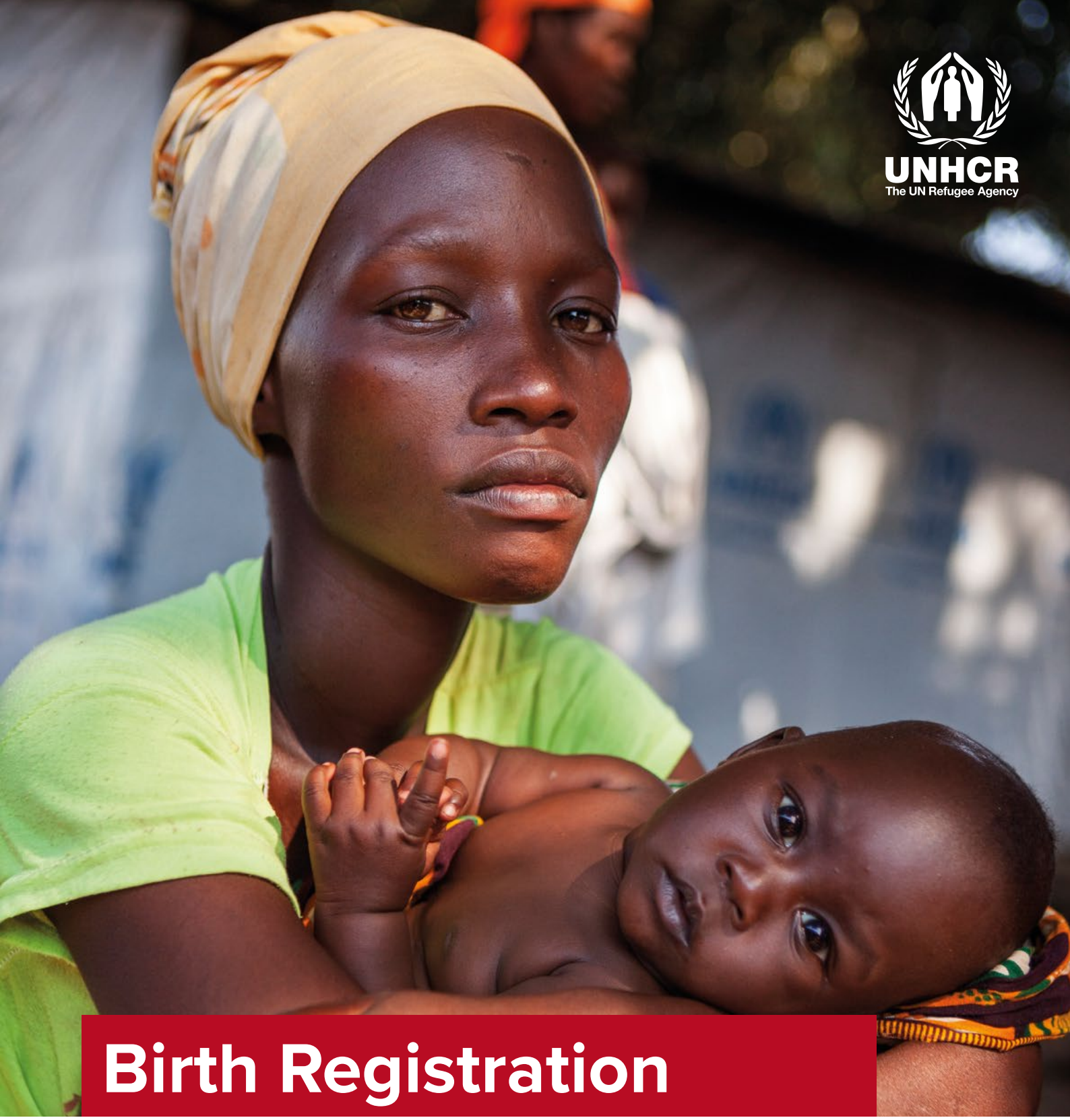

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

Birth Registration

UNHCR GLOBAL FIELD SURVEY ON POLICIES AND PRACTICES

UNHCR 2016

Executive Summary

Birth registration represents the first legal recognition of a child's existence. International human rights law institutes this right and prescribes that children should have their birth registered as early as possible and without discrimination. A birth certificate indicates who the child is, who his/her parents are and where he/she is born - essential when determining the nationality of a child and preventing statelessness.

Registering a child's birth impacts his/her rights and protection and acts as a gateway to both essential services and other identity documentation throughout childhood and into adulthood.

This report highlights some of the common obstacles UNHCR faces in its work to ensure that every refugee child is registered at birth. The mapping conducted covers over 100 countries, and provides a clear overview of legal frameworks and birth registration practices and procedures. It also highlights some of the many good practices of field staff, illustrating how birth registration for refugee children can be achieved.

Acknowledgements

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We would like to thank field colleagues from around the world for their contribution to this report.

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PART 1

INTRODUCTION TO BIRTH REGISTRATION

1. Introduction and Overview

All children have the right to a name, identity and to be registered at birth. Having a legal identity is an essential form of protection, ensuring that children can claim rights, access services, and is an important step to prevent statelessness. Despite this, there are an estimated 230 million children around the world who have not been registered.[1] Refugee children are at particular risk of not being registered and many refugee children and their families face a multitude of challenges in being registered at birth and in obtaining birth certificates.

As part of its mandate for the protection of refugee children, UNHCR prioritizes birth registration as a core protection intervention and a Global Strategic Priority (GSP). UNHCR's *Framework for the Protection of Children*, launched in June 2012, emphasizes that girls and boys are entitled to obtain legal documentation related to nationality, travel, status, education, custody, property or other civil matters, including birth registration. Benchmarks for success include indicators such as:

- Accurate disaggregated data available on birth registration
- Birth registration procedures in place for newborns and late registration
- Obstacles to birth registration identified and addressed

Birth registration is also closely linked to UNHCR's mandate for the prevention and reduction of statelessness and is included as a goal in the 10 year campaign to end statelessness. Birth registration helps to prevent statelessness by establishing a legal record of where a child was born and who his or her parents are. As such, it serves as a key form of proof of the link between the child and the country of nationality of the parents and/or the country of birth, thereby facilitating the child's acquisition of nationality.

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[1] UNICEF, *Global database on birth registration*, New-York, December 2013, http://data.unicef.org/child-protection/birth-registration.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BIRTH REGISTRATION FOR REFUGEE CHILDREN

The increased risks unregistered children face underlines the importance of birth registration. Unregistered children may face difficulties in family reunification, with no documentation to prove their relationship with their parents. Durable solutions, such as return to the country of origin, may also be more difficult if a child lacks legal documentation. A significant area of concern for unregistered children is their access to age appropriate legal protection. If children do not possess legal proof of their right to benefit from child-sensitive proceedings during asylum or judicial proceedings, this may have a significant impact on decisions made. For example, children recruited into armed groups must be able to prove they were in fact children at the time of recruitment in order to benefit from certain legal protections. The risks of not being registered extend into adulthood and may lead to a deprivation of the right to vote, get married or be employed, acquire ID documents, or to register their own children.

Birth Registration Overview

Birth registration is the official recording of a child's birth though the state's administrative process. Once the birth is registered, a birth certificate is issued to the child. Birth registration is part of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS).[2]

> **CRC Article 7(1):** The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire nationality and, as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents.

Birth registration acts as the legal basis for protection by acknowledging the individual's existence under the law. This acknowledgement translates into the ability to access certain rights such as health care, education and legal protection. Birth registration therefore serves as a "passport to protection".[3] A child has the right under international law to be registered at birth and states have the obligation to do so in a non-discriminatory manner. This is specified in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and other international treaties and commitments.[4]

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[2] CRVS is defined as: "the continuous, permanent, compulsory, and universal recording of the occurrence and characteristics of vital events (live births, deaths, fetal deaths, marriages, and divorces) and other civil status events pertaining to the population as provided by decree, law or regulation, in accordance with the legal requirements in each country." United Nations (UN). Principles and recommendations for a vital statistics system, Revision 2. UN, 2001.

[3] UNICEF, A Passport to Protection: A guide to Birth Registration Programming, New-York, 2013.

[4] UNCRC art. 7, ICCPR art. 24. The New York Declaration (Article 32, 71) and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (Annex 1, Art 5(f)) contain important state commitments to ensure the registration of the births of all refugee children born on their territory as well as efforts to reduce statelessness. Sustainable Development Goal 16.9 also commits States to providing legal identity for all including free birth registrations by 2030.

2. Global Mapping: Purpose and Methodology

In order to better understand progress against UNHCR's Child Protection Framework, Goal 4: *Girls and boys obtain legal documentation*, a global mapping exercise was conducted. The mapping allowed an analysis at a global level of common challenges and success factors to help guide programmatic response, as well as lessons learned from both positive and negative experiences in the field. In addition, opportunities to further develop UNHCR's response were identified and evaluated, taking into account relevant national, regional and global initiatives.

The mapping included both qualitative and quantitative tools to guide its research. Detailed questionnaires were developed and sent out to 117 operations worldwide, of which 108 – or 92% – were able to respond.[5] Furthermore, of those 108, 41 operations were approached and in depth interviews focusing on data collection were conducted.

In the following sections, the outcomes of the mapping will be analysed and challenges and good practices highlighted. The analysis focuses on both the challenges and good practices that are external to UNHCR and those that are internal to UNHCR operations. The final part of this report contains recommendations for the continuation of the work on birth registration.

This global mapping builds on earlier initiatives to map birth registration for refugee children. These include a 2012 mapping exercise that was initiated by the Regional Bureau for Africa, with the support of the Division of International Protection and the Regional Support Hub in Nairobi. Regional reports and partial mappings have also been conducted by UNHCR in Africa,[6] Asia and MENA.[7]

[5] Questionnaires sent to EU countries were shorter than those sent to other operations as the information about the national birth registration systems in those countries is fully accessible through other sources.

[6] UNHCR, *Status Report: Birth Registration of Refugee Children in Africa- A Review of Selected Countries*, Dakar, 2012.

[7] UNHCR, *Regional Key Messages on Birth Registration*, internal document, unpublished, MENA Bureau, July 2014.

KEY TERMINOLOGY

BIRTH REGISTRATION: the continuous, permanent and universal recording, within the civil registry, of the occurrence and characteristics of births in accordance with the legal requirements of a country.

BIRTH NOTIFICATION: the notice of the occurrence of birth by an individual or institution to the registrar of vital events in a country. The notification is usually done by health institutions and birth attendants; or by local government officials when births take place at home. The birth notification only has a record value, it is not a legal registration record.

BIRTH CERTIFICATE: the vital record that documents the birth of a child. The birth certificate is a personal document issued by the State to the child. It should record the following minimum information:

- Full name of the child
- Sex of the child
- Date of birth
- Place of birth
- Full names of parents, nationalities and address
- Name and signature of the civil registrar

Sources: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistic System Revision 2*, Series M/19, Statistics Division, United Nations, New York, 2001; UNICEF, *A Passport to Protection: A guide to birth registration programming*, UNICEF, New York, 2013.

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PART 2

OUTCOMES OF THE GLOBAL MAPPING

This section looks at existing practices in relation to birth registration and the challenges faced by UNHCR operations in achieving universal birth registration for refugee children.

The outcomes of the global mapping on birth registration show that UNHCR's operations face a number of common challenges when implementing birth registration activities for refugee and asylum-seeking children. These challenges range from difficulties arising due to weak national systems, but also to internal issues relating to the allocation of staff time and funds that limit UNHCR's ability to support governments and access to birth registration.

Based on analysis from the questionnaires and interviews conducted, operations face a number of common challenges relating to the legal and policy environment and the strength of national civil registration systems when implementing birth registration activities for refugee and asylum seeker children. These include difficulty accessing services, procedural complexity, and discrimination, both against refugees as a whole and against specific groups of children. A full list of the challenges mentioned by operations can be seen in the Annex, Table 1.

SUMMARY OF COMMON EXTERNAL CHALLENGES ON BIRTH REGISTRATION OF REFUGEE AND ASYLUM SEEKER CHILDREN

- Government policy on birth registration
- Low prioritisation of birth registration activities by state authorities
- Discrimination against refugees
- Discrimination against specific groups of children (children born out of wedlock, children born outside of health facilities, children from minority groups) in state policy/laws
- Weak and/or centralised civil registration system, including inaccessibility to civil registry offices for refugees
- Lack of integration of birth registration services with health services
- High costs and extensive delays in getting birth certificates
- Complicated late registration procedures with high fees
- Documentation required to register births of children and loss of ID documents of refugees
- Fraud and corruption
- Misconceptions around birth notifications versus birth certificates
- Lack of awareness or importance given to birth registration among refugee parents

1. National Legal Framework on Birth Registration in Countries Studied

All countries surveyed have adopted legislation related to civil registration, with procedures to register children at birth described under a specific provision. Some countries[8] also cover birth registration within specific child protection legislation. Birth registration legislation is generally seen as universal – applicable to all children, including refugees and asylum-seekers. Most countries therefore do not have specific legal provisions for the birth registration of refugees, which sometimes results in *de facto* exclusion for refugee children.

However, there are a number of countries that have adopted specific regulations or decrees excluding refugees or certain categories of refugees (usually from minority groups or from countries which have strained relations with the country of asylum) from registering the births of their children.[9] These restrictions are often linked to misconceptions around the links between birth registration and the acquisition of nationality. In these countries, advocacy for universal birth registration is sorely needed to support refugee and asylum-seeking families, as well as other minority groups.

[8] Angola, Botswana, DRC, Guinea, Indonesia, Kenya, Philippines.

[9] Bangladesh, Chad (for South-Sudanese refugees), Iran, Myanmar, Malaysia.

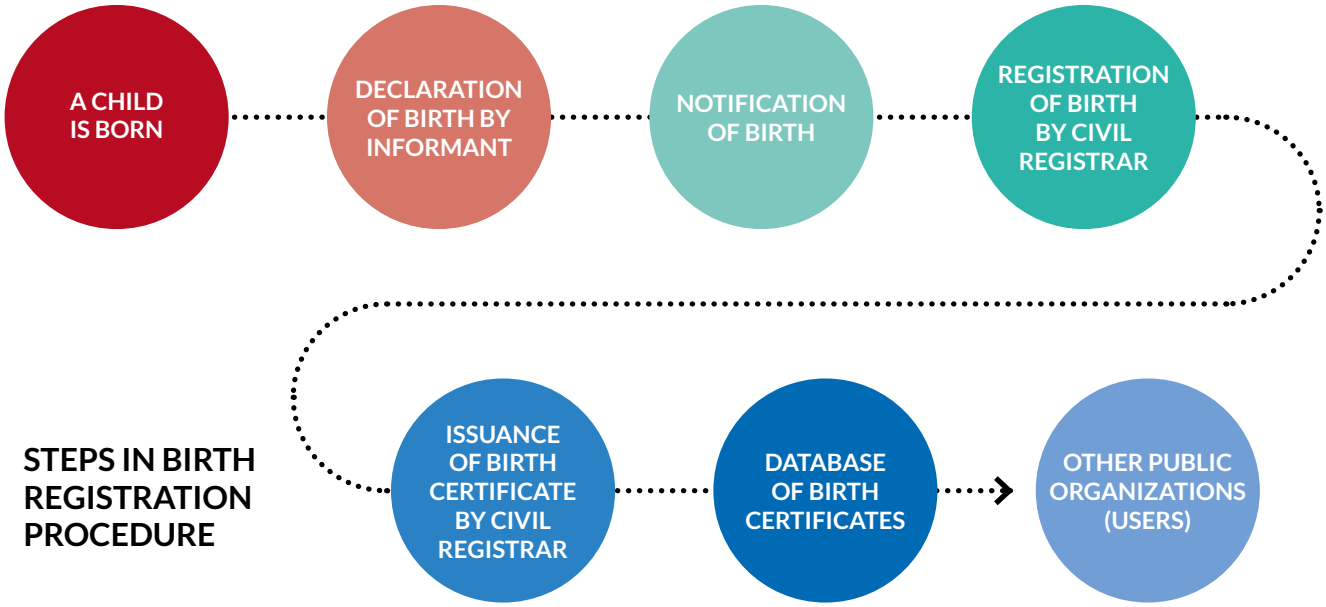
WHAT ARE THE LINKAGES BETWEEN BIRTH REGISTRATION AND NATIONALITY?

Birth registration does not itself confer nationality upon a child. The process for registering births is distinct from the process whereby individuals acquire nationality, which usually happens automatically at birth. Birth registration is nevertheless important for the prevention of statelessness because it establishes a legal record of where a child was born and who his or her parents are. This constitutes a key form of proof of whether a person has acquired nationality by birth on territory (jus soli) or descent (jus sanguinis), which are the most common bases for acquisition of nationality at birth.

(Child Protection Issue Brief (2013): Birth Registration)

2. Procedural Challenges Related to Birth Registration

Based on the results from the global mapping, birth registration procedures are similar from one country to another and are always regulated by law. Although in most countries surveyed the legal framework is universal for all children, in reality, procedures may differ for refugees and for nationals.



Parents who are refugees or asylum-seekers face specific challenges when they wish to register their newborns. In the mapping, UNHCR staff reported on four major obstacles in birth registration procedures for refugee and asylum-seeker children:

- Requirements for specific supporting documentation;
- Physical and financial accessibility to birth registration procedures;
- Delay in the issuance of a birth certificate; and
- Complex procedures for late registration.

The requirement for specific supporting documents presents a significant challenge for refugee and asylum-seeking parents seeking to register the birth of their children. In most countries, the documents requested are the birth notification, parents' identification documents and in some cases, a vaccination card. For some countries in the Middle East and North Africa as well as Asia, a marriage certificate for the child's parents is also required. A few countries also request a refugee card or residency permit to register children at birth. Extensive documentation requirements can be a particular challenge for refugee parents as they might not have brought these documents with them as they fled, or the requested documents may be lost or

destroyed. Survey results indicated that he more documents required, the longer and more complex the birth registration procedure gets (for a full overview of documents required per country, please see Table 2 in the Annex).

Physical and financial accessibility to birth registration procedures is often a barrier for refugees and asylum-seekers. In areas with poor national civil registration infrastructure, physical access to civil registry offices can be an obstacle for refugees and asylum-seekers and may also be a challenge experienced by the host community. However, refugees and asylum-seekers living in camps or facing other restrictions on their movements may face additional challenges due to the cost and bureaucracy associated with travel. Even where birth registration facilities are accessible, the cost of birth notifications and certificates can present an additional barrier to refugees and asylum -seekers.

According to most national laws and regulations, **birth certificates should be free**, but the reality is often very different. Among the 96 countries surveyed and for which data on birth certificates is available, only 54 countries or 56 %, have free birth registration for all children, including refugee children.[10] When birth registration is not free (in 42 countries out of 96 surveyed), the average cost for a birth certificate is $6.07 USD. In many countries, the cost of a birth certificate appears to be linked to the country's economic development and standard of living. Canada has the most expensive fees for birth certificates, with costs varying from $22 to $39.50 USD, while Kenya and Senegal have birth certificate costs of just $0.50 USD. In Ethiopia, the cost of a birth certificate is $15.00 USD, a prohibitive cost in comparison with the cost of living in the country (for a full overview of costs linked to birth certificates, please see Table 4 in the Annex). Birth notifications are largely free (only three countries reported a fee), but children born outside of health facilities often encounter difficulties in getting birth notifications.

In the majority of countries, the birth certificate is delivered on the same day as birth registration takes place. In Europe, 83 % of countries deliver the birth certificate on the same day as birth registration, 76 % in the Americas, 72 % in Asia and 58 % in MENA while only 32% of countries in Africa deliver the birth certificate on the same day. **Delays in the issuance of birth certificates** from civil registry offices vary with an average delay of 10 days. The longest delays are seen in Africa with up to 180 days in Burundi and 150 days in the Republic of Congo.

Based upon survey data, a delay of 7 to 14 days can be a considered as average. Delays going beyond 30 days are generally considered as an undue delay. The main factors for longer delays in the delivery of birth certificates is the weak capacity (both in human terms and logistically) of civil registration offices to process birth certificates and the low priority given by the governments in question to birth registration.

In all countries, the legislation related to birth registration includes a provision on **procedures for late birth registration**. Ensuring free late registration is an important safeguard for all children, especially for marginalized families and communities, including refugee and asylum seeking children. Policies on late registration, however, vary from one country to another both in terms of what constitutes 'late registration' and the procedures that need to be followed.

The time period in which parents are allowed to register the birth of a child varies widely, from 7 days[11] to one year after the birth.[12] In countries where access to civil registration offices or birth registration costs pose a challenge, a reasonable legal delay to register children at birth is important as it will lower the number of cases of late registration which are generally more complicated and costly for parents, as they may include court procedures.

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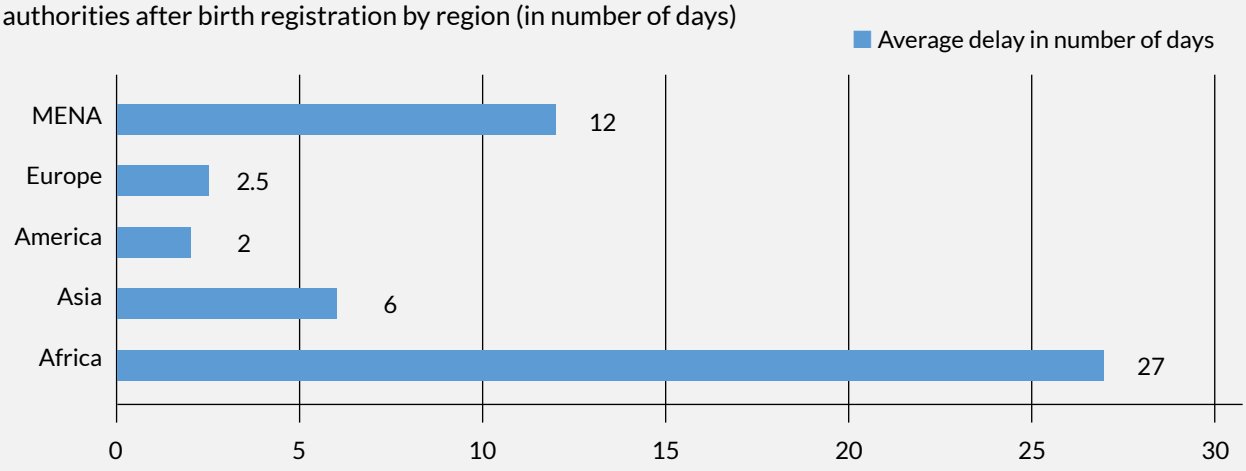
[10] The 12 EU countries are not included in this part of data analysis, as different questionnaires were sent to these operations.

[11] Myanmar.

[12] Ghana, Honduras, Lebanon.

Figure: Average delay in obtaining a birth certificate from civil registration authorities after birth registration by region (in number of days)



In general, late registration requires different procedures from those that are followed for regular birth registration. This might entail the provision of an explanation for late registration, sometimes producing witnesses or an affidavit, and paying a fee. Court proceedings are sometimes required, resulting in significantly higher costs, which often poses an insurmountable challenge to refugees and asylum-seekers.

Late registration costs for refugees and asylum-seekers are often covered by UNHCR, often comprising a significant portion of an operation's birth registration budget. A number of UNHCR staff commented that this can impede implementation of other birth registration activities, including advocacy for systemic changes. Late registration fees vary significantly from country to country, ranging from 0.5 USD[13] to 2,000 USD[14] (for a full overview of costs associated with late registration, please see Table 4 in the Annex).

3. Institutional Challenges for UNHCR Operations

In addition to challenges relating to the national civil registration system, UNHCR operations face a number of internal challenges in achieving effective birth registration programming for refugee and asylum seeking children. These include:

- Lack of understanding of birth registration procedures and priorities;
- Lack of quality, reliable data;
- Dedicated staff and dedicated staff time; and
- Budget constraints/ low prioritisation of birth registration within operations.

[13] Liberia.

[14] Lebanon.

Common understanding on birth registration procedures and response strategies

As birth registration is a strategic priority for UNHCR, having a common understanding among staff on birth registration is essential. However, there is significant confusion regarding the components of birth registration amongst staff surveyed, including the difference between birth notification and birth certificates. This confusion has contributed to challenges in analysing FOCUS data, as some operations report 100% birth registration coverage – reflecting the rate of birth notifications issued rather than the rate of birth registration.[15] This lack of clarity hides existing problems in birth registration systems for refugees and asylum-seekers.

In the majority of countries, refugee and asylum-seeking children receive the same birth certificate as national children. In a few countries, refugee children in camps only receive UNHCR-issued "birth certificates" (so-called "camp" birth certificates"), which are not officially recognized, as they are not issued by the competent civil registration authority and thus have no legal value. These "camp birth certificates" cannot replace official birth certificates and should not be referred to as a birth certificates. As long as refugee or asylum seeker children do not have official birth certificates, they lack a legal identity and the protection provided thereby, and should therefore not be considered as having been registered at birth. While most operations have been implementing birth registration activities for years, there does not appear to be a unified strategy or approach for UNHCR in birth registration programming at either regional or global levels. Field operations' priorities for birth registration need clearer guidance and often lack an emphasis or the technical capacity to carry out effective advocacy work. Clearer programmatic direction is needed along with comprehensive staff capacity building.

Operations would also benefit from further sharing of good practices and lessons learned from similar contexts. During interviews, almost no operation was able to mention a good practice on birth registration used by other operations in or outside their region. Sharing of knowledge is essential internally, but also to discuss with external partners at government or agency level. Compilation and dissemination of good practices at the global level would also improve this knowledge gap.

Data collection and monitoring

Data collection on birth registration is a significant challenge for UNHCR operations. Sources of data on birth registration vary from one operation to another. In some operations[16] data on birth registration is reported directly by UNHCR through its own refugee registration and often in proGres, while in other operations,[17] data on birth registration comes from the government, with little transparency or possibility for corroboration.

A further problem is the lack of consistency on the type of data reported. Some operations report in proGres on *the percentage of children under 12 months of age in possession of an* ***official birth certificate***, while other operations report on *the percentage of children with a* ***birth notification***, or *percentage of children in possession of* ***unofficial birth certificates*** (i.e. "camp" or "UNHCR" birth certificates).

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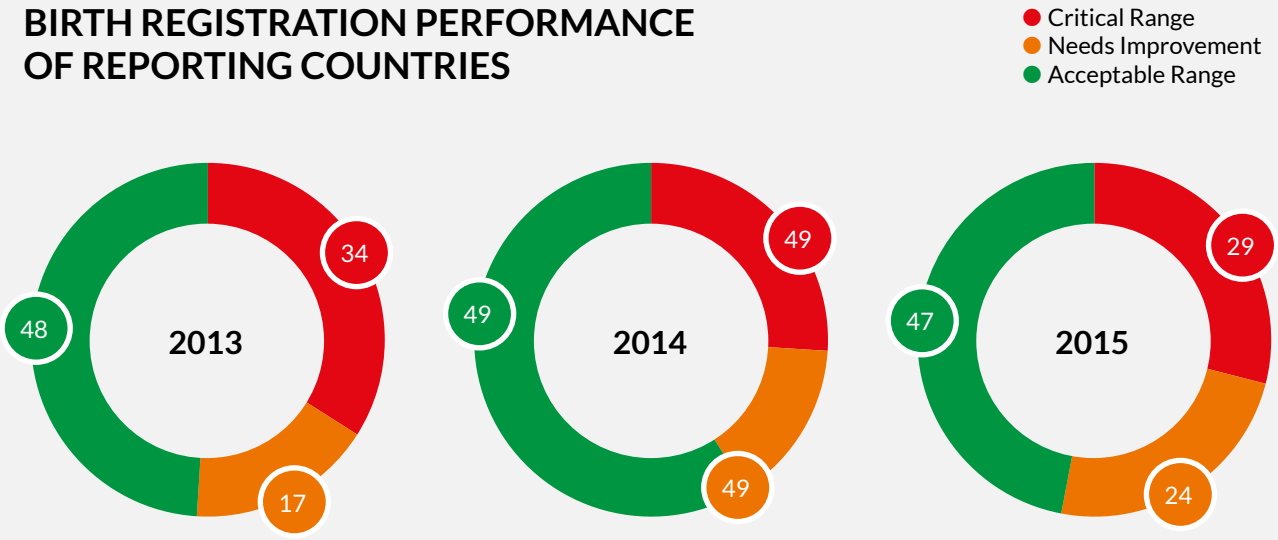
[15] DRC, Ethiopia.

[16] Kenya, Thailand.

[17] Iran, Malaysia.

BIRTH REGISTRATION PERFORMANCE OF REPORTING COUNTRIES



Source: reporting.unhcr.org

Apart from data collection and reporting, the regular monitoring of birth registration coverage is poor at operational level. Monitoring trends on birth registration is one way to show if interventions implemented on birth registration are having a positive impact. Only one operation undertook a systematic monitoring exercise to monitor trends in birth registration coverage among refugee and asylum seeker children.[18]

While a statistical analysis of birth registration coverage among refugee children was anticipated to be a key part of the global mapping, this analysis has been difficult because of the lack of existing data on birth registration of children under 12 months old in many operations. **The need to enhance data collection and reporting on birth registration is therefore one of the key recommendations from this report.**

Reporting on birth registration in FOCUS is optional for UNHCR operations and is linked to whether the operation itself considers the issue relevant for their context and/or whether activities related to birth registration are being conducted. This means that even if some operations have easy access to data, they might not report their indicator values and narrative assessments unless birth registration is a priority in their operational framework. Without consistent reporting from the majority of operations, a comparison of performance and results as well as trend analysis, yields unreliable data.

Reasons for not being able to report back include:

- Lack of access to government data (common in Europe and the Americas);
- Weak internal data collection systems in field operations;
- Inaccuracy of data reported; and
- Confusion in the understanding of terminology (questionnaires showed a confusion between birth notifications, birth certificates, as well as "camp birth certificates" issued by UNHCR).

[18] Lebanon.

Furthermore, in some operations with weak government structures and high levels of corruption, false birth certificates are issued to nationals as well as to refugees. The verification of birth certificates to ensure that they are authentic is a major task that requires not just resources from UNHCR, but the active cooperation of authorities. Unfortunately, operations facing the challenge of false documentation will therefore struggle with reporting the accurate number of children registered.

Given the weaknesses and inaccuracies highlighted above, the current reporting practices on birth registration do not permit the systematic use of available data in proGres or FOCUS. Capacity building and improvement on data collection and reporting are needed to get reliable data on birth registration of refugee and asylum seeking children (see Part 3 on recommendations).

Looking at FOCUS data from 2013-2015, an average of only 27% of UNHCR operations reported on the indicator of "*% of children under 12 months who have been issued birth certificates by the authorities*". Of those, approximately half were in the acceptable range for the indicator (with a performance between 80-100%).

Resource Allocation

a. Allocated staff time for birth registration activities

In survey questionnaires, many staff noted their lack of time to work adequately on birth registration, and many operations also raised this challenge in interviews.

In 60% of operations with activities on birth registration,[19] the protection staff who act as a focal points for birth registration dedicate 10% or less of their time to birth registration. Furthermore, only 13% of operations have birth registration focal points spending 50% or more of their time on birth registration, most of whom are located in Europe,[20] with one in MENA.[21]

As shown in the graph above, the average time allocated to birth registration by UNHCR birth registration focal points varies between regions, from 10 % in the Americas, 12% in Africa and Asia to 16% in MENA and 45% in Europe. In MENA, while national birth registration rates are higher than in Africa or Asia, there are acute challenges in birth registration of refugee and asylum seeker children. Despite these challenges, an average rate of only 16% of time is reportedly allocated to birth registration. In Europe, birth registration is given high priority in terms of staff time dedicated to this issue, with 80% of staff time dedicated to birth registration in Kosovo and Serbia and 50% in Bosnia Herzegovina.

The low level of time dedicated to birth registration by some operations reflects a lack of prioritization of birth registration. Clearly operations are also struggling with competing priorities, and staff may not be able to dedicate more time on birth registration, even when they are willing to do so, due to other priorities, staff shortage or budgetary constraints.

From the results of the survey, there is a link between the percentage of time devoted to birth registration and the development and implementation of good practices on birth registration. In operations where staff dedicate 40 to 80 % of their time to birth registration, progress on birth registration rates was noted or/and good practices on birth registration were being developed and implemented.

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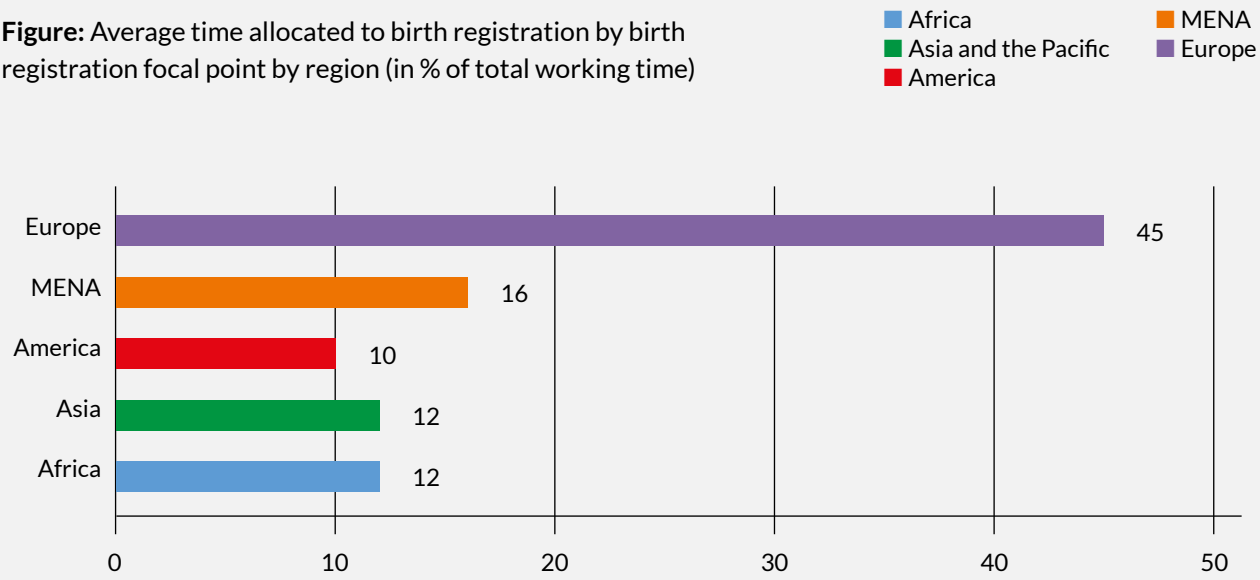
[19] Included here are majority of operations based in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and MENA. Only 2 operations based in the Americas replied on the % of time dedicated to birth registration as most operations in this region do not implement activities on birth registration.

[20] Bosnia & Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia.

[21] Lebanon.

Figure: Average time allocated to birth registration by birth registration focal point by region (in % of total working time)



b. Allocation of financial resources

80 % of operations surveyed claim significant constraints linked to a limited birth registration budget. This results in staff who feel that they have less ability to plan and implement birth registration activities, as these are seen to be 'competing' with other protection activities and priorities. Some operations' finances are so tight that activities on birth registration are under threat and might be discontinued if finances are not reallocated to meet the need.[22]

Due to differences in operational contexts, it is not possible to estimate the size of the birth registration budget needed to yield positive results. It is however noted that operations which have developed good practices on birth registration all had budgets of more than 150,000 USD/year for 2013. While a birth registration annual budget over USD 150,000 seems to have made a difference in obtaining results, some operations with higher budgets on birth registration were not always able to monitor positive impact on birth registration.[23]

UNHCR's budget allocation to birth registration activities for refugee and stateless children has remained somewhat stable between 2013 (when ExCom Conclusion 111 was released) and 2015 (when the #IBelong campaign was initiated). In examining data from FOCUS, only slight increases in budgets are noted.

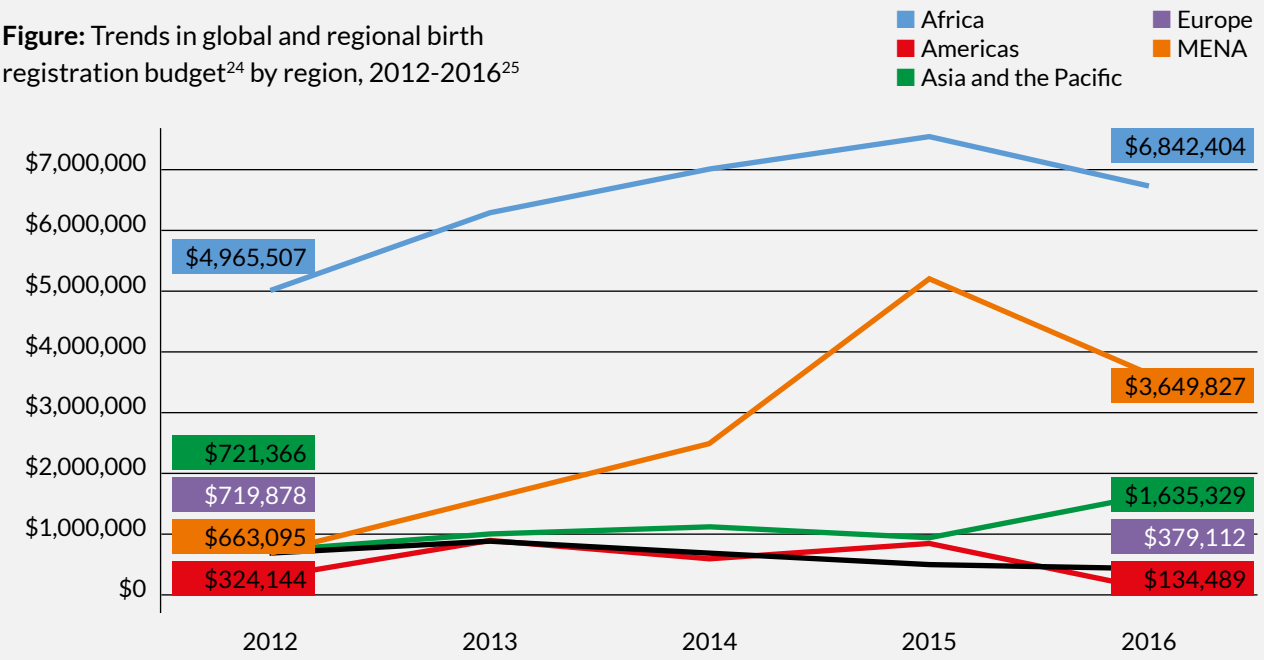
The civil registration budget, which includes birth registration, is divided into four major outcomes:

- Advocacy conducted ;
- Birth registration and certificates provided ;
- Capacity development supported ; and
- Issuance of civil status documentation by national institutions supported.

[22] This was particularly the case in operations like Rwanda, the Republic of Congo and Tunisia, as these are operations spending most of their budget on late registration fees and court procedures.

[23] Chad, Cote d'Ivoire.

Figure: Trends in global and regional birth registration budget[24] by region, 2012-2016[25]



Source: FOCUS data, 2012-2016

On average, 59% of the 2012-2016 budget was allocated to the outcome "Birth registration and certificates provided" and 24% to the outcome "Issuance of civil status documentation by national institutions supported". If we add these two outcomes related to the provision of birth certificates, we see that 83% of the civil/birth registration OL budget is destined to the issuance or support to provision of birth certificates and other documentation, leaving only 17% of the budget destined to advocacy or capacity building.

This trend continued at regional level with most operations reporting mainly against the outcome "birth registration or birth certificates provided".

Examining FOCUS data from 2014, a high number of country operations did not have a budget for civil registration. Out of 108 operations covered by the global mapping, only 48 operations reported a budget in 2014 under Civil Registration and Birth Registration.[26] Most of these operations are located in Africa, Asia and MENA. The operations without a budget for birth registration are mainly in the Americas and Europe. Based on questionnaire replies from operations, most do not have birth registration interventions either because refugees do not face problems obtaining birth registration for their children,[27] or because birth registration is not given priority when budgets are already low. In some cases, the lack of birth registration interventions appeared to be related to the fact that operations did not have access to data related to birth registration of refugee and asylum seeker children (i.e. operations were not aware of whether it was a problem).

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[24] The source for birth registration budget is the FOCUS outcome "civil registration and civil status documentation strengthened", with a specific outcome on birth registration reported in Focus from 2012 onwards.

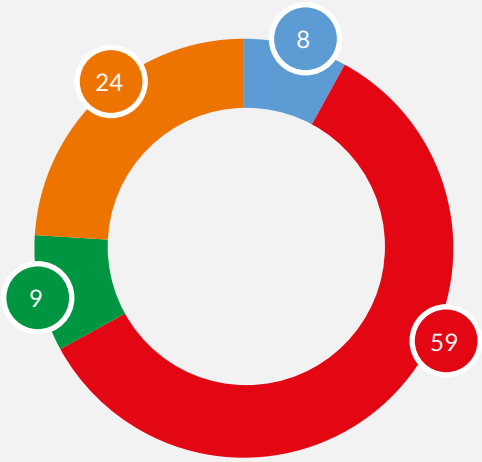
[25] Between 2010 and 2014, budgets on birth registration from the regional offices (Bangkok, Dakar, Nairobi, Panama, Kyiv) are also included in the graph by respective regions.

[26] Source, FOCUS.

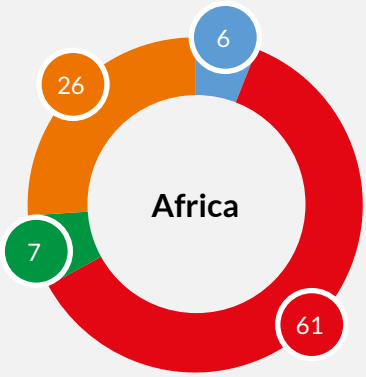
[27] There is an assumption that birth registration of refugee children is not a problem in countries where birth registration is universal, but this has not been verified or researched specifically.

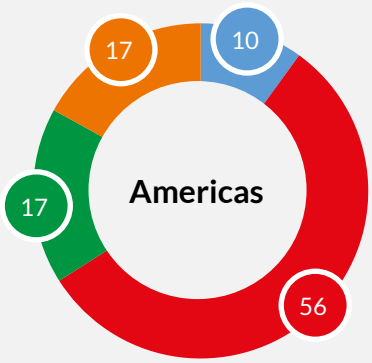
AVERAGE GLOBAL DISTRIBUTION OF BIRTH REGISTRATION BUDGET BY OUTCOMES, AVERAGE FOR 2012-2016

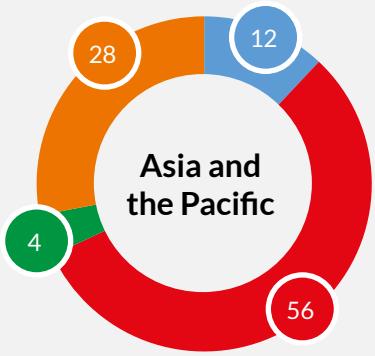
- Advocacy conducted
- Birth registration and certificates provided
- Capacity Development Supported
- Issuance of civil status documentation supported

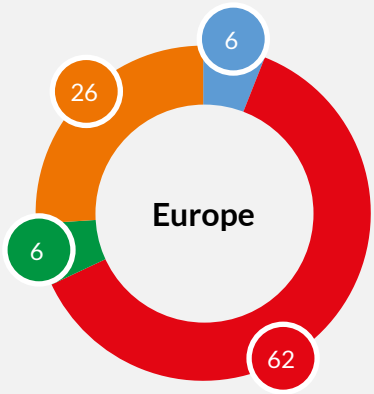


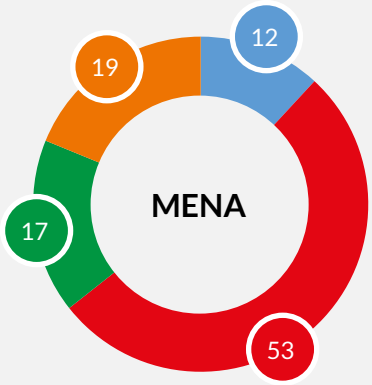
REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF BIRTH REGISTRATION BUDGET BY OUTCOMES FOR REFUGEE AND STATELESS POPULATION TYPES, AVERAGE FOR 2012-2016











Source: FOCUS data, 2012-2016

PART 3

POSITIVE FIELD PRACTICES ON BIRTH REGISTRATION

Advocating for birth registration for refugee children in contexts where it is not seen as a priority by national governments or in emergency settings can be even more challenging as weak civil registration capacity – in particular the lack of accessible and efficient civil registration services – presents an overwhelming hurdle. Results from the global survey however showed that country operations have employed a large number of successful strategies when it comes to improving birth registration of refugee and asylum-seeking children.

1. Support to Governments and Systems Strengthening

In the face of limitations, UNHCR must find ways to engage national governments and promote solutions to strengthen birth registration. Recent Ministerial Conferences on Civil Registration Services held in Asia and the Pacific in November 2014 and in Africa in 2010 and 2012[28] included active discussions on birth registration with governments, and resulted in important commitments. Specific recommendations for supporting governments on birth registration are as follows:

Advocacy with governments

In operations where refugee and asylum-seeking children do not have access to birth registration either due to legal or practical barriers, UNHCR operations have actively advocated with governments to address these challenges. The example of Thailand illustrates how the operation has successfully advocated with the government to register refugee children at birth and resolve a backlog of unregistered children.

[28] A First Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration was held in Addis Abeba in August 2010, followed by a Second Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration in the Republic of South Africa in September 2012.

★ THE EXAMPLE OF THAILAND: Active advocacy with the government on birth registration of refugee children

In 2013, the government of Thailand agreed to issue birth certificates to unregistered refugee children born between 2008 and 2010, prior to the establishment of a camp-based registration system. This included a backlog of 4,000 children successfully registered in one province. In urban areas, the strong cooperation between UNHCR and the national authorities yielded a positive outcome with 100% of refugee children registered in urban areas. This progress meant that in 2015, UNHCR was able to direct refugees directly to authorities to register their children, without any involvement needed.

Some operations have successfully advocated for an exemption regarding documents required from refugee parents to register their child at birth,[29] such as in Lebanon where the government reduced the number of prerequisite documents to register new refugee births by accepting the Family Booklet as proof of both parental identity and marital status. From August to December of 2014, the Government of Lebanon invited all Syrian refugees to regularize their legal presence in the country without penalty, creating access to civil registration, including birth registration, for thousands of families.

Development or revision of laws and regulations

Addressing gaps in laws and policies that prevent refugee children from being registered at birth is one of the most important parts of a comprehensive birth registration strategy. At regional level, UNHCR is engaged in supporting governments in civil registration reform, such as in Asia and the Pacific and in Africa, where direct support is provided to Ministerial Conferences on Civil Registration and for the implementation of follow up actions. In Asia and the Pacific, UNHCR is also a Member of the Regional Steering Group on CRVS, which provides opportunities for discussing civil registration issues of persons of concern, including birth registration.

At the country level, some UNHCR operations address the issue of birth registration through direct support to the revision of laws and policies on birth registration. Some operations have advocated that the government include specific provisions regarding birth registration of refugee and asylum-seeking children in relevant laws and regulations.

★ THE EXAMPLES OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA AND KOSOVO: Support to revision of laws and regulations

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, UNHCR has successfully advocated for civil registries to recognize refugee cards as official ID documents, which can be used for children's birth registration. This was reflected in the Law on Basic Registers along with specific provisions on the protection of data for refugees and other potential beneficiaries of international protection.

In **Kosovo**, upon extensive advocacy from UNHCR, a Circular Letter was issued in 2012, 2013 and 2014 by the Central Registration Agency requesting municipal civil status offices to suspend fines for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities for late birth registration.

[29] Sudan, Uganda, Pakistan, Yemen, and Lebanon.

Strengthening and expanding existing civil registration systems

Strengthening or expanding the existing civil registration system is key to improving birth registration for refugee and asylum-seeking children. To be efficient, a civil registration system needs to be accessible to the entire population, irrespective of geography. In almost all countries studied, access to civil registry offices was a problem for refugee and asylum-seeking populations, especially for those living in camps and refugee settlements, which are often located in isolated areas.

★ THE EXAMPLE OF DADAAB CAMPS IN KENYA:
Expanding on existing civil registration system

At the end of 2013, Dadaab Refugee Camp in **Kenya** was hosting 408,283 refugees from Somalia, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Great Lakes countries, with an estimated 2,000 children born each month. The Kenyan Birth and Deaths Registration Act (2012) outlines the right to birth registration for all children born in Kenya, including refugee children. However, successful implementation of the Act, required an expansion of the services provided through the existing civil registration system. UNHCR therefore supported the establishment of district civil registrars within the Dadaab Refugee Camp in **Kenya** to register children at birth.

Upon the birth of a child in hospitals in Dadaab, a birth notification is issued by the doctor or midwife. The notification is entered manually into a register. Copies of the birth notification are given to the mother, the hospital and UNHCR. All notifications are then forwarded to the district civil registry office. Mobile teams visit the Dadaab camps every month and issue Kenyan birth certificates to refugee children.

This example shows that positive progress is possible even in countries with limited resources. The key to success lies in a positive partnership between UNHCR and local authorities, which in Dadaab included the strengthening of the capacity of local civil registries, the establishment of mobile civil registration teams, and the creation of systematic linkages with health providers.

Supporting travel costs for refugee families to travel to the nearest civil registry office has proven to be neither efficient nor sustainable as the same travel will have to be undertaken for all newborns. Country operations have therefore focused on providing support to mobile registration teams linked with the existing civil registration system as a more efficient means to improve the birth registration rate for refugee children.

★ THE EXAMPLES OF EASTERN SUDAN AND CHAD:
Support to mobile registration teams, including late registration

In **Eastern Sudan**, UNHCR partnered with the Ministry of Social Welfare to deploy mobile registration teams in every camp. Relevant civil registry authorities train and designate local health workers in NGO clinics to issue birth notifications, submit monthly birth registration forms to the nearest civil registry offices and deliver birth certificates back to refugee parents. These mobile teams and partnerships with health workers have been successful, with a birth registration rate among refugee newborns in camps increasing from 40% in 2013 to 70% in 2014. Similar initiatives have been extended to most camps in Eastern Sudan.

In **Chad**, UNHCR supports mobile courts for late registration of unregistered refugee children. This initiative successfully registered more than 1,300 refugee children from camps around Gore and Belom.

Several UNHCR operations have also supported the capacity of civil registrars through trainings and information sessions. Globally many operations include capacity building sessions on birth registration for

civil registrars or health officers including on topics such as refugee rights, statelessness or protection of refugee children.

In countries where corruption is a concern, false documentation is a major concern. In some cases, civil registrars deliver false birth certificates to refugees (and national citizens) as a way to speed up the registration process or to collect illegal fees. Often, refugees may be unaware that the birth certificates are false. This is a major challenge particularly for UNHCR's operations in West and Central Africa. Strengthening existing civil registration system is the best way to counter falsification of civil documentation. If the system works well, there will be fewer reasons or opportunities to deliver false documents. Anti-corruption measures also need to be strengthened whenever possible. The example below shows how UNHCR addressed the issue in the Republic of Congo.

★ THE EXAMPLE OF THE REPUBLIC OF CONGO:
Addressing the issue of false birth certificates delivered to refugee children

UNHCR in the Republic of Congo has started, in collaboration with local authorities, to undertake a verification of birth certificates to determine their validity. If it is identified that a refugee has received a false birth certificate, the civil registrar will replace it with an official birth certificate. While such an exercise is long and costly, it is a positive step towards strengthening the accountability of the existing civil registration system and ensuring that refugee children are properly registered at birth. UNHCR also supports training of civil registrars at national and district level to improve their knowledge on birth registration rights and procedures.

Supporting the use of technology

The use of new technology has been an important way to expand access to birth registration. Innovations included moving from paper-based systems to computer-based civil registration systems, thus facilitating the issuance of birth certificates or duplicates with improved accessibility of civil registration data and using text messaging and online systems to report the births of children.

Refugee children living in remote areas or in isolated communities can particularly benefit from the use of new technology.

★ THE EXAMPLE OF UGANDA:
Support expansion of new technologies to improve birth registration

In Uganda, with support from UNICEF, online birth registration has started in the district of Adjumani.[30] Birth notifiers were trained in refugee settlements on birth registration procedures prior to submitting the birth registration book to the district civil registry office in order to register birth registration data. The "short" birth certificates are then delivered to parents. This is the second step of birth registration in Uganda, the final step being the delivery of a "long" birth certificate. With support from the online registration system, the birth registration process is shortened and facilitated for refugee children. While this is positive progress in terms of technology, more advocacy and support to the government are still needed to ensure that refugee children are issued the official birth certificate, the so called "long" birth certificate.

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[30] In Uganda, UNICEF is piloting a mobile and web-based technology to digitalize birth records, in partnership with a private sector partner, Uganda Telecom. Source : UNICEF, *Case Study on Narrowing the Gaps for Equity. Uganda. Right to Identity: Using mobile technologies to improve delivery of, and access to birth registration.*

2. Expanding Partnerships and Integrated Programming

The link between birth registration and health services is a globally recognized good practice and according to the survey results, can be further developed in most of the participating countries. Furthermore, partnerships with other UN agencies and NGOs in the development of birth registration programming, can result in increased cost efficiency. This section explores the positive practices from some country operations and how they might be useful for improving integrated programming for birth registration globally.

Mainstreaming within the health sector

The integration of birth registration within health services is a major contributing factor to improving birth registration rates. It is recognized as a global good practice by agencies such as UNICEF[31] and Plan International and has been endorsed by inter-governmental meetings such as the Africa Ministerial Meeting on Civil Registration and the Asia Pacific Regional Meeting on Civil Registration.

Midwives, doctors and birth attendants play a major role in birth registration of children by issuing the birth notification, the main document required for birth registration. The issuance of birth notifications is also an opportunity for health workers to inform parents of the need to register their child with civil registration authorities and to provide information on birth registration procedures. In refugee contexts, the birth notification is produced in most health facilities, but there is often no clear link with the civil registrar's office. Some areas where partnerships with the health sector could be expanded in refugee operations are:

- training of health workers on the need to register children at birth and on birth registration procedures;
- the development of mobile registry offices or the implementation of permanent registry desks at health facilities;
- the development of a joint registration system between health facilities and civil registration system; and
- strengthening of information activities related to birth registration through health facilities and activities.

Health facilities can distribute information materials on birth registration just after the birth of the child. Hospitals can also display posters informing refugees about the importance of birth registration in local languages. Nutrition and infant feeding sessions are also good opportunities to inform parents about the right to birth registration and existing procedures.

This study identified only limited examples of positive practice in mainstreaming birth registration within the health sector in UNHCR operations. The examples of Liberia and Kenya below show positive practices on mainstreaming birth registration within the health sector – practices which could easily be replicated in other locations.

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[31] United Nations Children's Fund, *Good Practices in Integrating Birth Registration into Health Systems (2000–2009)*, UNICEF, New York, 2010–2012.

POSITIVE PARTNERSHIP WITH UNICEF ON UNIVERSAL BIRTH REGISTRATION

In the **Democratic Republic of Congo** (DRC), a Working Group on Child Protection was established with active participation from UNHCR, UNICEF and other agencies working on child protection. In Bukavu, through the joint advocacy of the members of the Working Group, the window for registering births was extended from 30 to 90 days. Following this, UNHCR supported joint advocacy to have this extension formalized in the 2009 Child Protection Law. This measure benefited all children, in particular refugee children whose parents faced specific challenges in registering their children on time due to cost, distance and documentation issues. The need to resort to late registration procedures for refugees, which is costly and complicated in DRC, was also reduced.

Collaboration with UNICEF has also proven fruitful in developing and implementing joint mass awareness campaigns on birth registration. In **Gambia**, a joint sensitization campaign was organized with UNICEF and the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare to reach out to isolated refugee communities and to issue birth certificates to unregistered children.

In **Brazil**, an agreement was signed between UNHCR and UNICEF to implement joint activities on the prevention of statelessness through birth registration.

In **Costa Rica**, the Chiriticos project is developing a mapping on the needs of unregistered children in the Southern border area through a joint initiative between UNHCR and UNICEF.

Capacity building sessions on birth registration for civil registrars was jointly done with UNICEF in **Armenia**.

★ THE EXAMPLES OF LIBERIA AND KENYA:
Mainstreaming birth registration with health sector

In **Liberia**, when deliveries take place in camp health facilities, the child is automatically registered at birth through mobile civil registry offices. Thanks to this initiative, birth registration in Liberia reaches 100% at camp level, while it is only 7% at national level.

In Dadaab camp in **Kenya**, birth registration is mainstreamed within the health sector. Any birth in a health facility is recorded by the health officer on duty and a birth notification is issued in 3 separate copies to the mother, the hospital and UNHCR. Births at home have to be notified by medical staff to UNHCR within 72 hours of the birth. All birth notifications are then forwarded by UNHCR to the district civil registrars. The birth certificates are delivered to the families by the mobile civil registration teams. This cooperation between the health sector, UNHCR and the civil registration system is essential for an efficient birth registration system. Dadaab camps have a birth registration rate of approximately 90%.

Partnerships on universal birth registration

Some UNHCR operations have developed a close and active partnership with organisations working to improve birth registration in development programming, such as UNICEF and Plan International. UNICEF's global work on universal, free birth registration and close, long-term collaboration with national governments is often a helpful, complimentary initiative to UNHCR's advocacy and operational engagement on birth registration for refugee and asylum-seeking children. This is also a cost-efficient alternative to operations facing budget cuts. Collaboration on birth registration is an opportunity to build on complimentary mandates and capacities to best effect.

3. Improving UNHCR's Data Collection and Outreach to Refugee Communities

Improving data on birth registration will be a critical pillar of a UNHCR birth registration strategy. As mentioned in Chapter 2, better data could support UNHCR in developing better, more effective programming for birth registration. Until now, very few operations have undertaken a systematic review to improve the quality of data collected on birth registration.[32] The case of Lebanon gives an example of how this could be implemented at an operational level.

★ THE EXAMPLE OF LEBANON:
Improving internal data collection and quality on birth registration

In **Lebanon**, data on birth registration of refugee children was not systematically shared with UNHCR. In 2013, UNHCR provided telephone counselling to 7,700 refugee Syrian parents with children born in Lebanon, and directly collected data on birth registration (rate and barriers) through these phone interviews. Cases of unregistered children were referred to legal partners for assistance in obtaining birth certificates.

The results of these monthly phone surveys were presented in "birth registration snapshots" developed by the Lebanon office . This monitoring and referral system resulted in an increase in the birth registration rate of refugee newborns, while the qualitative data collected provided valuable information for UNHCR's advocacy on birth registration with the government. However, collecting qualitative data is labour-intensive and was disrupted in May 2014 due to a lack of office capacity and financial constraints.

Some countries where data on birth registration of refugee children is scarce or unavailable indicated that they planned to undertake specific mappings or surveys of refugee children, to better understand the needs and challenges on birth registration.[33] This focused data collection could support better programming on birth registration.

4. Increasing the Demand among Refugee Communities

In many operations, refugees are not aware of the importance of birth registration. Some come from countries of origin where birth registration was not prioritized or seen by parents as an essential intervention. Even when refugees know the importance of birth registration for their children, they might lack general information on birth registration procedures in the country of asylum. Complicated birth registration procedures, like in many MENA countries, can also become an obstacle to birth registration. Illiteracy or language barriers can also prevent refugees from understanding local registration procedures or can result in fear or hesitation to approach authorities.

Even in countries where the civil registration system is well-functioning and birth registration services are available, some refugee and asylum seekers do not have access to information on birth registration and may think that they are not entitled to register their children. Many UNHCR operations thus conduct information sessions on birth registration when refugees come for registration at UNHCR offices or in camps.

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[32] Lebanon and Thailand.

[33] Costa Rica, Malaysia, Panama.

Community and religious leaders play a crucial role in improving the birth registration rate through awareness raising campaigns and community-based registration efforts. They play an important role in transmitting information to parents and families and in explaining procedures and access to birth registration services. The examples below describe effective awareness-raising and provision of information on birth registration to refugee communities.

★ The examples of Jordan, Pakistan and Sudan:
Increasing awareness on birth registration among refugee communities

In **Jordan**, as in most countries in MENA, the national birth registration rate is almost 100 %. However, staff noted a low rate of awareness among refugee and asylum-seeking parents on the importance of birth registration. To ensure that refugees had the information they needed, information leaflets on birth registration were developed and distributed to refugees by UNHCR, in partnership with UNICEF. The leaflets are produced in Arabic using simple language and helpful visuals, making them more user-friendly. The leaflets clearly outline the types of documents required to register a child. The leaflets are distributed in camps and urban areas when refugees approach UNHCR and partners for information, services or assistance.

In **Pakistan**, the national birth registration rate is 27%, one of the lowest in Asia. Awareness on birth registration is low, especially among Afghan refugee communities. In 2013, the government agreed to issue refugee ID cards to Afghan refugees and to register children at birth. Following this agreement, a mass information campaign on birth registration was conducted through radio and community meetings were conducted by UNHCR and partners targeting refugees in camp settings in particular.

Between 2013 and 2014 in **Eastern Sudan**, the birth registration rate in camps increased from 40% to 70% following UNHCR's birth registration programme, implemented in partnership with the Ministries of Social Welfare and Interior as well as the judiciary. Mass awareness raising campaigns were conducted with 2,000 community members, including school children, and more than 150 community leaders, volunteers and health workers were trained on birth registration procedures. A birth registration centre was then established in Abuda refugee hospital, and in Wad Sharifey. As a direct result, over 2,000 children were successfully registered at birth without costs.

PART 4

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Birth registration is a universal right for all children under international law. Registering refugee and asylum-seeking children at birth enables children to access essential and lifesaving health services, allows them to pursue education and prevents family separation and statelessness. For UNHCR operations, the implementation of a well-designed birth registration programme supports comprehensive and durable solutions for refugees.

While important progress can be made quite quickly on birth registration of refugee children, **birth registration programming needs to be planned for in a sustainable manner to ensure results are maintened, even after the completion of a programme**. Based on the outcomes of the global study, recommendations for better birth registration programming for refugee and asylum seeking children are:

- Conduct evidence-based, strategic advocacy with governments on birth registration of refugee and asylum seeker children;
- Strengthen refugees' access to existing CRVS systems, including linkages with the health sector;
- Expand on new and existing partnerships for working on birth registration;
- Strengthen monitoring and reporting on birth registration of refugee and asylum seeker children; and
- Invest in design and implementation of birth registration activities at operation level through the allocation of appropriate staff time and budget.

These recommendations implemented together in a holistic manner can create a comprehensive birth registration programme. They are interlinked and operations will need to employ a systems approach in deciding on those priorities that are most appropriate to their country operation.

As shown in Part 3, several UNHCR operations have succeeded in increasing birth registration for refugee and asylum-seeking children through targeted advocacy with governments. **Advocacy for policy change and capacity building of governments** are sustainable solutions that ensure longer term results for children

of concern to UNHCR. Government advocacy should include key ministries involved in CRVS such as Ministries of Interior, Health and Justice. The commitments contained in the New York Declaration and the Sustainable Development Goals represent important opportunities to strengthen advocacy.

This includes advocating for governments to **undertake CRVS assessments**[34] t**o better understand needs and gaps** for refugee children accessing birth registration and the promotion of birth registration for specific groups of refugee children, including children born outside of wedlock, stateless children or children from minority and marginalised groups. Furthermore, the abolition of complex procedures, documentation requirements and fees for late registration should be a part of advocacy strategies with government counterparts.

Building and expanding existing CRVS is a cost saving option for UNHCR as well as being attractive to governments. Given the complexity of operational contexts and the remoteness of many refugee settlements, the **establishment of mobile birth registration teams** helps to build human resources and contributes to an improved civil registration system, not only for refugee and asylum-seeking children but also national children living in remote rural areas. This includes the **innovative use of technology** such as through mobile phones and online programmes for registration.

The **integration of birth registration activities within primary health services** provides another option to improve birth registration of refugee and asylum-seeking children. By supporting health facilities to create permanent registry desks or having mobile teams integrated within the health facilities, the procedure of birth registration is significantly shortened and simplified, seeing as birth notifications and birth certificates would be requested and delivered in the same location.

Support should be provided to health professionals who have an important contact with parents and are able to guide and provide information not only on the care of newborns but also on the importance of birth registration and information about procedures to achieve birth registration.

Health facilities are an important information source and information campaigns on birth registration targeting refugees could be posted in health facilities.

Moreover, strengthening cooperation with other UN agencies, such as UNICEF, and ensuring that UNHCR's persons of concern are considered when revising national birth registration systems and policies offers a low cost option and brings a stronger message to governments of UN commitment.

This report has showcased weaknesses in the data collection and reporting of UNHCR operations when it comes to birth registration. Challenges include the fact that **reporting** on the GSP indicator on birth registration is optional. It is recommended to use existing data collection in proGres to gather data on birth registration and updated during subsequent interaction, such as renewals of certificates or protection interviews. This can be done during initial registration where refugees are asked whether their children possess birth certificates and updated during subsequent interaction, such as renewals of certificates or protection interviews. Accurate data in proGres is a foundation for the effective development of birth registration programming in UNHCR operations and can support advocacy efforts with governments and as well as providing a strong base for funding requests for birth registration programming.

Ongoing **monitoring of birth registration** globally is encouraged. The annual GSP report on birth registration presents an opportunity to engage country operations and encourage them to report on this indicator. The GSP indicator is a population based indicator and close government cooperation and access

[34] Among the 108 countries studied, only 15 countries (14 %) have undertaken a Civil Registration and Vital Statistics assessment. Most of these are African countries (10 out of the 15).

to CRVS data has the potential of providing the most accurate figures and complement proGres data gathered during continuous registration.

The 10 year #Ibelong campaign offers another opportunity to build better internal monitoring of birth registration. With *Action 7: Ensure Birth Registration for the Prevention of Statelessness*, increased focus has been put on the importance of birth registration.

Improving birth registration for refugee and asylum-seeking children requires prioritization and a well-defined and managed programme. **Allocation of dedicated and skilled staff and staff time to birth registration programming is highly recommended.** When designing a programme for birth registration, funding allocation must be considered in the longer term. Advocacy with government counterparts is a longer-term process and important gains can be lost if funding and staff levels are not sustained.

