

Chapter

10

Population Register

Why it is important: Not all countries maintain a population register. However, for those that do, the population register is essentially a computerized database with a separate record for each individual residing in the country and, in many countries, for citizens residing abroad as well. The record contains information from, or linkage with, various other government databases, including the civil registration system, national identity system, and others. The primary function of the population register is to provide reliable information for the administrative purposes of government. If a population register is maintained, this section contains key topics that should be addressed in the law.

1. Population register: definition and responsible agency

Good practice: The population register is a data system used for continuous recording, and/or coordinated linkage, of selected information pertaining to each member of the resident population of a country, in such a way as to provide the possibility of determining up-to-date information concerning the size and characteristics of a country's population, including residential address, at any given time.¹ The "resident population" includes all person within the territory of the country, regardless of citizenship status. In many countries, the population register also contains information pertaining to persons who are not usual residents of the country, such as citizens temporarily residing abroad, those who have emigrated, and those who are deceased or disappeared. The population register is the product of a continuous process, in which records of certain events, which may have been originally recorded in different administrative systems, are automatically linked to it on a current basis.²

Agencies in charge of operating and maintaining a population register differ from one country to another. For example, the population register may be the responsibility of the ministry of interior, home affairs, or justice, or the statistics or tax authority. In some countries, the entity responsible for maintaining the population register may be the same as the entity responsible for civil registration and/or identity management.³

Guidance: Describe whose data is maintained in the population register (e.g. citizens, all persons residing within the territory of a country, citizens outside the territory of the country). State the agency in charge of the population register. In the comments section, describe whether the law aligns with good practice and note any recommendations for regulatory reform.

a. Population whose data is maintained in population register:

Citation:

Comments:

b. Agency in charge of population register:

Citation:

Comments:

2. Method of sharing data: merged or linked data

Good practice: Information from the civil registration, national identity registration, and other agencies must somehow be accessible to or in the population register. In a merged population register, selected information from selected agencies is transmitted to, and merged together, in the population register. However, a population register need not be either a physical or single consolidated list (either in paper or electronic format), but can be a network of registers linked in a coordinated way. In linked systems, the

¹ United Nations, Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 3, New York, 2014, Para. 454.

² United Nations, Guidelines for the Legislative Framework for Civil Registration, Vital Statistics and Identity Management Systems, New York, 2019, Para. 470.

³ United Nations, Guidelines for the Legislative Framework for Civil Registration, Vital Statistics and Identity Management Systems, New York, 2019, Para. 471.

information is not physically submitted or transmitted from the civil registration, identity management, and other agencies, to the population registrar; rather, the registers are linked, usually through a UIC, so that the desired information is accessible to an agency when it is authorized and needed.⁴ In such a system, information is linked and shared for specific purposes, while stored across different databases.⁵

To protect privacy, linked population registers are recommended. There may be a risk to privacy if individual records are merged across a wide range of registers, potentially leading to the ability for unauthorized access to all information in a consolidated record of engagements and transactions.⁶ However, even the linkage of all records in various databases through a UIC may present a risk to privacy through the potential to consolidate records. To protect against this, many countries use only sector specific numbers to access services. These sector specific number are then matched to the person's UIC in a separate database when authorized and needed. In this way, a person's UIC is never made available to service providers or the public. This minimizes the potential risk.⁷

Regardless of whether records are merged or linked, personal privacy and data protection systems and procedures should be in place. (See Chapter 10 on Data Protection and Personal Privacy).

Guidance: Describe whether information in the population register is merged from information across various databases, or whether information is stored in various databases and linked through a UIC or other means. Describe any personal privacy and data protection systems and procedures that protect against unauthorized access to information in the population register. In the comments section, describe whether the law aligns with good practice and note any recommendations for regulatory reform.

a. Is data is merged or linked in the population register?

Citation:

Comments:

b. Person privacy and data protection systems and procedures:

Citation:

Comments:

3. Information shared by Civil Registration and ID Registration Authorities with the Population Register

Good practice: The content of the population register varies from country to country. However, it commonly contains the names of a person and her/his parents, date and place of birth, residential address, and UIC.⁸ A population register also often contains information concerning an individual's legal

⁴ See United Nations, Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 3, New York, 2014, paragraph 469.

⁵ United Nations, Guidelines for the Legislative Framework for Civil Registration, Vital Statistics and Identity Management Systems, New York, 2019, Para. 104.

⁶ Gelb and Diofasi, Preliminary Discussion Paper on the Future of Identification and Development, Center for Global Development, 2015, page 29.

⁷Implementation of the United Nations Legal Identity Agenda, United Nations Country Team Operational Guidelines, May 2020, paragraph 98.

⁸ United Nations, Handbook on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems: Management, Operation, Maintenance, Revision 1, 2018, paragraph 443.

status (such as citizenship, legal residency status, immigration and emigration status) and civil status (i.e. married, unmarried, divorced).

