

TWINNING CONTRACT

**AM/14/ENP/ST/15**

# **Strengthening of the National Statistical System of Armenia – Phase II**



## **MISSION REPORT**

**on**

### **Demographic Statistics**

**Activity 2.8: Follow-up on achievements and recommendations for the future**

Mission carried out by

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**List of Abbreviations**

- EU            European Union
- NSSRA      National Statistical Service of the Republic of Armenia
- RA            Republic of Armenia

## 1. General comments

This mission report was prepared within the Twinning Project ” Strengthening of the National Statistical System of Armenia – Phase II”.

It is the final mission to be completed within Component 2 of the project.

The purposes of the mission were:

- To discuss the status regarding the component at the beginning of the project
- To discuss the status of the project results
- To prepare recommendations regarding the sustainability of the achievements
- To prepare recommendations for future work of NSSRA after the project finishes
- To identify outstanding issues and needs for further support, if any

The MS Experts would like to express their thanks to all officials and individuals met for the kind support and valuable information which was received during the stay in Armenia and which highly facilitated the work of the MS Experts.

This views and observations stated in this report are those of the consultant and do not necessarily correspond to the views of EU, NSSRA, Istat, Statistics Lithuania or Statistics Denmark.

## 2. Status at the beginning of the project

### 2.1. Vital statistics

During the first meeting of the mission, it was been agreed with the BC to focus on births and deaths, as they are crucial for the analysis of population dynamics and to estimate population size and age structure between subsequent censuses.

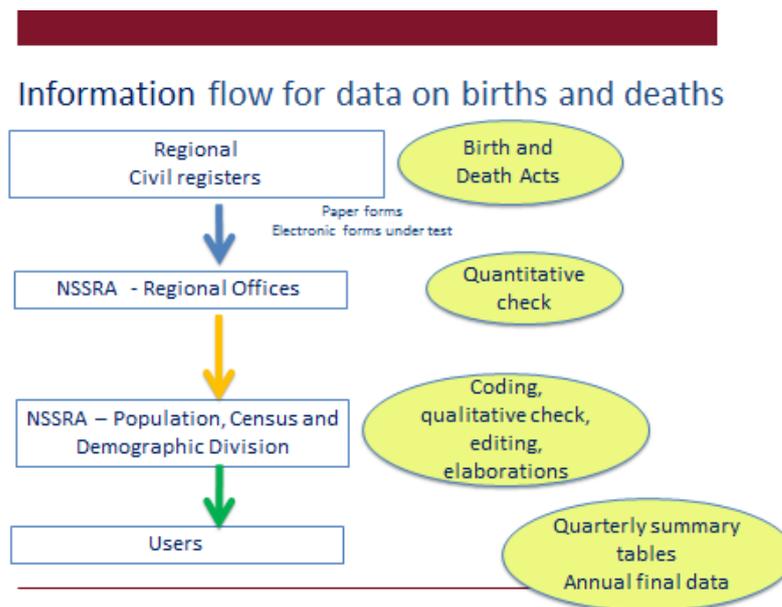
The legal basis to data collection is the RA laws “On State Statistics” and “Three-year Statistical Work Program” as well as the Resolution 11-N of the State Council on Statistics of RA (3.10.2003) “On approval of procedure of statistical Information Provision” and “On Approval of Annual Statistical Work Program”. Other relevant legislation concerns the establishment of the civil register and the regulation about provisions for supporting parents of new-borns and households of deceased persons.

At the beginning of the project, data collection was based on paper: second copies of acts issued by regional civil registration offices were sent to the NSSRA regional offices for a quantitative check. Later, they were sent to the central NSSRA (Population, Census and Demographic Division) for qualitative checking and further elaborations.

Death certificates, issued by the medical authority, were attached to the death registration acts and sent to NSSR as well.

The quantitative check were mainly aimed at verifying that all expected acts were actually in the parcel received from the civil register, and sent integrally to NSSRA central office. NSSRA staff then proceeded to coding some text variables, e.g. the place of occurrence of the event. Forms were checked for inconsistencies and for missing data and finally entered in an Access database. In case a person older than one year was registered as new-born in the CAR, he/she would be included in statistics on births regardless his/her actual age.

The chart below summarizes the information flow.



An on-line system for registration of acts was under construction, so that files with registration records could be directly available and NSSRA. That's why one of the main aims of the sub-component is to ensure that "Vital statistics are improved concerning data collection mechanisms (transition from paper sources to electronic)".

The document "Quality declaration on vital statistics" provides a general overview about the statistical process, including a description of data sources and of statistical concepts which can help users to better understand published results. It should be updated to the new process and include more detailed information.

Concerning timeliness of data production, it doesn't appear to be a critical area: in the quality declaration is specified that quarterly indicators are published within one month, and annual data are published within 6 months.

Instead, a critical issue could be the under-coverage of data processed by NSSR: even though the registration of vital events is compulsory, experts opinion was that there could be a not irrelevant quota of under-registration, especially in remote areas and for the event of death.

Some evidence about this issue is provided by the results of "Armenia Demographic and Health Survey, 2010" showing that in 2010 the birth registration rate was 99.6%, the under-coverage being concentrated in 5 regions, namely Kotayk, Lori, Shirak, Armavir and Tavush. In 2015, the WHO "Rapid assessment of National Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems" was carried out in cooperation between NSSR and the Ministries of Justice and Health. It resulted in an overall evaluation of the efficiency of the system equal to 84 out of 100, showing a need for improvement.

A question included in the 2011 population census could be useful to better measure the possible un-coverage of registration, as it was asked to each household if a possible birth/death occurred in the last 12 months had been registered.

## 2.2 Migration statistics

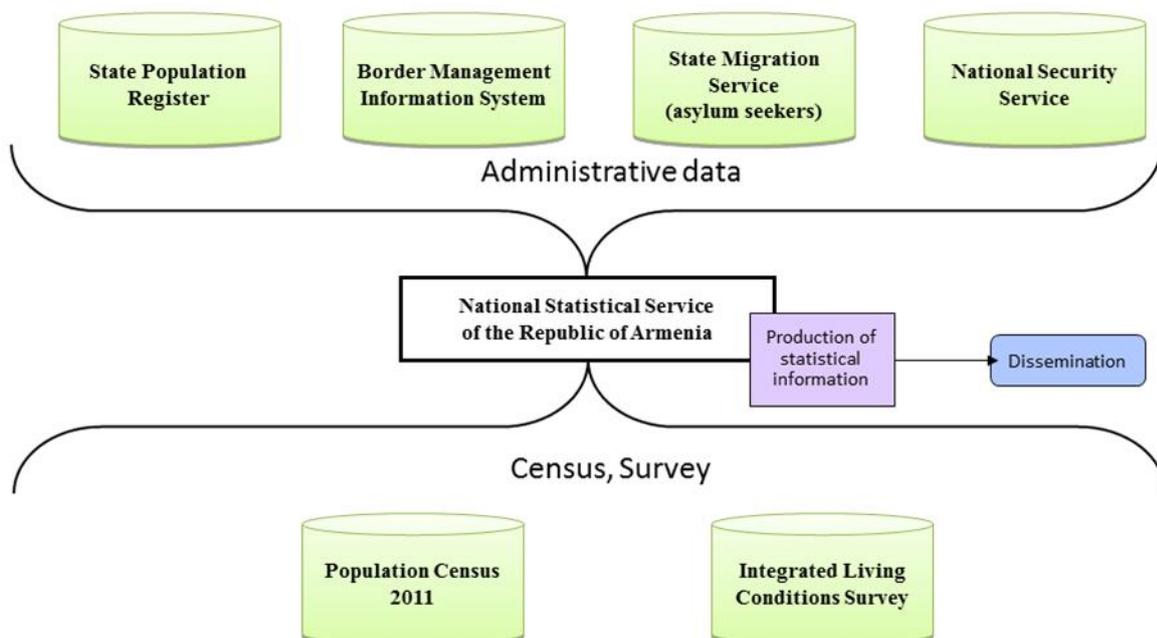
During the first mission, the situation of the production and dissemination of migration statistics was investigated.

The mandate of the NSSRA to collect data for the production, analysis and dissemination of migration statistics is determined in the Law on State Statistics of the RA. The Law on Three-year Program of State Statistical Work defines the three-year statistical work program of the RA which includes the directions of activity for formation of statistical information necessary for observation of the economic, demographic, social and environmental situation of the country, taking into account restrictions of the available resources, burden on statistical information providers and cost-effectiveness.

Other laws are relevant for collection, usage of administrative data sources, production and dissemination of migration statistics: Law on State Register of Population, Law on the Foreigners, Law on the Refugees and Asylum.

The NSSRA for the production of the migration statistics has used different sources (see Figure 1): Integrated Living Conditions Survey, Population Census, State Population Register, Border Management Information System, State Migration Service and State Security Service.

**Figure 1. Statistical data flows on migration processes**



The main source of information on migration in NSSRA is the Integrated Living Conditions Survey. This is an annual sample survey which enables to collect information about demographic and social characteristics of the migrants, together with main information on living conditions of households and household’s members.

The NSSRA uses for the Population frame the Addresses from 2011 Population Census. From the Population frame the sample of addresses for the Integrated Living Conditions Survey has been selected. The two stage systematic random sample design has been used, the sample size is strict – 5184 households. The non-responded households have been changed by other

households from the extra sample (which selected for this purpose). The design weights have been used in Integrated Living Conditions Survey for estimation the main indicators of the survey (poverty indicators and so on.) also the number of migrants. The migrant has been defined from the positive answer on the question: „Since January 1, 2010, has person migrated to another Marz or another country within 3 and more months?“. The exact year and month of emigration / internal migration have been asked. From the survey there is no possibility to identify if the persons had declared to administrative authorities about the change of their place of residence or not.

The quarterly and annual numbers of emigrants / immigrants by sex, age groups, regions, reasons of departure have been estimated based on the survey results and data from Population Register (about declared migration). Quality indicators have not been estimated.

The quality declaration on Long Term Migration provides for the users the general information about migration: data sources, legal basis, main concepts, reference period, accuracy, comparability, accessibility of the statistics.

Metadata in publications and quality declaration reports have been published according to the calendar.

The NSSRA has carried out the Population Census once every ten years. Population Census results give a lot of information about migration: persons who participated in the migration process and live in the country, persons who emigrated and stay still abroad and etc. After the Population Census the revisions of population and migration statistics are done.

Visa and Passport department of the Police of RA is responsible for the State Population Register. Data of the State Population Register have a legal value and are based on the personal documents. Population Register obtains data of citizens of the Republic of Armenia. All persons who registered in the Population Register receive the personal ID. The Population Register obtains data of persons' declaration of changing of the place of residence. Flows of the declared international migration is very low, they do not represent the real situation. There is a big difference between the results from the Integrated Living Conditions Survey and declared migration. Unfortunately, there is no enough motivation for persons to declare their changes of the place of residence. The NSSRA does not receive a copy of population stock.

National Security Service of RA is responsible for the Border Management Information System. Data of the Border Management Information System have a legal value and are based on the personal documents. Border Management Information System obtains data on the all movements in / out of the country and data on received visas. The NSSRA receives the data on the aggregated level from Border Management Information System. There is no possibility to identify the movements of particular person and his / her duration of staying abroad / in the country for longer than 12 months from received data. Statistics about border crossing movements, received visas show significant movement flows, which are much higher than the number of migrants estimated from Integrated Living Conditions Survey or number of declared migrant from Population Register.

State Migration Service of RA obtains the data on the personal level about all applications of the asylum seekers and semi-annually and annually presents aggregated statistical reports to NSSRA, according to EU Regulation (No 862/2007, 11 July 2007).

State Security Service of RA (information concerning those with temporary and permanent status – RA Police) obtains the data on the personal level about residency status of the foreigners and presents statistical reports to NSS RA semi-annually and annually.

Different data sources (surveys, administrative data sources) show different situation. Users may not understand the significant differences in results. Further collaboration between NSSRA and administrative data sources is necessary for improvement of the quality of migration statistics in RA.

Meetings with the NSSRA Population Census and Demography Division and IT Division were organized in order to observe their work using IT tools and specifics of IT specialists work on the preparation of tools for the Population Census and Demography Division.

### **3. Status of project results**

#### **3.1 Vital statistics**

Even though the staff of the Demographic and Census division is engaged in several tasks, including the sub-component Migration statistics, they made all efforts to take full advantage of the twinning and the main targets of the Terms of References were achieved.

#### **Data Acquisition**

The electronic data transmission is in place. It is organized so that every month NSSRA can download the files related to births, deaths, marriages and divorces registered during the previous month (max 30 days delay). The record layout is reported in a methodological document.

In cooperation with the IT department, a new database was realized to receive and process these files. Also, a new procedure was put in place to calculate indicators and to draw the tables needed for the regular publications.

Two more variables have been considered to be important for NSSRA, and their inclusion in the files regularly downloaded by NSSRA has been requested to the Ministry of justice and the E-Government agency. They are:

1. the Personal identification number (for newborns and mothers, spouses and divorcees, dead persons); it will allow to have full information about multiple births registered in different offices and, more in general, to link records about vital events with other databases, e.g. the population register database
2. the country of birth (for mother and father, for spouses and divorcees, for dead persons) that will give insights on population movements.

The agreement was reached, and the two variables are going to be present in the individual records, possibly starting from July 2017.

Some technical problems related to files download (such as missing information, system failures, etc.) have been solved in the first months of 2017.

Recent changes and a possible complete re-organization of the administrative communities can make it difficult to derive territorial information. The solution adopted is to have data at a very fine territorial level (settlement), and so have the possibility to compose them in any higher territorial level. It is also a variable that could be used for further analysis.

A major change has been introduced in the coding of causes of death. Until 2016, NSSRA was managing the coding, based on the text describing causes of death, as written by the medical doctor in the paper certificate. Since January 2017, the doctor certifying the death, is also responsible for the coding and certificates are being transmitted in electronic format only, with a diminution in NSSR workload. This changes has to be closely monitored (see Sustainability).

### **Under-coverage**

The issue of under-coverage of birth and death registrations was considered in depth. Results of the Demographic and Health survey in 2010 were analyzed, and compared with data elaborated from the 2011 Population Census, broken down by marzes.

A telephone interview to secretaries of rural communities has been carried out, to complement and update previous results, and to raise awareness about the issue of under-coverage in vital registrations.

Estimates of the under-coverage size range from 0.88% to 2.27% for births; from 2.28 to 4.17% for deaths.

### **Documentation**

Two methodological documents were finalized, on births and deaths statistics. These documents, to be regularly updated, are conceived as an aid to keep track of all the phases of the process and to identify possible weak point, to be addressed in the short and medium term. The methodological documents include:

1. The administrative system and its normative basis
2. Data collection
3. Data treatment
4. Analysis
5. IT process
6. Dissemination

A draft of the methodological document has been prepared for marriages and divorces, and should be finalized by July 2017

### **Other achievements**

#### ***Data treatment***

A short training has taken place, including a presentation of main concepts and tool for editing data. Further improvements in this field would require more practical sessions for the staff working in the division. It could be beneficial also for other divisions dealing with data validation, editing and imputation (e.g. staff responsible for surveys).

#### ***Data analysis and dissemination***

A number of data and indicators are already analyzed and disseminated in various publications, mainly in the yearly Demographic handbook. Some improvements in data presentation (e.g. graphs and maps) have been introduced in the 2016 edition, and more are planned for the next one.

A short training was held about demographic indicators and demographic indicators, with the active participation of the division's staff.

### ***Awareness raising***

As vital statistics rely on the work of civil register officials, it was considered of primary importance to increase their awareness about the relevance of demographic data, in order to increase their attention to statistical aspects of their activity.

Hence, a desk calendar was printed and distributed to all the local civil register offices, showing, for each month, a relevant statistic related to vital events. The feedback about the initiative has been very positive.

## **3.2 Migration statistics**

The Demographic and Census division of NSSRA made all efforts to take full advantage of the twinning and the main targets of the Terms of References were achieved.

### ***Integrated Living Conditions Survey (ILCS)***

ILCS questionnaire of the Migration Module was improved according to expert recommendations in the end of 2016; data collection from January 2017 is going in usage the revised questionnaire. The improved questionnaire allows producing migration statistics of higher quality, for example, evaluating the number of international migrants by citizenship and by all age groups, following EU Regulation (EC) No 862/2007, etc. The question regarding the duration of absence of the household member only for the previous year (instead of the current three-year period) related to migration experience will improve the accuracy of the survey results. Procedures for quality assessment of migration statistics from Integrated Living Conditions Survey have been updated.

Due the fact that there is a question in the Migration Module of the Integrated Living Conditions Survey: “Did you send remittances in cash or/and in kind during the last 12 months?”, it could be useful in the future to investigate the possibilities to collaborate with the Central Bank of the RA on the remittances statistics issues to ensure good quality of the remittances statistics to fulfill users needs.

### ***Methodology of migration statistics***

Methodology of migration statistics has been improved, the document should be regularly updated. The document includes the main standard parts, such as: legal basis for production of migration (internal and international) statistics, usage of various (administrative data and sample survey) sources; data collection, data treatment, analysis, preparation of statistical information (including IT process) and dissemination.

### ***Technical specification***

Since the methodology and the technical specification (internal document of the NSSRA) have common features, both documents were prepared at the same time. Technical specification) has been developed, that improve the process of production of migration statistics and collaboration between Demographics statistics and Census, IT and Households statistics divisions. The IT staff is professional and can work with administrative data at the personal record level for the production of migration statistics.

### ***Improvements in automated processing of migration statistical data***

Program for automated processing of data received from Population Register has been updated.

***Improvement of publication of migration statistics***

Work on the improvement of migration statistical data formats and adding them to publications is in progress. The new NSSRA publication “The Demographic Handbook of Armenia” was discussed; in particular Chapter 7 “Migration”. There is noticeable progress in the chapter: updated metadata and definitions, explanations, data sources used in the RA for the production of migration statistics are presented. More improvements in data presentation (e.g. graphs and maps) are planned for the next annual publication.

***A standard format of technical document on provision of programs***

A standard format of technical document on provision of programs to the divisions has been drafted by the IT department. There was a need of technical specifications for the existing systems used by the Population Census and Demography Division, as well as in others divisions. This is very useful for clarification the current data production process and eliminates the risk of poor data quality. Having specifications in the form of a document would also shorten the adaptation period for new staff members in the NSSRA.

**4. Sustainability of the achievements****4.1 Vital statistics**

Continuous and strict cooperation with the stakeholders and the data providers is needed to make sure that NSSRA can improve the quality of the produced statistics and its reputation. It is also needed to ensure that, in the medium term, the registration under-coverage is reduced to zero, so that vital statistics are complete.

A continuous dialog with users can help fulfilling the needs of the different audiences (policy makers, public administration, media, academia and the large public).

In the first period of application, the change in the process of coding causes of death has caused a decrease in data quality, with a high number of missing values and the risk of a significant break in series that could hamper the monitoring of mortality patterns in the country. It is necessary that NSSRA continues monitoring the effects of the new system. At the moment, a one year period of double coding (following the old and the new methodology) is foreseen, until the end of 2017. At the end of this period, a decision based on evidence should be taken in agreement with all the stakeholders (namely Ministry of Health, NSSRA and E-government agency) whether to continue the monitoring. Some ad-hoc training for medical doctors, whose coding would result significantly different from the one realized by the NSSRA expert, should be taken into consideration.

Sustainability is also linked to a regular update of staff’s skills, to keep pace with technological and methodological innovation.

**4.2 Migration statistics**

Continuous collaboration with the stakeholders and the owners of main administrative registers data is needed to make sure that NSSRA can improve the quality of the produced statistics and its reputation.

A continuous dialog with users can help fulfilling the needs of the various users (policy makers, public administration, media, academia and public-at-large).

Regular update of staff's skills is important with continuing improvement of the methodological issues of migration statistics and technological innovation.

## **5. Recommendations for the future (short and long term)**

### **5.1 Vital statistics**

- To fix all technical issues about data transmission, in cooperation with the E-government agency, and also improving the Internet capacity and stability at NSSRA.
- To ensure that the new variables requested (PIN and country of birth) are made available in the downloaded files for all vital events.
- To monitor the new process of coding of the causes of death, in strict cooperation with the responsible ministry, in order to ensure that no unnecessary break in series would occur and that the analysis and monitoring of mortality patterns can be appropriately performed. That could imply ad hoc training for medical doctors.
- To focus on further improving the registration system, in terms of accuracy and completeness, with awareness initiatives for civil register officials (ad hoc material and training) and for population in specific areas, in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice.
- To improve the skills of the division's staff, taking into account IT skills, statistical data treatment, demographic analysis tools. Available tools, such as TAIEX, could be used to finance some specific courses.
- To improve the availability of demographic indicators, especially in electronic format and with territorial disaggregation, and their visualization.
- To update analysis on under-coverage using results of the 2015 DHS and repeating in the 2020 Census round the set of questions about birth and death registration.
- To introduce standardized methods for data validation - to identify outliers and possible errors - and for data editing and imputation, in cases where the manual checks do not allow to treat errors or missing values. This point is relevant also for other divisions in NSSRA.
- To update the methodological documentation, keeping track of changes in the process of data acquisition and processing.
- To monitor differences between the data published by NSSRA and those published by international organizations, such as UN and World Bank, in order to progressively come to convergence.
- To explore the possibility of record linkages, once the population registers will be available to NSSRA.
- To evaluate the opportunity to prepare national population projections, also considering users' needs.

### **5.2 Migration statistics**

On the basis of the main mission's findings and results of the project, the following recommendations can be made:

- Continuation of the improvement of the quality of migration statistics
- Further collaboration with owners of administrative data is essential for getting data on personal level
- To publish more metadata and explain to users the usage of various data sources
- Maximize efforts for implementing electronic system that will help to improve efficiency
- More productive cooperation between statistical divisions and IT division is recommended:
  - To finalize the standardized request forms to streamline technical specifications
  - Specifications could be used to ensure transparency in production processes and good quality of final statistical information
- Data confidentiality and security issues should be taken into account
- Training and study visits to some NSI's of European "register countries" would be useful
- To develop a methodology for measuring immigration and emigration flows, using possible administrative data sources, as well as the Integrated Living Conditions Survey results
- Disseminate the updated migration statistics (publications, press releases, visualized statistical information) taking into account the users' needs
- To use imputation procedures for missing values
- To use Population Register for different statistical purposes (Census, population frames, etc.)
- When starting preparation for the 2020 Population Census round, it is recommended:
  - to take into account the European legislation for the 2021 Population and Housing Censuses in EU
  - to have module (questions) on migration what will be essential to have high quality internationally compared migration statistics

## 6. Identification of needs for additional support

Additional support could be sought to strengthen the skills of the NSSRA staff (e.g. through TAIEX and study visits to other NSIs) in terms of:

- statistical skills (data editing, quality improvements, imputation, use of administrative data etc.)
- analysis skills
- IT skills and capacities for working with registers and administrative databases

More initiatives to continue raising awareness of the importance of complete and good quality registration of vital events would be beneficial.

More in general, the need of high quality register data to have high quality statistics should be discussed and spread among the whole administration.

## 7. Outstanding issues

There are no outstanding issues within this component.

## **Annex 1: Terms of Reference**

### **Terms of Reference**

#### **EU Twinning Project AM/14/ENP/ST/15**

**6-9 June 2017**

#### **Component 2: Demographic Statistics**

##### **Activity 2.8: Follow-up on achievements and recommendations for the future**

#### **0. Mandatory results and benchmarks for the component**

Mandatory results:

- Vital statistics improved concerning data collection mechanisms (transition from paper sources to electronic), coverage, timeliness and quality (July 2017)
- Migration statistics improved concerning data collection, coverage, timeliness and quality (July 2017)

Benchmarks:

- Methodology on vital statistics updated (October 2016)
- Methodology on migration statistics updated (April 2017)
- Improved vital statistics implemented and published (July 2017)
- Staff of NSSRA trained on issues related to vital statistics and migration statistics (July 2017)

#### **1. Purpose of the activity**

- To discuss the status regarding the component at the beginning of the project
- To discuss the status of the project results
- To prepare recommendations regarding the sustainability of the achievements
- To prepare recommendations for future work of NSSRA after the project finishes
- To identify outstanding issues and needs for further support, if any

#### **2. Expected output of the activity**

Demographic Statistics component follow up (for each topic in the component):

- Status at the beginning of the project
- Status of the project results
- Sustainability of the achievements
- Recommendations for the future (short and long term)
- Clarification of outstanding issues

### **3. Participants**

#### **NSSRA**

##### Component leaders

- Mr. Gagik Gevorgyan, Member of State Council on Statistics of RA
- Ms. Karine Kuyumjyan, Head, Population Census and Demography Division

##### Other staff

- Ms. Anna Tokhatyan, Chief specialist, Population Census and Demography Division
- Ms. Armine Avetisyan, Leading specialist, Population Census and Demography Division
- Ms. Anna Grigoryan, 1<sup>st</sup> category specialist, Population Census and Demography Division
- Ms. Susanna Azatyan, 2<sup>nd</sup> category specialist, Population Census and Demography Division

#### **MS experts**

- Ms. Dalia Ambrozaitienė, Expert, Statistics Lithuania
- Ms. Maria Pia Sorvillo, Expert, Istat

#### **Other stakeholders taking part in the activity**

##### Representatives from:

- Department of Civil Registrations, RA Ministry of Justice
- RA Ministry of Health
- RA State Migration Service, RA Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development
- RA National Security Service
- Passport and Visa Department, RA Police

will also be invited.

## Annex 2. Programme for the mission

<b>Time</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Purpose / detail</b>
Tuesday, morning (6/6) 11:00	NSSRA	Meeting with RTA	To discuss the programme of the week
	NSSRA	Meeting with BC Component Leader and BC Experts	Assessment of situation and presentation by BC of the work conducted since last mission
Tuesday, afternoon (6/6)	NSSRA	Meeting with BC Component Leader and BC Experts	Follow-up on outstanding issues Identification of needs for additional support
Wednesday, morning (7/6)	NSSRA	Meeting with BC Component Leader and BC Experts	Discussion of status of project results Discussion on how to ensure sustainability of the achievements
Wednesday, afternoon (7/6)	NSSRA	Meeting with stakeholders	Meeting with stakeholders
Thursday, morning (8/6)	NSSRA	Meeting with BC Component Leader and BC Experts	Discussions of the way forward after the Twinning project and what to be recommended for the future (short and long term)
Thursday, afternoon (8/6)	NSSRA	Meeting with BC Component Leader and BC Experts	Discussions of the way forward after the Twinning project and what to be recommended for the future (short and long term)
Friday, morning (9/6)	NSSRA	Meeting with BC Component Leader	Preparation of final conclusions, recommendations and Mission Report
		Ad-hoc meetings	
Friday, afternoon (9/6) 14:00	NSSRA	Debriefing with BC Project Leader	Discussion of MS Experts' findings and agreement on the reached conclusions  De-briefing and presentation for BC Project Leader

## **Annex 3: Persons met**

### **NSSRA:**

- Stepan Mnatsakanyan, President of the NSSRA
- Anahit Safyan, Member of the State Council on Statistics of RA
- Gagik Gevorgyan, Member of the State Council on Statistics of RA
- Karine Kuyumjyan, Head of Population Census and Demography Division
- Anna Tokhatyan, Population Census and Demography Division
- Susanna Azatyan, Population Census and Demography Division
- Anna Grigoryan, Population Census and Demography Division
- Armine Avetisyan, Population Census and Demography Division
- Armine Arushanyan, Information Resources Management Division of Information Resources Management and Technologies Department

### **External stakeholders:**

- Diana Andreasyan, Head of Health Information-Analytical Center of National Institute of Health, Ministry of Health
- Vahagn Mkhitarian, Deputy Team Leader - Transactional e-Governance Development Project in Armenia
- Carel Hofstra, Project Manager – ICMPD, Support to Migration and Boarder Management in Armenia Project
- Tihan Zammit, Expert - ICMPD, Support to Migration and Boarder Management in Armenia Project
- Vardan Matevosyan, Analitical Unit - State Migration Service of the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development of RA
- Vahan Bakhshetcyan, Expert - State Migration Service of the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development of RA
- Vaghinak Nikoghosyan -Visa and Passport Department of the Police of RA
- Hayk Davtyan - National Security Service of RA

### **RTA Team:**

- Peter Bohnstedt Anan Hansen, Resident Twinning Adviser
- Liana Atoyan, RTA Assistant
- Anush Poghosyan, RTA Language Assistant