Funding allocation to birth registration should focus on capacity building and cooperation with civil registration authorities, including through mobile teams or to support the development of innovative technology to support registration in remote areas. UNHCR has traditionally allocated funds to late registration and costly court procedures for complex cases. This reactive approach has not proved to be cost effective or efficient but will need to be sustained until advocacy with governments yields positive results.

Awareness raising with communities on the importance of birth registration plays an important part in any birth registration programme. Communities need to be supported in both accessing and understanding the importance of registering their children's births.

As has been shown extensively through this report, UNHCR operations have numerous good experiences and results achieved in their work. It is therefore recommended to **expand on the sharing of good practices on birth registration of refugee children** and to support and encourage other operations to make birth registration a priority.

The gathering of good practices strengthens the evidence base for UNHCR's engagement on birth registration and can guide operations towards more effective programming. It can also serve as an advocacy tool with national authorities and increase awareness with donors and partners on birth registration and refugee children. A collection of good practices can also serve as a foundation for the development of training material for UNHCR staff, government counterparts, implementing partners and communities alike. Having a regional and/or global approach to capacity building ensures consistency and complementarity, providing UNHCR with a stronger foundation to advocate with governments for the universal birth registration of all children of concern.

Achieving every child's right to birth registration lies at the core of UNHCR's protection mandate. This report has highlighted some of the key obstacles UNHCR operations are facing on daily basis as well as the remarkable work they do to overcome them. The report has gathered global good practices and recommendations which encourage operations to place a higher priority on Birth Registration programming. This means development of close partnerships with government counterparts, NGOs, UN agencies as well as refugee and IDP communities themselves. It also includes accurate targeted data gathering and allocation of adequate financial and human resources.

ANNEXES

Specific external regional challenges on birth registration of refugee and asylum seeker children and countries concerned, as reported by UNHCR staff at operations level

AFRICA

Weak civil registration system

Angola	Ethiopia	Liberia	South Sudan	Tanzania
CAR	Guinea	Mozambique	Sudan	Zambia
DRC	Gambia	Nigeria	Uganda	Zimbabwe

Low levels of birth registration at national level (below 50%)[35]

Angola	Guinea	Liberia	Nigeria	Uganda	Zambia
Ethiopia	Gambia	Mozambique	South Sudan	Tanzania	Zimbabwe

Absence of functioning civil registration system

Ethiopia

Refugee and asylum seeker children cannot get birth certificates

Angola	Chad (Sudanese refugees)	Somalia
		Tanzania

Refugee children issued with a "short" birth certificate by authorities which is different from the official "long" birth certificate

Uganda

UNHCR supports all costs related to issuance and delivery of birth certificates (sustainability issue)

Chad DRC

Limited capacity of government

All

Irregular practices

Cameroon	Congo Republic	DRC	Nigeria

Lack of awareness of populations

All

Distance to civil registry offices

All

No late registration system

Djibouti

Backlog of unregistered children due to interruption of birth registration for years

Rwanda

Children born outside health facilities

All

Ongoing conflicts

CAR DRC Sudan

ASIA

Low level of birth registration at national level (below 60%)[36]

Afghanistan Bangladesh India Nepal Pakistan

Refugee and asylum seeker children cannot get birth certificates

Afghanistan Indonesia Iran South Korea

Different type of birth certificate for refugee children

Malaysia

Lack of official recognition of refugees

Myanmar Malaysia

Link between birth certificate and citizenship

Malaysia Turkmenistan

Discrimination against specific refugee communities or against refugees in general

Bangladesh Myanmar Malaysia Nepal

Loss or confiscation of ID documents

Kazakhstan

Legal permit residence required

Kyrgyzstan

Children born outside of health facilities

India Indonesia

Late registration not possible after age 5

Pakistan

AMERICAS

Lack of specific data on birth registration of refugee and asylum seeker children

All

Pockets of unregistered refugee children in border areas

Costa Rica Mexico Panama

Difficulties for asylum seekers to register their children

Venezuela

Capacity of authorities to function with increasing number of refugees

Mexico

Irregular practices

Haiti

MENA

Link between marriage certificate and birth certificate (proof of marriage required) – major issue if husband not present, children born out of wedlock, including after « SGBV, informal marriage, temporary marriage, early marriage, mixed marriage

All, except
Mauritania

Multiple steps to get birth certificate (birth notification, signed birth certificate document from the Mukhtar, birth certificate registered at civil registry office) (3 steps)

All, except
Mauritania

Refugee or asylum seeker children cannot get birth certificates

Mauritania Israel

Confiscation of identity documents

Jordan Lebanon Iraq

False identity documents of parents

Jordan

Low level of birth registration at national level (below 60%)

Yemen Mauritania

Lack of awareness of populations

Yemen

Fear of approaching authorities

Jordan Iraq Yemen

Children born outside health facilities

Yemen

Legal residence permit required to obtain birth certificate

UAE

High number of unregistered Syrian children entering countries of asylum

Lebanon Jordan Iraq

[35] Source: Statistical table from UNICEF, Every Child's Birth Right. *Inequities and trends in birth registration*, UNICEF, New-York, 2013, pp. 40-43.

[36] Source: Statistical table from UNICEF, Every Child's Birth Right. *Inequities and trends in birth registration*, UNICEF, New-York, 2013, pp. 40-43.

Expensive late registration fees

Lebanon

Ongoing conflicts

Syria | Iraq | Yemen

EUROPE (NON-EU COUNTRIES)

Lack or loss of ID documents

Armenia | FYR Macedonia | Georgia | Serbia

Low registration levels of minority refugee groups (invisible Roma)

Bosnia and Herzegovina | Croatia | Kosovo | Serbia

Impediment in registering the birth of children born to underage parents

Bosnia and Herzegovina | Croatia | Kosovo | Serbia

Births outside health facilities

Bosnia

Expensive late registration fees

Kosovo

Capacity of authorities to function with increasing number of refugees

Turkey

No access to data on birth registration of refugee children (Syrian children in camps)

Turkey

Late registration procedures not well defined

Montenegro

EU+ COUNTRIES

Lack of specific data on birth registration of refugee and asylum seeker children

All

Pockets of population without legal residence permit afraid of registering with authorities

The Netherlands | France

Different type of birth certificate delivered to children without documentation

Switzerland

Table 2: Type of documents requested to obtain birth certificates in Major refugee hosting countries by region.

Region	Country	Documents requested for birth registration						
		Birth notification	Parents' ID documents	Vaccination card	Marriage certificate	Residency permit	Refugee card or letter from admin	Muktar's signed document
Africa	DR Congo, Niger, Sudan	✓	✓					
	Botswana, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, Tanzania	✓						
	Cameroon		✓		✓			
	Chad	✓	✓		✓			
	Ethiopia	✓					✓	
	Liberia	✓		✓				
	Uganda	✓						
Asia	Afghanistan, India, Iran, Nepal	✓	✓					
	Bangladesh							
	Indonesia	✓	✓			✓		
	Malaysia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Sri Lanka	✓	✓		✓			
	Tajikistan, Thailand	✓	✓					
MENA	Egypt, Iraq	✓	✓		✓			
	Israel	✓	✓					
	Jordan	✓			✓			✓
	Lebanon	✓	✓		✓			✓
	Mauritania	✓			✓			
	Syria	✓	✓		✓			✓
	Yemen	✓	✓		✓			
Americas	Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama, Venezuela	✓	✓					
	Mexico	✓	✓			✓		
Europe (non EU)	Bosnia and Herzegovina	✓	✓			✓		
	FYR Macedonia		✓			✓		
	Serbia	✓	✓					
	Turkey	✓						

Table 3: Costs linked to birth certificate in major refugee hosting countries by region

Region	Country	Cost of birth certificate (in USD)
Africa	Burkina Faso	1
	Burundi	2.50
	CAR, Chad, Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Rwanda, Somalia	Free
	DRC	10
	Eritrea	10
	Ethiopia	15
	Kenya	0 to 2.50
	Liberia	6
	Senegal	0.50
	Sudan	3
	Tanzania	0.20
	Uganda	2
	Zimbabwe	10
Asia	Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Thailand	Free
	Indonesia	5
	Iran	1
	Myanmar	Unknown
	Pakistan	4
	Philippines	2 to 4
	Tajikistan	2
MENA	Egypt	2
	Iraq	8
	Israel, Syria	Free
	Jordan	1.50
	Lebanon	1
	Mauritania	3
	Yemen	3
Americas	Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Panama, Venezuela	Free
	Guatemala	2
	Mexico	4.50 to 13.50
Europe (non-EU)	Bosnia and Herzegovina	2.50
	FYR Macedonia	3
	Kosovo	2.25
	Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey	Free

Table 4: Late registration costs for refugee children in Major Refugee Hosting Countries by Region (in USD)

Region	Country	Costs for late registration (in USD)
Africa	Burundi	6 to 19
	Cameroon	169
	Congo Republic	60
	DRC	20
	Ethiopia	15
	Kenya	1.50
	Liberia	0.50
	Niger	3 to 20
	Rwanda	36
	Somalia	10
Asia	Bangladesh	0.65
	Iran	5
	Malaysia	Unknown
	Nepal	0.5
	Pakistan	Unknown
	Thailand	0.5
MENA	Egypt	10
	Iraq	Unknown
	Jordan	16
	Lebanon	2,000
	Mauritania	3
Americas	Brazil	Unknown
	Colombia	Unknown
	Costa Rica	Unknown
	Mexico	Unknown
Europe (non-EU)	Bosnia and Herzegovina	6
	FYR Macedonia	5
	Georgia	0
	Turkey	Unknown

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