Chapter

12

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.

Introduction

Not all countries maintain a population register. For those that do, the population register is essentially a computerized system with up-to-date information for each individual residing in the country. The "resident population" includes all persons 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.[1] The system contains information from, or linkages to, various government databases, including the civil registration system, the national identity system, and others. The primary function of the population register is to provide reliable information for the administrative purposes of government.

This chapter covers the following topics:

1. Method of Sharing Data: Merged or Linked data
2. Agency Responsible for the Population Register
3. Information Shared by Civil Registration and ID Registration Authorities with the Population Register
4. Information Shared Between Other Agencies and the Population Register
5. Data Sharing: Frequency and Data Protection

1.   Method of sharing data: merged or linked data

Good Practice: There are two main types of methods to share information with a population register: merging and linking.

In a merged population register, information is shared from various government databases and stored in the population register. In this type of system, all the information shared about a particular person is merged into a personal file in the population register. However, merged population registers present a privacy risk due to the large amount of consolidated information in one place.[2] There is a risk that a person with access to the system, for a specified purpose and set of information, can access other information not needed for that purpose. Therefore, in the last decade there has been a trend away from merged databases.

In linked population register systems, information from various government agencies is not merged into a personal file. Instead, government registers and databases are linked so that any particular desired information is accessible to an authorized agency at the time that specific information is needed.[3] In this kind of system, information is stored across different databases, and linked and shared only when a specific purpose and need arises.[4]

There are different ways to link databases. One way of linking is to use a UIC so that each sector-specific database can share information with any other sector-specific database (as shown in Figure 1 below). Selected Information is shared between databases, on request, for a specific purpose; however, the requested information is not stored in the database that is requesting the information.

Another way of linking is through a matching register. In this type of linked system, each sector-specific database contains only a sector-specific number for the individual, not a UIC. To request information, an

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[1] United Nations, Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 3, New York, 2014, Para. 454.
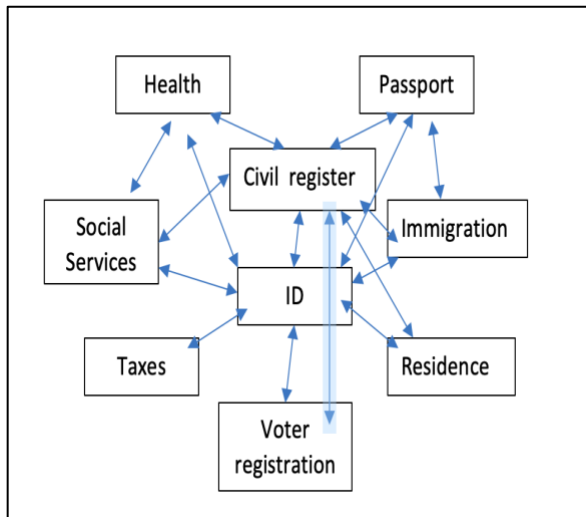[2] Gelb and Diofasi, Preliminary Discussion Paper on the Future of Identification and Development, Center for Global Development, 2015, page 29.
[3] See United Nations, Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System, Revision 3, New York, 2014, paragraph 469.
[4] United Nations, Guidelines for the Legislative Framework for Civil Registration, Vital Statistics and Identity Management Systems, New York, 2019, Para. 104.

intermediary matching register that contains the UIC and sector-specific numbers for everyone in the population is used (as shown in Figure 2 below). When a request for information is made, the matching register matches the sector-specific number with the UIC, then transmits the request to the database with the needed information by matching to that sector-specific number. The information is then relayed back in the same way. Storing the UIC separate from, but alongside, other functional databases allows for deliberate data matching and linkage for approved purposes, but adds a layer of security if there is a data breach.[5]