For those born in the country, the first entry into the population register happens at birth. After birth registration, the civil registration agency shares – through submission or linkage - basic facts about a child (name, parents, place/date of birth and UIC) to the population register. Sharing of the UIC soon after it is assigned is essential, as this allows the population register to link with other databases and to maintain continuously up-to-date information about the population.⁹ The civil registration authority also shares information about the fact of the occurrence of other vital events - marriage, divorce, adoption, legitimization, recognition, and death - to the population register. This keeps the population register up to date regarding a person's civil status. It is important that the civil registration authority share information about death registration in order for a person's legal identity to be deactivated in the population register and archived after death.¹⁰

Country practices vary on what information is shared from the national identity system to the population register. This information generally includes what identity documents have been issued, such as national ID card, passport, or driver's license. In some countries, biometrics are shared, in others they are not due to privacy concerns.¹¹ Because identity should be authenticated through the ID management system, and not the population register, there generally is no need for biometrics to be merged in a population register. For data protection and personal privacy reasons, it is recommended to permit linkage and use of biometrics only as needed for a specific authorized purpose.

The law should state what information is required to be shared by the civil registration and identity registration authorities with the population register.

Guidance: Describe what information is shared by the civil registration and national identity registration authorities with the population register. In the comments section, describe whether the law aligns with good practice and note any recommendations for regulatory reform.

a. Information shared by the civil registration authority with the population register:

Citation:

Comments:

b. Information shared by the national identity system with the population register:

Citation:

Comments:

⁹ United Nations, Guidelines for the Legislative Framework for Civil Registration, Vital Statistics and Identity Management Systems, New York, 2019, Para. 474.

¹⁰ United Nations, Guidelines for the Legislative Framework for Civil Registration, Vital Statistics and Identity Management Systems, New York, 2019, Para. 475.

¹¹ United Nations, Guidelines for the Legislative Framework for Civil Registration, Vital Statistics and Identity Management Systems, New York, 2019, Para. 476.

4. Information shared between other agencies and the Population Register

Good practice: Many other functional registers (such as a residency register, voter registration, tax authority, immigration, etc.) may also share information with, and receive information from, the population register. Population registers often are the authoritative source for other registers, such as tax and voting registers. In other instances, the functional register (such as a residency register) may be the authoritative source and provide input into the population register.¹²

For those not born in the country, first entry into the population register usually happens when a person immigrates to a country and is assigned a UIC. That point in time the immigration agency or another authorized agency submits their basic information to the population register.

The law should clearly state what agencies are required to share information with the population register, and the information required to be shared.

Guidance: Describe what information is shared between other agencies and the population register. State the agency and the information shared. Note whether the agency or the population register is the definitive source of the information. In the comments section, describe whether the law aligns with good practice and note any recommendations for regulatory reform.

a. Information shared between other agencies and the population register (note agency, information and definitive source):

Citation:

Comments:

5. Data Sharing: frequency and data protection

Good practice: The law should address the frequency of sharing of records from the civil registration and identity management agencies, as well as other appropriate agencies, to the population register. The frequency of data sharing will depend on the method of sharing data (i.e., merged or linked) and the degree of digitization and integration across systems. In a merged system, where information is transmitted from a specific government database to the population register for storage in the register, information might be sent according to a fixed schedule, for example daily, weekly, or monthly. However, in systems that are fully digitized and integrated across agency platforms, it may be that information is shared continuously. In other words, when specified information is entered into one database, it is automatically pushed into the population register. For example, in such a system, when the civil registration authority enters information about a new birth into the birth register, the name, date and place of birth, and parents name would be pushed into the population register at that time.

Linked systems work differently. In a linked system, the information from one database is shared with another government database only on an “as needed” basis. It is shared only with the personnel that is authorized to have access at that moment in time. It is shared only for one particular purpose and therefore is not stored in the other database. In addition, only the minimum information needed for that particular purpose is shared.

¹² United Nations, Guidelines for the Legislative Framework for Civil Registration, Vital Statistics and Identity Management Systems, New York, 2019, Para. 477.

Regardless of the manner of data sharing, the law should provide for secure sharing of information, including end-to-end encryption. See Chapter 11 for more on personal privacy and data protection procedures.

Guidance: Describe the data sharing process for all relevant agencies, including the civil registration agency, national identity agency, and any other agencies that share data. Describe whether the law clearly prescribes timeframes and/or processes for data sharing, and whether there are procedures for personal privacy and data protection. In the comments section, describe whether the law aligns with good practice and note any recommendations for regulatory reform.

a. Process for data sharing between civil registration agency and population registrar:

Citation:

Comments:

b. Process for data sharing between national identity agency and population registrar:

Citation:

Comments:

c. Process for data sharing between other relevant agencies and population register:

Citation:

Comments:

