



The Right Start in Life: Global levels and trends in birth registration 2024 update



"I have seven children. My firstborn was lucky enough to get her birth certificate with the help of a friend, as she needed one to enter college. I was not able to help her. All of my children deserve to have a birth certificate. It is always nagging on my mind how I will be able to make sure they all eventually have one."

Rehema, a mother of seven children, shared her story outside the district hospital in a town in central United Republic of Tanzania, where the youngest of her children, aged 6 months, was undergoing one of her regular check-ups.

"I couldn't afford the cost and process of getting birth certificates for my children. We have financial issues and, although I know it is important, it simply was not a priority."

Rehema read about a birth registration initiative on a poster at her local health centre. At the event, she was able to get two more of her children, both under the age of 5, registered.

"I read about the campaign of issuing birth certificates for free. This made me happy, so I made sure I attended the launch event. It was quite an easy process. I took along all the information of my children on the registration card, and within a short time I received the birth certificates, there and then. I really would like to advise other women across the country to take the opportunity to get birth certificates for their kids. In the past we had to pay for them, but now they're available for free. I understand that birth certificates are very important. Without one, your kids will never move on and they will have difficulties in their lifetime."





Over 500 million children under 5 have had their births registered in the last five years, reflecting notable strides worldwide. While such progress is to be celebrated, it also draws attention to the 150 million children who remain unregistered.

Many families like Rehema's continue to face significant barriers to birth registration for their children – from unaffordable costs to a lack of understanding about its value in ensuring lifelong protection and facilitating access to all other rights.

Society first acknowledges a child's existence and identity through birth registration. A birth certificate is proof of that legal identity and is the basis upon which children can establish a nationality, avoid the risk of statelessness, and seek protection from violence and exploitation. For example, possession of a birth certificate can help prevent child labour, child marriage and underage recruitment into the armed forces since it enables verification of a child's age. A birth certificate may also be required to access services in areas including health, education and justice.

The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015 placed birth registration firmly on the

international development agenda. The SDGs include a dedicated target (16.9) under Goal 16 – namely, to provide legal identity for all, including birth registration, by 2030. Complementing this is target 17.9, which calls for support in building the statistical capacity needed for strong national civil registration systems. Such systems produce vital statistics, which are foundational for achieving sustained human and economic development.

This publication draws from more than 500 data sources spanning a period of more than 20 years to present updated global and regional estimates of the number of unregistered children under age 5 and under age 1. The report also includes estimates on children and infants without birth certificates, both globally and across regions. In addition, it assesses progress over time and presents evidence for the amount of effort that will be needed – at both global and regional levels – to ensure that all children have a legal identity.



THE PROCESS OF BIRTH REGISTRATION



LEGAL IDENTITY is operationally defined as the basic characteristics comprising an individual's identity, including name, sex and date of birth. The primary vehicle for obtaining a legal identity is through the birth registration process.

BIRTH REGISTRATION is the official recording of the occurrence and characteristics of a birth by the civil registrar within the civil registry, in accordance with the legal requirements of a country. This establishes the existence of a person under the law and provides legal proof of his or her identity.

BIRTH CERTIFICATE is a vital record, issued by the civil registrar, that documents the birth of a child. Because it is a certified extract from the birth registration record, it proves that registration has occurred – making this document the first, and often only, proof of legal identity, particularly for children.

CIVIL REGISTRARS are the officials authorized by law to carry out the registration of vital events, including births, within a well-defined area (such as a country or district) and for recording and reporting information on those vital events for legal and statistical purposes.

SELECTED MILESTONES IN ADVANCING BIRTH REGISTRATION SINCE THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

MAY 2002

General Assembly resolution 'A World Fit for Children' reaffirms governments' commitment to ensure the registration of all children at birth.

SEPTEMBER 2006

The Committee on the Rights of the Child addresses the issue of birth registration and formulates standards in its General Comment No. 7 on implementing child rights in early childhood.

SEPTEMBER 2012

The Second Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration is held in Durban, South Africa. It leads to a strong resolution by ministers calling for reform of national civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems across the continent. This commitment is translated into a programme and policy document, *Africa Programme for Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (APAI-CRVS)*.

NOVEMBER 2014

The Asian and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Decade (2015-2024) is proclaimed at the Ministerial Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Asia and the Pacific held in Bangkok, Thailand. The ministerial meeting culminates in the adoption of a ministerial declaration to 'Get Every One in the Picture', committing governments in the region to focus efforts on improving CRVS systems.

SEPTEMBER 2015

The Sustainable Development Goals are adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, placing birth registration on the international development agenda with the inclusion of a dedicated target under Goal 16: By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration.

Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, a strategic framework for the social and economic transformation of Africa, is adopted. It lays out seven aspirations for shared prosperity and well-being, unity and integration. The 2040 Africa We Want elaborates on the vision outlined by Agenda 2063. It contains 10 aspirations and a corresponding set of goals to nurture and nourish the children of Africa by 2040. Specifically, Aspiration 3 states that every child's birth and other vital events are registered.

SEPTEMBER 2018

The time-bound inter-agency UN Legal Identity Expert Group in support of the UN Legal Identity Agenda 2020-2030 is established. This Agenda is formulated in response to a request by the United Nations Secretary-General to UN agencies to develop a common approach to the broader issue of civil registration and legal identity in support of the SDG promise to leave no one behind. The expert group is taking a unified approach to legal identity, starting from birth, across the UN system. It is also providing support to UN Member States to strengthen national civil registration, vital statistics and identity management systems based on international standards and good practices.

APRIL 2023

The Human Rights Council adopts resolution A/HERC/RES/52/25 reiterating the importance of universal, accessible and non-discriminatory birth registration to prevent exclusion and protect against statelessness. The resolution encourages legal and administrative reforms to remove barriers to registration and improve accessibility, including leveraging health and social protection systems to boost registration coverage.

IMPROVING THE AVAILABILITY AND QUALITY OF BIRTH REGISTRATION DATA: PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES

The SDG target of a legal identity for all, including birth registration, by 2030 is measured by indicator 16.9.1: the proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority. The primary sources for such data are vital statistics drawn from civil registration systems, national censuses and household surveys, including those implemented as part of international survey programmes, such as the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS).

Functioning civil registration systems are the main vehicles through which a legal identity for all – and SDG target 16.9 – can be achieved. Effective civil registration systems compile vital statistics that are used to compare the estimated total number of births in a country with the absolute number of registered births during a given period. However, the systematic recording of births in many countries remains a serious challenge, highlighting the urgent need to improve and strengthen CRVS.

While data coverage has improved over time, this has largely been the result of investment in data collection on birth registration in low- and middle-income countries through household surveys. In fact, in the absence of reliable administrative records, household surveys have become a key source of data to monitor levels and trends in birth registration. This said, it is important to note that estimates obtained through surveys are highly sensitive to the way in which questions are formulated. This is especially true of questions regarding the civil authorities in charge of recording births. Respondents may not always be clear on who these authorities are and may misinterpret notifying a church or village chief of a birth as formal registration. Household surveys generally customize questionnaires by naming the specific national authority responsible for registration. But even then, confusion about the birth registration process may persist. Similarly, questions regarding the possession of a birth certificate might also be misinterpreted since respondents may confuse a birth certificate with a health or vaccination card or other document. To minimize the risk of misreporting, in some household surveys, interviewers who administer the questionnaire ask respondents to show the birth certificate. For these reasons, the data on registration and possession of birth certificates obtained via caregiver reports need to be interpreted with a degree of caution.



WHERE WE STAND TODAY: UNDER-FIVE REGISTRATION AND CERTIFICATION

THE WORLD IS HOME TO OVER 200 MILLION CHILDREN UNDER 5 WITHOUT A BIRTH CERTIFICATE: THIS INCLUDES 150 MILLION UNREGISTERED CHILDREN AND 55 MILLION CHILDREN WHOSE BIRTHS ARE REPORTED AS REGISTERED BUT WHO LACK PROOF IN THE FORM OF A BIRTH CERTIFICATE

THE BIRTHS OF AROUND 2 IN 10 OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN ARE NOT REGISTERED; 3 IN 10 CHILDREN LACK A BIRTH CERTIFICATE

Fig.1: Percentage distribution of children under age 5, by registration status and region

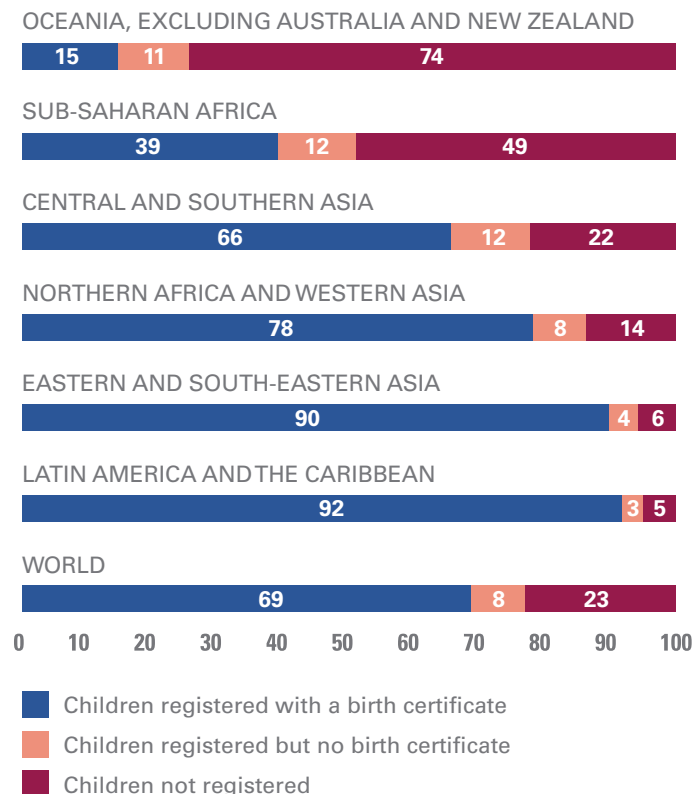
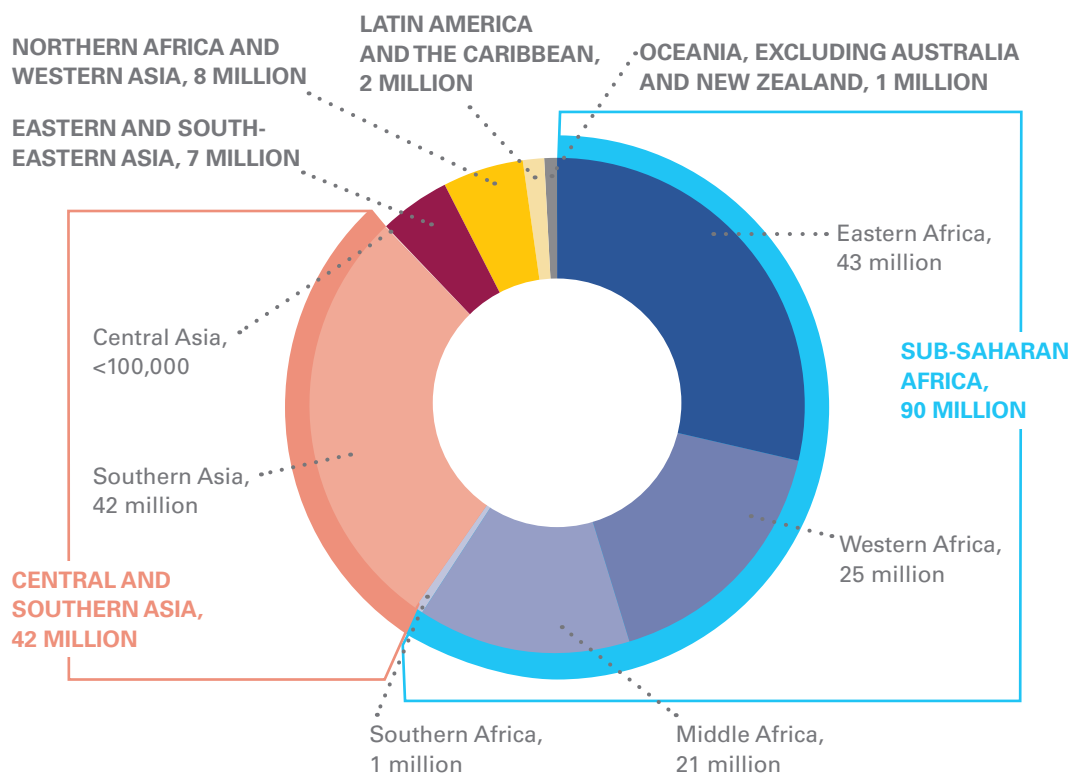


Fig. 2: Number of children under age 5 whose births are not registered, by region

