

# BIRTH REGISTRATION

## WHY IS BIRTH REGISTRATION IMPORTANT?

Birth registration is the official recording of the birth of a child by the State. Every child born in a territory has the right to be registered at birth, as recognized inter alia in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

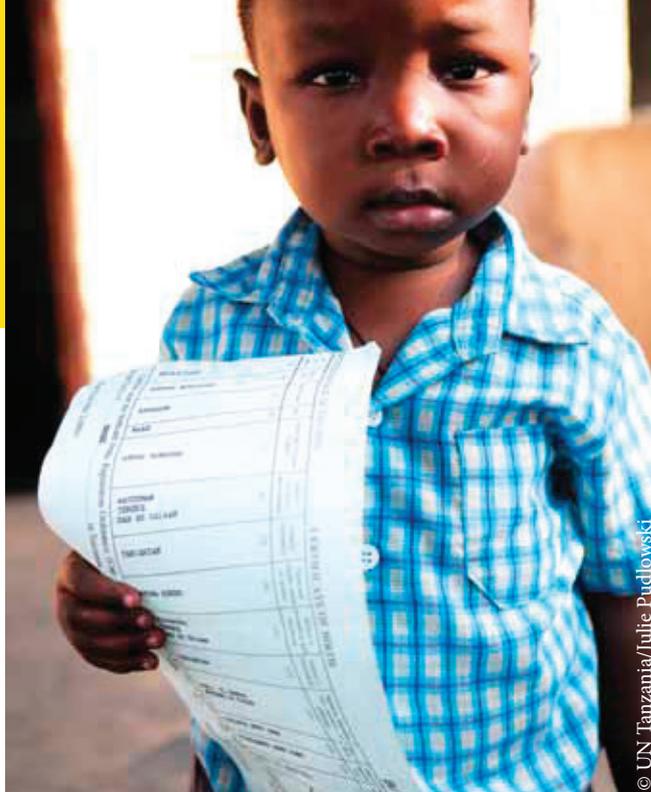
Besides being a basic right in itself, birth registration is also key to ensuring the fulfilment of several other human rights, including access to basic socioeconomic services such as health care and education. Birth registration can also help to protect children from age-related discrimination, abuse and exploitation. Birth registration records and data derived from these records are critical inputs for governance and development.

Birth registration serves two major purposes:

- 1. Legal and Administrative:** For an individual, the most important benefit is the recognition of one's existence before the law and the issuance of a legal document (birth certificate) that serves as proof of place of birth, parentage, family ties and relationships. Birth registration records are the basis for the determination of nationality and the issuance of other identity documents such as national identity cards and travel papers.
- 2. Statistical:** Birth registration records are important for evidence-based policymaking and service delivery. Indicators derived from these records allow for the measurement of progress towards national and global human development targets such as the Millennium Development Goals. Countries need to know how many people are born (and die) each year in order to adequately plan and meet the social and economic needs of their populations.

Birth registration should take place as soon as possible after a child's birth. Unregistered children face barriers in accessing social protection, education and health services. A child's "invisibility" in the eyes of the State can lead to serious violations such as early marriage, child labour, child trafficking and recruitment into the armed forces. While birth registration does not in itself confer citizenship upon the child, it is often essential for its acquisition based on each country's laws.

The importance of birth registration continues into adulthood. Birth certificates may be needed to obtain social security benefits or formal employment, to buy or prove the right to inherit property, to obtain identity documents or a passport, to stand for electoral office and to vote. The lack of a birth certificate can have a serious, cumulative negative effect on people's life opportunities.

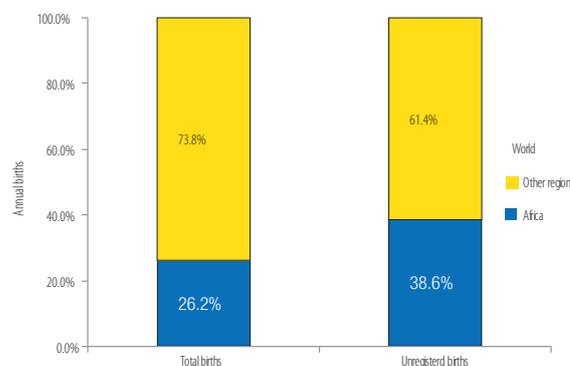


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## WHAT IS THE SITUATION?

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that 48 million children under the age of five are not registered at birth.<sup>1</sup> At the global level, South Asia has the largest proportion of unregistered births (63 per cent), followed by sub-Saharan Africa (55 per cent). In Africa, only the small islands of Mauritius and Seychelles have complete levels of birth registrations, as well as some North African countries including Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco. Birth registration levels vary between countries. They depend on the degree of national commitment to birth registration, the existence of adequate legislation, sufficient infrastructure, social acceptance, the value placed on birth registration, and the ability of families to register their children. Many barriers still prevent people from registering births such as poverty, cultural beliefs and practices, social exclusion, inadequate coverage of registration offices and staff in remote and rural areas, and disability and discrimination.

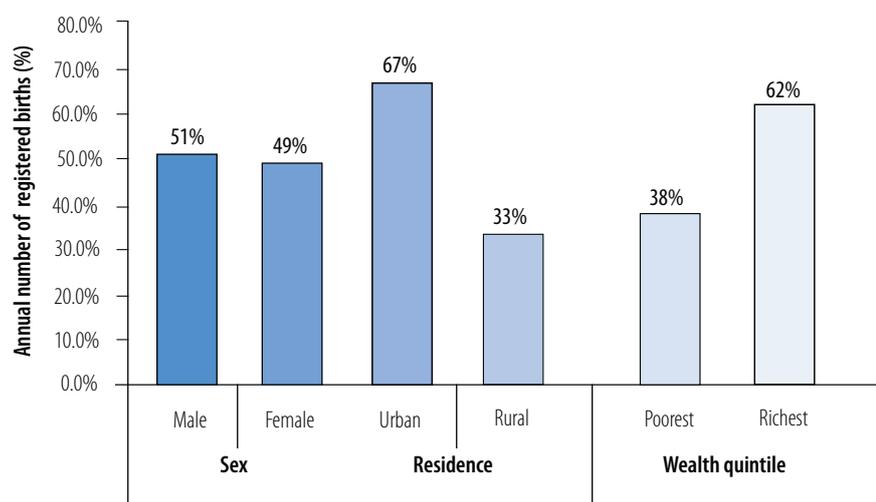
FIGURE 1: THE STATE OF BIRTH REGISTRATION IN AFRICA



Source: UNICEF, 2013. Every Child's birth right: A statistical analysis of birth registration

1 UNICEF, 2013. *Every child's birth right: A statistical analysis of birth registration.*

**FIGURE 2: THE STATE OF BIRTH REGISTRATION IN AFRICA BY SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS**



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## WHAT IS BEING DONE?

Civil registration and vital statistics systems are the conventional and most reliable means for the continuous registration of births, the archiving and maintenance of registration records, and the production and dissemination of vital statistics on births. Most African countries have inadequate registration systems. The Economic Commission for Africa, in collaboration with the African Union Commission, the African Development Bank and other key regional and international organizations, is implementing the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil registration and Vital Statistics to guide systemic reform and support sustainable progress in improving such systems in African countries.

## HOW DO WE IMPROVE THINGS?

- As a first step to increasing birth registration rates, **carry out legal reforms** to ensure that birth registration services are accessible immediately after birth and are free of charge.
  - **Put in place adequate policies, plans of action, strategies and infrastructure** to support implementation of permanent and compulsory national birth registration systems.
  - **Clear the backlog of unregistered children** to establish a birth registration system or jump-start a dormant one.
  - **Increase public acceptance and demand for birth registration** through mass media and community mobilization, as well as by keeping the costs of access to birth registration as low as possible.
  - **Train registrars** in outreach capacity and culturally appropriate civil registration and vital statistics systems to cover remote and marginalized groups of people.
  - **Improve accessibility** by establishing network linkages that are both formal and informal, such as health services, community leaders, faith-based organizations and others.
  - **Modernize birth registration** by using technology to establish online and computerized systems.
- **Make special efforts to register the births of children in orphanages.**
  - **Make special efforts to register children in the midst of and in the aftermath of conflict and other emergencies** to ensure the right of all children to birth registration.

 United Nations  
Economic Commission for Africa

