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STATUS OF CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS IN EL SALVADOR

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FOREWORD

This is a brief account of the civil registration and vital statistics system for one of the Latin American countries, and of the problems in obtaining satisfactory vital statistics. This is followed by three recommended steps for the improvement of civil registration and vital statistics.

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STATUS OF CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS
IN EL SALVADOR

by

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INTRODUCTION

The Organic Law of the Servicio Estadístico Nacional states that the principal responsibility of the Dirección General de Estadística y Censos (DIGESTYC) is to compile, analyze, publish and distribute statistical data which may serve as a basis for national socioeconomic planning.

In order to carry out these responsibilities, DIGESTYC conducts a program for the coordination of statistical research, under the subprogram headings of "Continuous Statistics and Surveys" and "Census." In compliance with legislation, vital statistics, which depend on civil register offices as their traditional source of data, are one of the research fields assigned to the Servicio Estadístico Nacional, under the subprogram on Continuous Statistics and Surveys."

CIVIL REGISTRATION

El Salvador is divided into 14 departments and 261 municipal districts at the civil administration level. The officials of municipalities responsible for the local governments of each town are elected by popular and direct vote by the citizens and neighbors of each municipal district. The municipalities are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior and the elected officials include the mayor, a trustee, and two or more councilmen in direct proportion to the population.

The establishment of a new municipality should meet the following requirements:

- 1) At least 8,000 inhabitants should live in the new district.
- 2) The main seat of the project should have its own land, basic public services, electric power, running water, road transport facilities and all necessary elements for the establishment of other services.
- 3) The new municipal district must be compatible with the National Development Plan.
- 4) The main municipality to be divided should have a population of at least 8,000 inhabitants, and sufficient income for its public services.
- 5) Possible income to be obtained should be sufficient to maintain public services within the new municipal district.

The municipalities have a secretariat, treasury and a civil registration office. One of their specific duties consists of establishing and maintaining vital registers of the population of the respective districts and, should these

records already exist, of improving the completeness and quality of information on the records in conformity with the Elections and Personal Identity Card Laws.

Four books, one for each vital event occurring in the population, are kept for such purposes. The first book contains live birth records, indicating the first name, family name and sex of the infant, day and time of birth, as well as the names, origin and address of the parents in the case of a legitimate child, or the mother's data in case of an illegitimate child.

All marriage records are entered in the second book, including names, age, nationality, address and profession or craft of the bride and groom, the names of the parents if the birth of the bride and groom are legitimate and of the mothers' if they are illegitimate, the name of the officiant of the marriage and of the witnesses present, and the month and day of the wedding. In case of a marriage annulment or divorce granted by a competent authority, the interested parties are required to inform the mayor so that a notation may be entered in the margin of the corresponding marriage record.

The third book registers deaths, containing the first name and family name, age, sex, marital status, nationality and last address of the deceased, the name and family name of the spouse, cause of death, and names of the legitimate parents of the deceased or of the illegitimate mother if that be the case.

The fourth book includes divorce records, which contain the same items required on marriage records, along with the date of the final court judgment granting the divorce and ordering the cancellation of the corresponding marriage record.

All records are numbered in correlative continuous sequence, corrections being made either by obliteration or insertion. All records are signed by the mayor, the secretary and the informant, and are reported by the mayor at each regular municipal board session.

VITAL STATISTICS

The vital statistics department of DIGESTYC is the unit responsible for the compilation, preparation and presentation of official data on all vital events taking place in the territory. At present, this department is composed of a chief, a subchief and seven assistants, whose duty is to produce data on the following events: live births, deaths, marriages, migratory movements, health, fetal deaths, infant deaths, divorces, tourism and meteorology.

The following are the general duties of this unit in the area of demographic statistics:

- 1) Distribution of individual forms on live births, fetal deaths, deaths, marriages and divorces to all the municipalities of the Republic, and on live births, fetal deaths and deaths to hospital centers.
- 2) Transmittal of migratory movement forms to the Dirección General de Migración.

- 3) Receipt, classification, review and entry in the respective control books of the registration number of all records of the different vital events registered.
- 4) Editing, coding and verification of all individual certificates of vital events.
- 5) Preparation of handwritten tabulations of live births, fetal deaths, total deaths, infant deaths (under one year), marriages, divorces, causes of death and migratory movements.
- 6) Monthly transmittal of individual reports already coded to the Card Punch Unit.
- 7) Monthly review of punched-card data with the purpose of correcting errors and inconsistencies.
- 8) Review, analysis, consistency and presentation of final tabulations prepared by the data processing units.
- 9) Drafting of explanatory notes.

The Anuario Estadístico is the official publication containing the statistical figures prepared under the responsibility of the Unidad de Estadísticas Vitales.

MAIN PROBLEMS

The compilation system of vital events data, on the basis of its generating source (civil registration offices) is manifestly deficient due to the following reasons:

- 1) Lack of statistical consciousness of the majority of the population, a cause which indirectly involves the staff in charge of civil registration records.
- 2) The limited staff of municipalities gives priority to duties expressly called for in the Municipal Law, which does not contemplate the function of civil registration. Consequently, such staff does not show proper interest in the collection of vital events information.
- 3) Due to the same reason stated above, questionnaires or individual reports are received with considerable delay at the central office.
- 4) Most civil registration offices lack adequate equipment and facilities to perform their statistics function. This situation cannot be met by DIGESTYC, mainly due to economic limitations and because those offices are under other governmental ministries.

- 5) Data are collected by mail, which brings about delays and losses and makes it difficult to verify the information immediately.

CONCLUSION

In order to achieve a substantial improvement of the civil registration offices and vital statistics, DIGESTYC should meet the following needs:

- 1) Technical and economic aid to set up and maintain a publicity campaign at the national level oriented to create positive statistical consciousness, with emphasis on vital statistics.
- 2) Technical and economic assistance with a view to establishing a duly equipped bureau with personnel from DIGESTYC (statistical delegations) in strategic locations, in order to effectively control the staff whose duty is to record vital events. The establishment of these offices should enable the prompt collection of documents, verification of data and direct transmittal to the central office.
- 3) Financing required to enable the DIGESTYC personnel, in particular the staff assigned to the Unidad de Estadísticas Vitales, to participate in courses or seminars held in Latin America on civil registration and/or vital statistics.

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