. Registration is organized on the basis of the family unit, the cell of the society. Citizens must register themselves in the civil register and must obtain an identity card which is to be carried at all times. They also had to obtain a passport to be used in their personal dealings with governmental departments. The father is responsible for registering a birth, the elder (*mukhtaar*) of the family for registering a death, the husband is responsible for registering a marriage or divorce.

9. Various documents are needed for registration, in addition to a witness who is above 18 years of age.

##### *Characteristics of vital events collected*

10. The information that is collected in the registrar is the date of birth (of the child), religion, and parents' information. Note that religion is collected and stored in the system but not reflected on the ID card.

*Time allowed for registration and penalties for late registration*

11. For citizens, the family is responsible for the declaration and reporting of the vital events occurred in the family within 30 days if the event happened in the country, 60 days if abroad. For non-citizens, the civil registration office also needs to send a copy of the registration record to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For vital events happened abroad, the law requires that the events have to be sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In reality, however, this is rarely done.

12. There are penalties imposed for late registration – if birth is registered after 30 days of it occurred but before 1 year, the penalty is 500 Syria Pound (SYP); the penalty grows to 2000 SYP if register after one year, 4000 SYP if register after 4 years of age.

*Data confidentiality*

13. The importance of data confidentiality is fully understood and respected. There is mutual agreement between the civil registration office and statistical office for data sharing. Other agencies do not have access to data without special approval from the civil registration office.

*Coverage of the civil registration system*

14. The coverage of births registration is at 98% while the coverage for the death registration is only at 75%.

Source of vital statistics

15. The Central Authority for Civil Registration produces vital statistics and the population structure by sex and age from this system, for the country and its administrative divisions. Vital statistics collected from civil registration are made available to UNSD including the births and deaths by sex; births and deaths by month of occurrence; total marriages and divorces and marriages by month of occurrence. Other detailed tabulations on vital events are not available and there is no information on infant deaths.

16. The most recent population census was conducted in 2004, questions on duration of first marriage, children ever born and living to ever married women, births occurred in the last 12 months and household deaths in the last 12 months were included in the questionnaire.

17. The most recent two surveys were MICS III conducted in 2006 and PARFAM (Family Health survey) in 2001. Those two surveys were single-round and used random sampling technique. Those surveys are for multiple purposes and covered topics on employment and unemployment, education, child labor, health and immunization and maternal mortality.

#### Availability of vital statistics

18. Syria provided data to 9 tables out of 41 vital statistics tables requested by the United Nations *Demographic Yearbook* and relevant to the region, for the 10-year period of 1997-2006 (Refer to Annex 2 for the complete list of the tables). Most of the data provided are rather up-to-date. Data on infant deaths and foetal deaths are not available.

19. The latest population census in Syria was conducted in 2004 and fertility and mortality topics were covered. However, no data on children ever born and children living were provided to the *Demographic Yearbook*.

#### Difficulties and future plans

20. Currently the registration is done manually and computerizing the entire system is an ongoing project, in collaboration with UNFPA. The project is going to be completed by the end of 2007.

21. One important aspect that Syria needs help is on the techniques that can be used to evaluate data more frequently. After the 1994 census, a decline of population growth was observed and after careful checking and cross-checking it was found out that the registration records had major flaws and needed to be corrected.

Source: Technical Report on the Status of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in ESCWA Region, United Nations, ESA/STAT/2009/9