Figure 1: Linked System – Using UIC   **Figure 2: Linked System – Using a Matching Register**
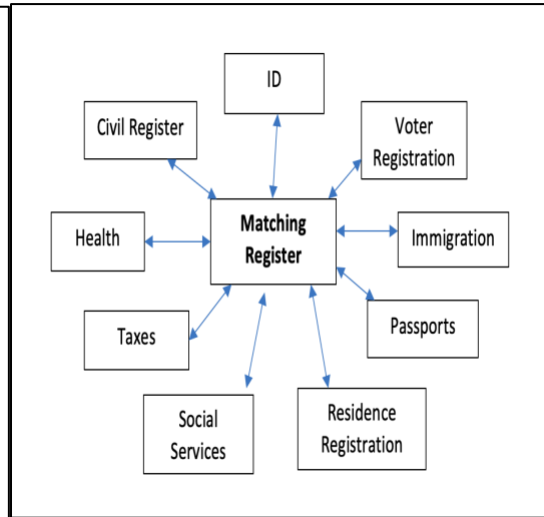
Guidance: Describe whether information in the population register is merged from information across various databases, or whether information is stored in various databases and linked through a UIC or other means. If a linked system is used, describe whether information is shared directly or through a matching register. In the comments section, describe whether the law aligns with good practice and note any recommendations for regulatory reform.

a. **Is the population register a merged register or a linked system?**

Citation:

Comments:

b. **If a linked system is used, is information shared directly across databases through use of a UIC, or is an intermediary matching register used to match sector specific numbers with a UIC?**

Citation:

Comments:

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

2. Agency Responsible for Population Register and Relevant Population

Good practice: Agencies in charge of operating and maintaining a population register system differ from one country to another. For example, a merged 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 national identity card registration.[6] In a linked system, the computerized operations system that links various databases might be under a ministry or agency responsible for information and communications technology (ICT) or other agency.

In a merged system, the population register would have a data file on every person who is a resident of the country, regardless of citizenship status. Many countries also include citizens who reside abroad in a merged population register. For linked systems, data may be shared (for legitimate and defined purposes) for any person within any of the linked databases.

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

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a. State the agency in charge of population register.

Citation:

Comments:

b. Describe whose data is maintained in a merged population register or whose data is linked in a linked system.

Citation:

Comments:

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

Good practice: The content of the population register system varies from country to country and by the type of system maintained. In linked systems, each government database contains only the information relevant to that sector, as discussed above.

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

In merged systems, the population register commonly contains the name of a person and her/his parents, date and place of birth, residential address, and UIC.[7] A merged population register also often contains information concerning an individual's legal 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 a population register system happens at birth. After birth registration, the civil registration agency shares basic facts about a child (name, parents, place/date of birth and UIC) to the merged population register, or shares the UIC to the matching register if a matching register is used. Sharing of the UIC soon after it is assigned is essential, as this allows the population register system to link with other databases and to maintain continuously up-to-date information about the population.[8]

The civil registration authority may also share information about the fact of the occurrence of other vital events - marriage, divorce, adoption, legitimation, recognition, and death - to a merged population register, or push specific relevant information to specific authorities in a linked system (for example, pushing death registration information to the ID authority to deactivate an identity after death). This keeps the population register system up to date regarding a person's civil status.[9]

Country practices vary on what information is shared by the national identity system to a merged 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 shared due to privacy concerns.[10] 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.

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. **Describe the information shared by the civil registration authority with the population register.**

Citation:

Comments:

b. **Describe the information shared by the national identity system with the population register.**

Citation:

Comments:

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

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

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

[10] 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 system.[11] For those not born in the country, first entry into the population register system usually happens when a person immigrates to a country and is assigned a UIC. At that point in time, the immigration agency would submit their basic information to a merged population register, or submit the assigned UIC to the matching register in such a linked system.

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

a. **Describe the other agencies and databases that share information with the population register system.** Describe the information, if known.

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, if a merged population register is used. The frequency of data sharing will depend on the degree of digitization and integration across systems. In a merged system that is not fully digitized, information might be uploaded and 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 and in real time. 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 merged 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. Only the minimum information needed is shared with the authorized person or office and only for the time it takes to fulfil the specified purpose. The received data is not stored in the receiving database. This system is more protective of personal privacy than a merged system because the information available to any individual government official is limited in both content and time.

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 there are

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

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 population registrar system and other databases,** including frequency of updating data (if known) and procedures for protecting data during transmission (such as encryption).

Citation:

Comments: