

Press release

## IUSSP expands collaborations on population register systems, ethics and human rights

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Paris, France; Kampala, Uganda; Johannesburg, South Africa; Los Angeles, USA

The [International Union for the Scientific Study of Population \(IUSSP\)](#) is proud to announce new partnerships with the [Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research \(WiSER, South Africa\)](#), the [USC Institute on Inequalities in Global Health \(IIGH, USA\)](#) and the [Initiative for Social and Economic Rights \(ISER, Uganda\)](#). These new collaborations are being spearheaded through IUSSP's [Scientific Panel on Population Perspectives and Demographic Methods to Strengthen Civil Registration and Vital Statistics \(CRVS\) Systems](#). The overall purpose of this initiative is to infuse interdisciplinary perspectives, drawing on perspectives from law, history, economics, public policy, demography, and public health, to address the ethical and human rights challenges that are emerging as population register systems are modernized and digitized. These expanded collaborations are made possible through the generous support and long-term guidance from the [International Development Research Centre \(IDRC\), Canada](#).

A key challenge for scholars and practitioners who work on and with population register systems is managing the promises of more inclusive societies via digitized population data against the potential risks of systemic exclusion and discrimination towards vulnerable subpopulations, resulting in denial of basic rights and essential services. [Discussions are ongoing in many corners](#), yet, a major limitation is that many efforts are limited by disciplinary boundaries. Romesh Silva, Chair of the IUSSP Scientific Panel on CRVS Systems noted: *“This new collaboration facilitates stronger engagement by population scientists and supports much needed interdisciplinary collaboration on population register systems, ethics and human rights.”*

The political interests driving population registration in the Global South are [mobilizing a broad set of concerns](#) about national security, financial and societal inclusion, global migration and a renewed interest in welfare and state building. As Keith Breckenridge, Deputy Director at WiSER, notes *“there are great opportunities for change in this moment, and some serious dangers - especially in the adoption or renewal of unrecognized patterns and categories in the organization and distribution of the new population data systems.”*

In many countries, national population registers and digitized ID systems are increasingly underpinning delivery of social services. [Uganda is a case in point here](#). Salima Namusoby, the Executive Director of ISER based in Kampala, highlighted that *“this collaboration will not only go a long way in expanding the knowledge base on the intersection of population register systems, ethics and human rights, but also augment existing research and advocacy efforts to shape the attendant legal and policy discussions.”*

Critically engaging human rights, alongside adopting an ethical framework, can contribute to the active and informed participation of individuals and communities in ways that can help ensure that as population registers modernize they are just. By recognizing individuals and communities as active agents/participants in decision-making rather than simply passive beneficiaries, working across disciplines can help these efforts bring to the fore the value of population registers for the populations who need them most. Noting the clear need for effective, transparent and accessible monitoring and accountability mechanisms, Professor Sofia Gruskin, Director of the USC IIGH in Los Angeles, said *“this is a wonderful opportunity to show real leadership. The need for an in-depth exploration of these systems is more acute than ever, and the ways we choose to strengthen and reshape them is not only important today but for our collective future and that of generations to come.”*

This partnership between IUSSP, WiSER, ISER and USC IIGH will be organized around three core activities: (i) a [residential fellowship program for early-career scholars/practitioners](#), (ii) a joint program of interdisciplinary research outputs, and (iii) regular cataloging of emerging challenges in the field of population registers, ethics and human rights. Applications for the fellowship program close on 31 August, 2022. Anyone interested in contributing to the panel’s work is encouraged to contact [Paul Monet](#) at the IUSSP Secretariat.