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REFORMS IN THE CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS SYSTEMS OF MOROCCO

International Institute for Vital Registration and Statistics
9650 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, Maryland 20814
U.S.A.

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FOREWORD

During the past two decades, the Government of Morocco has pursued a vigorous policy aimed at bringing the Kingdom's civil registration and vital statistics (CR/VS) systems to a state of adequacy so that these systems can make appropriate contributions to the nation's social and economic development. In addition to a variety of measures aimed at improvement, the Government has carefully studied the operation of the CR/VS systems to uncover problems which need to be resolved. In the last few years, the United Nations Population Fund has supported projects to assist Morocco in this area. This paper discusses the deficiencies in the systems and the measures taken to accelerate the improvement of CR/VS in Morocco.

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REFORMS IN THE CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS SYSTEMS OF MOROCCO

By
Violeta Gonzales-Diaz
Statistician
United Nations Statistical Office
Department of International Economic and Social Affairs

INTRODUCTION

Since the mid 1970s, the government of Morocco has pursued a number of administrative and legal measures to improve the civil registration system. From 1975 up to 1987, activities were carried out solely with government support and from 1987 onwards with the assistance of the United Nations Population Fund to two different projects: 1) Strengthen Civil Registration and Computerization of the System (MOR/87/PO1) and 2) Strengthening the Vital Statistics System (MOR/88/PO3) which are complementary to each other. A brief description of the evolution of the civil registration system and the activities implemented up to now under those projects is given below.

Evolution of the civil registration system of Morocco

a) With the advent of the Protectorate, in 1915, the French authorities provided for compulsory registration of vital events of the French and foreign population. In 1931, accessibility was granted to Moroccans as well and in 1950 became compulsory for everyone within the Protectorate. At independence in 1956, civil registration extended to the entire Kingdom.

The procedures set for registration in 1915 and 1950 were basically applied to the entire kingdom. For instance, the registration of births and deaths were made in bound books in Arabic, as it still is. A register book is kept at the local registrar's office and a duplicate must be prepared and sent to the Procurator of the Tribunal of the First Instance, Ministry of Justice, for its custody. The notations in the margin have to be included in both the original and duplicate registers. Certificates are issued either by transcribing the entire vital record or by means of excerpts.

b) Before 1976, a large proportion of births and deaths were unregistered in part due to apathy of the population itself and also due to an insufficient number of registrars. The network of civil registration offices did not provide the necessary accessibility to the population, and their equipment and supplies left much to be desired.

Between 1975 and 1986, the government undertook a number of measures to improve civil registration in the kingdom since it was perceived as a fundamental instrument for the monitoring and evaluation of various socio-economic programmes. Chief among these measures were reforms in the administrative structure that included the establishment of a Civil Status Division, at the central level, in the Ministry of the Interior (Decree of 26 January 1975). A new decree, passed on 17 December 1976, made this Division responsible for all attributions concerning civil registration. It mandated the execution of all reforms necessary to insure that the civil registration institution would enhance its role in the country and would have an important status similar to that in developed countries. The enactment of a decree on 30 September 1976, that dealt with community organization bolstered civil registration. The responsibility for carrying out registration was transferred to the Presidents of the Community Councils, who were appointed as civil registrars and were to be assisted by their deputies and/or advisers.

Civil registrars made great efforts to implement activities to correct the system's deficiencies as outlined in a plan of action of the Civil Status Division. The plan of action followed a detailed evaluation study conducted in 1976 by the Civil Status Division. The study found major weaknesses in the system at that time:

- large omissions in registering births and deaths
- poor performance of CR offices as manifest in frequent errors in entry and transcription, no preparation of backups for vital records, despite their legal requirement, and duplicate registration
- insufficient human and material resources at the registration offices--one quarter of the registration units had only a single CR agent with very weak skills and training
- inadequate content of the CR records
- lack of interest in CR on the part of the population
- inaccessibility of registration offices to some groups.

Under the direction of the Ministry of the Interior, implementation of the activities in the plan of action continued for about ten years with the sole support of the Government. Significant progress was made in reorganizing and strengthening the local registration offices both in terms of better trained and supervised personnel, and a more adequate allocation of office space and equipment. Some of the reforms touched technical aspects as well, such as, the extension of the time allowance for registering deaths from 3 to 15 days, the creation of the individual registration card and the family status card.

The legal reforms led to the drawing up of a proposal for a new civil registration law whose enactment is expected in the near future.

An assessment of the achievements made in this period, carried out in 1986 by the Ministry of the Interior found the following:

- Significant increase in the rate of coverage of registration.
- Improvement in performance of all registration offices. More than 70 percent of the delays and irregularities had been corrected.
- Most of the partial juridical reforms pertaining to civil registration were made.
- The network of the local registration offices had notably been enlarged from 475 to 1163 of which 859 were primary registration units and 304 were subsidiary registration units (see below).
- improved cadre of local registrars by means of training seminars.
- implementation of program of supervision of local registrars by central office inspectors.

Distribution of the registration units in the Kingdom: 1986

Communities	Primary Units	Subsidiary Units	Total
Municipalities	59	171	230
Autonomous centers	40	5	45
Rural communities	<u>760</u>	<u>128</u>	<u>888</u>
Total	859	304	1,163

Despite the recognized improvements, the civil registration offices still suffered from deficiencies in terms of both human and material resources. The following table gives a picture of the availability of qualified personnel at urban and rural levels:

Local Registrars in the Kingdom: 1986

Area	Total Number	Nonqualified Number	Percent
Urban	2,416	1,711	70
Rural	<u>2,658</u>	<u>1,562</u>	58
Total	5,074	3,272	64

Civil registration had arrived at a turning point in its history. The failure to meet all the objectives in the work plan of reforms were largely due to factors and circumstances that fell beyond the responsibility of the local communities and of the Ministry of the Interior. For instance, the overall reforms needed in the legal aspects of civil registration largely depended upon the Ministry of Justice (there were a multiplicity of regulations on civil registration and these were dispersed).

The removal of remaining problems in the CR system were viewed as a necessary condition before dealing with the use of vital records for statistical purposes and before preparing the ground for the introduction of computers in the local registration offices.

The 1986 study found that more than a quarter of the registration offices exhibited below average performance despite the efforts in upgrading their status. Among the main problems found in the 316 below-average offices were: vital records unsigned, delays in preparing the duplicate registers, errors in the contents of the vital records, loses of the registers, duplication in registering vital events. The main causes for these problems were always the scarcity of human resources and equipment and poor allocation of resources to the registration units.

Despite the prevailing constraints, civil registration did make significant progress from 1975 to 1986 which was manifest in the increase of the population's awareness of civil registration matters and in a clearer perception of the many uses of vital records. This progress has been made possible thanks to the close cooperation of the local Community Councils Presidents, and the Civil Status Division of the Ministry of the Interior.

STRENGTHENING CIVIL REGISTRATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF A COMPUTERIZED SYSTEM (MOR/87/POL)

In 1986, the Government of Morocco requested the assistance of the United Nations Population Fund to continue its programme of reforms in civil registration. This resulted in the approval of a special project (MOR/87/PO7) in the amount of US\$ 338,950, to be implemented starting in April 1987. The main aim of this project is to improve the collection and the utilization of the information from the civil registration system. It is expected that the ongoing activities will progressively transform the civil registration system into a basic instrument for the socio-economic development of the country. A civil registration system, well organized and scientifically exploited, can be an important statistical and demographic data base for local, regional and national development, i.e., a primary source of data for knowing the current status of the population and for assessing its future status and needs.

The Civil Status Division of the Ministry of the Interior is the implementing agency and plays an important coordinating role, including the administrative and judicial aspects of the system. The Directorate of Statistics of the Ministry of Planning is responsible for the vital statistics compilation at the national level, their publication and dissemination. The ministry of Justice is responsible for the judicial aspects of the civil registration system including the custody of the vital records. The emphasis of the project is on births and deaths since marriages, divorces and separations are made on a confessional basis only.

In view of the multiplicity of problems that need to be addressed, the Government is convinced of the advantages of introducing computer facilities in the local civil registration offices, as a means of enhancing their services and for the preservation and retrieval of vital records. But, countrywide efforts in this direction will be made only after the completion of a thorough study on its application on an experimental basis.

To test the application of a few personal computers in civil registration related activities in selected local registration offices, three demonstration areas have been selected: Ain El Orma (province of Meknes), Anfa (prefecture of Casa-Anfa) and Bouknadel (prefecture of Sale):

Casablanca Anfa: population (1989): 44,276 (urban community)

Ain El Orma (Meknes): population: 18,629 (rural community)

Sidi-Bouknadel: population: 30,000 (Sale)

(Morocco had an estimated population of 24 million in 1989).

Within those communities, the local registration offices of Anfa, Toulal and Bouknadel center have been selected. The selection of the three pilot areas was based on specific problems in each civil registration office with a view to generalize the computerization so developed to other registration bureaus on a progressive basis.

The short term objectives of this project are:

1. Training of the civil registration personnel so as to increase their skills in legal and statistical matters.
2. Organizing a vital statistics system at the community, prefectural, provincial and national levels.
3. Testing all necessary modifications to the current system in the pilot areas, by means of simplifying the procedures for registration, redesigning of existing forms, setting up procedures for safekeeping and preservation of vital records, review of the contents of the statistical reports to make them suitable for modern data processing.

4. Computerizing all activities concerning civil registration at the Civil Status Division (the central office), and testing the possibilities of computerization of civil registration functions in the three pilot areas (includes the recording, editing corrections, retrieval of vital records in computer media, the insertion of amendments and judicial annotations, certificate issuing).

The storage of vital records in computer media will not only improve the service to the public as the preparation of the facts can be directly keyed into the computer, but it also will enhance retrieval and preservation of records and will assist the local registrars to better monitor the proper filling in of the vital records. It is expected that errors and omissions in vital records will be minimized. This system, which is considered to be indispensable for the good performance of the local registration office, is already in operation, since January 1989, in the pilot community of Casa Anfa. The other two selected communities: Sidi Bouknade (Sale) and Ain Orma (Meknes) will soon be in operation.

The pilot computerized registration system has the following objectives:

- control of the validity of the information in the vital records (for example, in respect to the delay of the declaration, etc.)
- automatic entry of the different facts of civil registration
- numbering of the facts by chronological order of registration
- automatic printing of the vital records to organize loose-leaf files to replace the current bound registers and the manual filling in of vital records
- computer generating of excerpts of vital records for certification purposes that will take into account eventual mentions in the margin and judicial annotations
- computer-generating of vital statistical reports to avoid transcription errors
- preparation of annual and decennial indexes of vital records
- recording of basic references of vital records registered before 1 January 1989 to assist registrars in the searching process and to prepare a decennial index for the same purpose
- elaborate statistics concerning internal activities of the local registration office

The complete range of activities in this project are:

- improvement and simplification of civil registration procedures and document harmonization
- implement supervision measures at the local registration offices
- increase motivation and skills of civil registration officials and of their deputies and assistants
- increase coverage of registration
- increase population awareness of civil registration matters
- establishment of computer facilities (PC) to assist in the civil registration activities and to monitor the local population growth.

The computerization of some of the registration activities is already operational since January 1989 within the urban community of Anfa and is limited, for the moment, to births and deaths. Computerization of the civil registration activities includes the transcription of vital records into magnetic media, editing and corrections, their retrieval for certification purposes (excerpts) and the printing of annual and decennial indexes. The indexes contain basic information to assist in the searching process for a particular vital record which may display: name, surname, date of birth. These indexes are automatically prepared. The outputs of these activities are: birth records, death records, birth/death indexes, birth/death certificates. The programmes related to the corrections and amendments of vital records and to the insertion of judicial annotations are in preparation.

At the end of this experience, the Ministry of the Interior will have at hand a proven set of computer programmes to enhance its services in the selected communities implied in the experiment. It is foreseen that the necessary measures will be implemented to generalize the use of several PC in those local communities that have the necessary means for doing so. It has been recommended at the national level, however, that no community should individually undertake steps towards computerizing its civil registration functions until the results of the experimental study are made available.

The current status of the system calls for the reshaping of its administrative structure both at the local and central level so that it could be readapted to perform the essential functions that must be rendered to the society.

Framed in this project, studies were carried out by the Ministry of Interior, the Directorate of Statistics, and technical assistance from the United Nations Population Fund, in 31 civil registration offices which revealed that:

The rate of coverage for live births was 76 percent, the rate of coverage for deaths was even lower, between 35 to 40 percent. Therefore, coverage is still well below its desired level since registration became compulsory in the early 1950s. A number of factors explain this situation:

- lack of interest of the responsible authorities of civil registration (26 percent, as revealed by a community survey in 1986)
- unqualified civil registration personnel (in 64 percent of the civil registration bureaus)
- deficient service provided by the civil registration bureaus to the public and other users
- long delays in giving legal value to vital records kept in the registers (numbering, signature and stamp from a Procurator of the Tribunal of the First Instance is needed).

Despite all the efforts made by the government throughout the years to reform and upgrade civil registration, constraints proved to be deeply rooted in the administrative, human and material resources allocated to the registration offices. The assistance both technical and financial being provided through this project will further strengthen and unify the civil registration system in the country, so that the population can benefit from its outputs and rights derived from registering vital events. The national administration can also benefit from reliable vital statistics derived from vital records. The long term goal is to make registration reachable to all population groups and to reduce, as much as possible, the omissions in registering births and deaths. The establishment of a reliable vital statistics system based on vital records is also foreseen so that vital statistics can play an important role in demographic analysis. The latter is a corner stone in planning socio-economic development.

From the demographic point of view, this operation also contributes to the establishment of a reliable statistical data base capable of providing information to both the local and central authority about the demographic status of the population, as well as on its dynamics. This constitutes the second phase of the Project MOR/88/PO3, the first phase of which is currently in operation. The second phase will assist the Government in building up a computerized civil registration system at the provincial level so that births and deaths can be monitored monthly. The current project has computerized all information gathered nationwide by the supervisors (before, data were compiled manually) regarding (a) each civil registration bureau's resources, personnel, equipment, office facilities, (b) irregularities found in the contents of the vital records, as well as, (c) future needs of the registration offices.

The following outputs are available from computerization central office activities: (a) list of the local registration offices, (b) list of the registrars and their assistants, (c) personnel in the registration bureaus by category, (d) list of the irregularities in the contents of the vital records by type, (e) level of development of the civil registration bureau from the point of view of availability of human and material resources, (f) annual activities of the local registration offices (status of the annual activity, rate of coverage of each civil registration office, rate of coverage by type of community, status of the civil registration. These statistics are available at the community, province level and for the Kingdom as a whole.

THE CIVIL REGISTRATION SYSTEM AS A SOURCE OF VITAL STATISTICS

The compilation of vital statistics was initiated by the Directorate of Statistics of Morocco in 1965, which consisted of monthly counts of births and deaths regardless of their registration in the communities. The local registrars, under the surveillance of the Ministry of the Interior were charged with the responsibility of reporting births and deaths registered in their communities to the Directorate of Statistics in Rabat. The current nationwide procedure to prepare statistical reports requires the transcription of data from the vital record to a collective-type statistical report that accommodates a number of vital events of the same type.

The analysis of the data so produced showed that vital statistics were largely deficient both in quantity and quality. Coverage was only 60 percent for births and 40 percent for deaths. A variety of reasons have been given to explain the situation--chief among them were the lack of coordination among the multiplicity of agencies participating in the statistical operation (the local communities, local registration offices, the Directorate of Statistics) insufficient human resources and poor office equipment and supplies, and the nonstandardization of the statistical reporting process whose very roots were the nonstandardization of civil registration itself. To these, one can add the severe problems in document flow from the civil registration offices to the Directorate of Statistics. Viewing all of these barriers to a healthy vital statistics system, the enhancement of the role of the civil registrars was seen as fundamental among the many efforts needed to improve the system.

In 1979, the Government made an attempt to collect vital statistics on births and deaths regardless of their status of registration in the registration office. But the results of these efforts were discouraging and it was decided instead to further the improvement of civil registration so that the quality of statistics can be upgraded as well. For this purpose, close-coordination among the concerned institutions was viewed as essential, together with a firm commitment on the part of the Government to carry out periodic training of the civil registration personnel.

Parallel to the testing of new forms for civil registration within the three pilot areas, a decree of 20 December 1988 of the Ministry of the Interior mandated the creation and establishment of a Civil Status Division at the Provincial level. This new unit will have the responsibility of pursuing the reorganization activities initiated in the country, as well as the improvement, control, establishment and maintenance of the demographic and other statistical data. In order to make these tasks operational, a specialized Statistical Service has been created within the Provincial Civil Status Division (circular no. 367 of 20 December 1988).

An evaluation study of the vital statistics made in 1988 (26 October to 5 November)³ by the Directorate of Statistics, resulted in another project "Improvement of Vital Statistics from Civil Registration" (MOR/83/PO3), which is also funded and technically assisted by the United Nations Fund for Population Activities. The implementation of this project was initiated in April 1988 under the responsibility of the Directorate of Statistics of the Ministry of Planning and will extend for a 3-year period.

The 1988 study was conducted in close cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior in 31 selected civil registration bureaus (2.7% of the total). The results of this study were essential for the design and implementation of a number of corrective measures. It focused on identifying the reasons for the poor performance of the vital statistics system in the country, the description of the human resources, the availability of material resources in the local registration offices, the sources of irregularities in the process of transmission of statistical reports (or lack of reporting at all) to the Directorate of Statistics in Rabat, and the identification of the most frequent type of errors made by local registrars in preparing statistical reports.

Distribution of the primary and subsidiary registration units
by status of transmission of vital statistics reports: 1988

Status	Primary	Subsidiary	Total
Continuous transmission	575	179	754
Discontinuous transmission	204	89	293
No transmission	30	53	83
Total	809	321	1,130

The 1988 study surveyed three groups: (1) local government authorities, (2) local registrars, and (3) local registrars' assistants. Different questionnaires were completed for each group. The first group provided information on vital events which were not registered. They also made observations and suggestions concerning the preparation of statistical reports. The second group provided information on their educational background--they also made observations and suggestions on the preparation of statistical reports. From the third group, information on personal characteristics was obtained, e.g., age, sex and education. From this last group, information was also gathered on their office activities, e.g., duties, hours of work and detailed data on the preparation of statistical reports.

As the 31 civil registration bureaus surveyed were not randomly selected, the results of the study cannot be generalized to the 1,130 civil registration bureaus in the country. Rather, it was intended to provide insights on how to deal with the procedural problems encountered in the preparation of statistical reports and their timely transmission to the Directorate of Statistics. The ultimate goal of the 1988 study was to shed light on the main irregularities that affected the collection and compilation of vital statistics from the civil registration bureaus in 1988.

The study revealed serious problems in the document flow. For instance, it was found that the rate of coverage for civil registration was actually higher than revealed by the compiled vital statistics of births and deaths as 32.5% of registered births and 7.8% of deaths were not reported to the Directorate of Statistics for their processing. This means that if proper care would be taken

in the document flow and in the filling out of the statistical reports, significant improvement can be made in both quantity and quality of birth and death statistics.

PERSPECTIVES

During the IV National Conference of the Local Communities⁴, in June of 1989, the progress made in civil registration, in qualitative terms, in the past 13 years was acknowledged. Such progress was attributed to the better understanding by the members of the population of the importance of vital records and their usefulness. This, in turn, has paved the way for the upgrading of local registration offices. A key contributing factor has also been the cooperative work of the Ministry of the Interior, responsible for civil registration, and the Directorate of Statistics of the Ministry of Planning, responsible for vital statistics.

There was consensus in the conference that all programmes to upgrade and modernize the civil registration system and bureaus should strive, in the near future, to bring civil registration to a level of a model institution. Towards this goal, national efforts should continue to complete the review of the legal frame concerning registration so that all necessary reforms in civil registration can be made. Equally important is the pursuance of efforts to strengthen the performance of the civil registration offices that are below average (27 percent). The latter needs to be coupled by the increase, in number and skills, of local registrars, and the allocation of material and financial resources to the local registration offices. It is well known that budgetary constraints, at the community level, are the roots of the organizational problems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A Civil Status Commission that studied the system's problems in 1986 arrived at the following recommendations with a view to furthering improvements in the systems⁵:

- establishment of a National Commission on Civil Registration to draw up the necessary guidelines for civil registration and to ensure the compliance with all set procedures.
- complete reforms in the laws related to civil registration.
- install a national printing shop exclusively devoted to civil registration.
- allocate the necessary human and material resources to the local registration offices.
- assist the local registration offices to eliminate delays and all sorts of prevailing irregularities.
- elaborate a glossary with names and surnames in Arabic with translation to the Roman alphabet.
- review the procedures concerning the control of the registers by the Procurators of the King so as to expedite the process of according legality to vital records.
- redesign procedures to insert amendments in vital records.
- review the judicial organization of civil registration in the Consulates (for civil registration of Moroccans abroad).
- develop a system of compilation and preparation of vital statistics and their dissemination among the communities for their utilization.
- encourage the utilization of computer facilities in civil registration activities at the community level (local office) progressive generalization among the local registration offices (the use of micro computers is foreseen to assist also in the preparation of vital statistics at the community level to monitor the population growth).

Further, the 1988 evaluation study, jointly conducted by the Directorate of Statistics and the Civil Status Division, recommended: (a) to increase the population awareness on civil registration and vital statistics matters so as to minimize omissions, (b) to carry out training and motivational campaigns for registration personnel and local authorities on the role of vital statistics for monitoring the population growth, (c) to periodically assess the implemented measures to make sure that the statistical reporting is on time, that the procedures set up for statistical reporting are being closely followed, (d) carry out formal training for the civil registration personnel involved with the transcription and transmission of statistical reports⁶.

As the personnel is affected by high mobility, a periodic training programme would be essential to make sure the system does not deteriorate. It would also be equally important to make the local authorities aware of the problems and deficiencies that affect statistics derived from unregistered vital events so that technical and physical resources may be allocated to improve their coverage and reliability.

Permanent scrutiny of the vital statistics reports' contents should be made at the local offices, before forwarding them to the Directorate of Statistics. The study revealed that a great number of difficulties can be overcome or at least minimized just by simplifying the current procedures for the collection of vital statistics, e.g., reduction of the delays in transmitting the reports, improvement of the coverage of vital events recorded.

The Directorate of Statistics has suggested the substitution of the forms being used to report vital events, which would imply the redesigning of the vital records as well. The latter would be a loose-leaf form that will allow for a number of copies to be made at once and one of those could be sent to the Directorate of Statistics, thus avoiding the transcription process that promotes errors. The Directorate of Statistics has also proposed to utilize special statistical report forms for those vital events that still go unregistered and to make the local authorities responsible for the collection of those events.

The new structure for civil registration, that includes Civil Status Divisions at the provincial level, within which a new unit for data processing and computerization of vital records has been proposed in the pilot projects could make a substantial difference for a definite turning point in civil registration and vital statistics systems in Morocco. Further assistance has already been requested by the Government to the United Nations Population Fund to extend the project on Strengthening the Civil Registration System for another year up to April 1991.

SUMMARY

From 1976 to 1989, the civil registration system in Morocco has experienced remarkable improvement both at the level of its organization, accessibility to the public as well in terms of human and material resources allocated to the registration offices. These efforts were made thanks to the concerted efforts of the various government agencies participating in the civil registration and vital statistics systems: Directorate of Statistics (Ministry of Planning), Civil Status Division (Ministry of Interior) and the Ministry of Justice. Despite all of these persistent efforts, quality and quantity of vital statistics still suffer. Although 93 percent of the overall population of the Kingdom has been registered, the rate of registration coverage is only 60 percent for births and 40 percent for deaths as estimated by the services of the Ministry of Planning⁷. This is also an indication that late registration is present in Morocco.

The lack of interest of some local registrars has been pointed out as one of the main constraints to the development of the systems as they still do not perceive the importance of a good civil registration and vital statistics system. On top of that, there are significant limitations in the number and skills of civil registration personnel and in office resources. Proper training for the local registrars and proper control of their work are needed, especially in regard to the transcription and transmission of the statistical reports which translates into low coverage rates of births and deaths and problems in data quality. Finally, there is still a sector of the population for whom civil registration has no meaning in their lives and thus it is a contributor to the present under-registration of births and deaths.

The achievements in the two projects funded by the United Nations Population Fund should be given consideration by the Government so that reforms introduced in the three pilot areas under those projects can be expanded nationwide to accomplish a uniform and sound civil registration system for the entire kingdom that not only includes births and deaths but also other events, e.g., marriages, divorces, adoptions, legitimations recognitions, and so on.

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