

Birth Registration

Birth registration is the official recording of the birth of a child by a state administrative process. It is the permanent and official record of a child's existence and is fundamental to the realization of children's rights and practical needs.

Securing children's right to a nationality will allow them to get a passport, open a bank account, obtain credit, vote and find employment. It helps ensure access to basic services, including immunization, health care and school enrolment at the right age.

Birth registration is also essential in protection efforts, including: preventing child labour by enforcing minimum-employment-age laws; ensuring that children in conflict with the law are not treated (legally and practically) as adults; shielding them from underage military service or conscription; countering child marriage; and reducing trafficking, as well as assisting children who are repatriated and reunited with family members.

FACTS AND FIGURES

- In 2003, some 48 million births went unregistered – 36 per cent of all estimated births worldwide that year.
- South Asia had the largest number of unregistered children at more than 23 million, which is 63 per cent of all births in the region and accounts for 47 per cent of all unregistered births worldwide.
- In sub-Saharan Africa, 55 per cent of children under five have not been registered.
- In the Middle East and North Africa, 16 per cent of the children were not registered at birth, while in East Asia and the Pacific, 19 per cent of births were unregistered.¹

HUMAN RIGHTS

The **Convention on the Rights of the Child** (1989) calls for the registration of a child immediately after birth (Article 7).

BUILDING A PROTECTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN

Government commitment and capacity

This is needed to ensure free and compulsory birth registration and a free birth certificate for every child without discrimination.

Legislation and enforcement

Most countries make legal provision for registering births within a prescribed period. These laws, however, are often not comprehensive or are poorly enforced. Ineffective bureaucracies can make implementation complicated and costly. Governments should be encouraged to devote the necessary attention and resources to birth registration.

Attitudes, customs and practices

Particularly in remote areas, parents often do not see the benefits of their own citizenship, let alone the benefits that birth registration would confer on their children. Awareness-raising campaigns can help encourage parents to register their children.

Open discussion

Media and civil society can play an important role in making families and communities aware of the importance of birth registration and the steps involved in the process. Non-governmental organizations and grass-roots organizations can be particularly effective in the promotion of birth registration.

Children's life skills, knowledge and participation

Explaining the value of birth registration to older unregistered children can help them encourage their parents to secure their late registration and also the registration of their younger siblings. It can also motivate these children to register their own future children.

Capacity of families and communities

Local registration facilities should be decentralized, accessible and have adequate capacity to meet the needs of families and communities. Support for systems for birth registration ranges from the training of service providers at the community level to the provision of essential supplies for registration, such as birth registration forms.

Monitoring, reporting and oversight

Local birth registration services need to be integrated with a central database to ensure adequate recording, transmission, backup and safe keeping of data, as well as to protect the privacy of this information.

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Effective planning is virtually impossible without accurate and comprehensive data, and birth registration provides the foundation – basic information that is vital to local communities, nationwide strategies and, ultimately, global cooperation. Universal birth registration is not only the bedrock of child protection, it will facilitate achieving such Goals as eradicating poverty and hunger (MDG 1), universal primary education (2), reducing child mortality (4) and combating HIV/AIDS (6).

EXAMPLES OF UNICEF IN ACTION

In **Afghanistan**, in 2003, UNICEF worked with the government to launch a nationwide campaign to register all children under one year of age. The campaign used the services of polio vaccinators, combining the birth registration effort with Afghanistan's National Polio Immunization Days. In 2004, the campaign expanded to reach 1.7 million children under five.

In **Angola**, in 2001, UNICEF's Executive Director officially launched a nationwide two-year birth registration campaign which aimed to register 3 million children by 2002. In 2005, intensive advocacy on UNICEF's part resulted in an international conference on birth registration and the Government's adoption of a free birth registration policy for all newborns and children below 5 years old, including registration at hospitals.

In **Papua New Guinea**, the number of children whose birth has been registered in the national capital increased from 3 per cent in 2002 to 56 per cent in 2005. The birth registration system was decentralized in 50 per cent of provinces. All schools and health facilities were declared compulsory birth registration points.

Notes

¹ Figures from United Nations Children's Fund, *The 'Rights' Start to Life: A statistical analysis of birth registration*, UNICEF, New York, 2005, p. 3.

For further information please contact:
The Child Protection Section
Programme Division UNICEF NY
childprotection@unicef.org
www.unicef.org