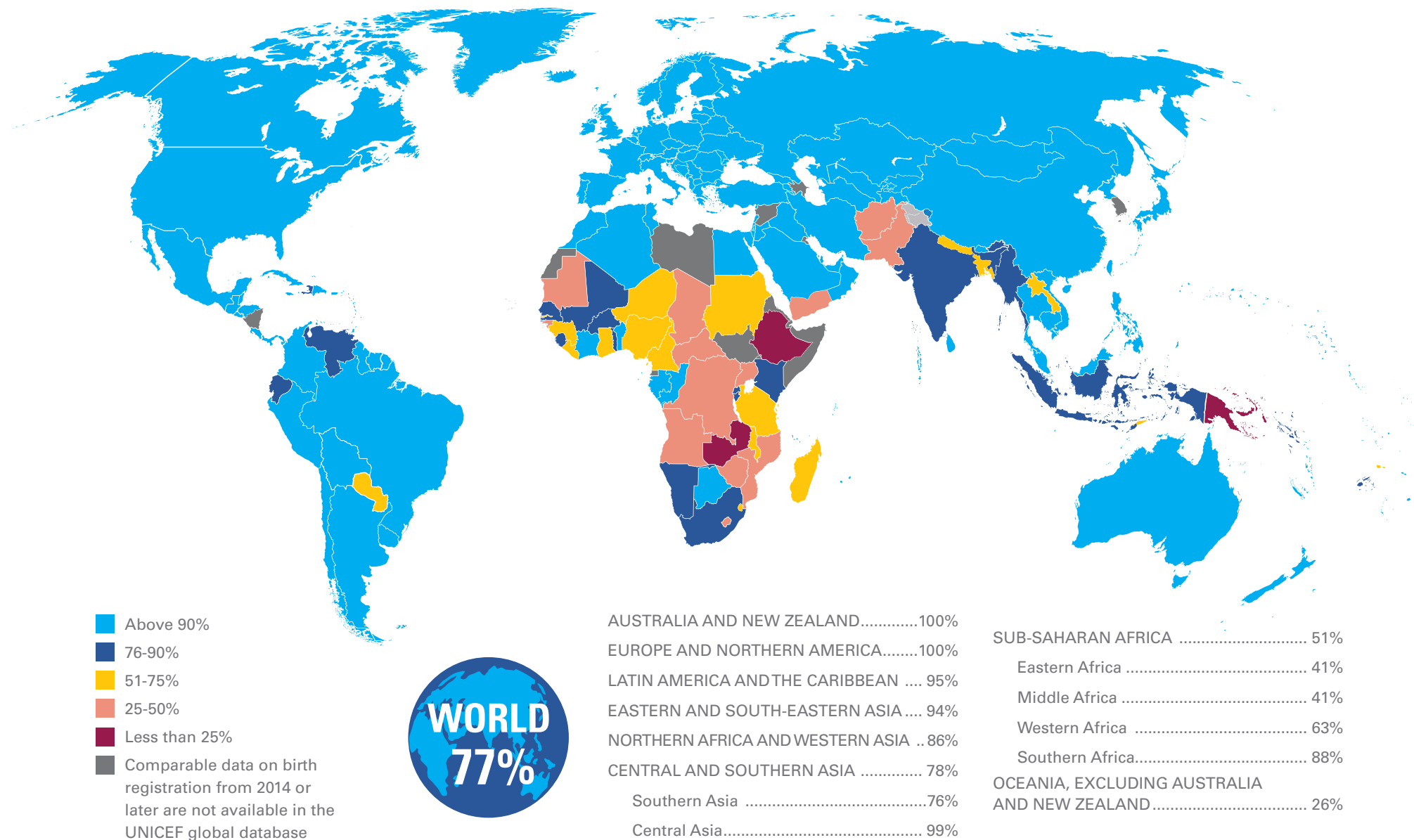


OF ALL UNREGISTERED CHILDREN WORLDWIDE, MORE THAN HALF (90 MILLION) LIVE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Note: In the regions of Europe and Northern America and Australia and New Zealand, 100 per cent of children are estimated to be registered with a birth certificate on the basis of civil registration coverage.

COUNTRIES WITH THE LOWEST LEVELS OF BIRTH REGISTRATION ARE PRIMARILY IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Fig. 3: Percentage of children under age 5 whose births are registered



Note: Refer to the Technical Notes for map disclaimer and footnotes on country data.

WHERE WE STAND TODAY: UNDER-ONE REGISTRATION AND CERTIFICATION

TODAY, 53 MILLION INFANTS LACK A BIRTH CERTIFICATE: THIS INCLUDES 37 MILLION BABIES WHO ARE UNREGISTERED AND 16 MILLION WHOSE BIRTHS ARE REPORTED AS REGISTERED BUT WHO LACK PROOF IN THE FORM OF A BIRTH CERTIFICATE

NEARLY 3 IN 10 INFANTS WORLDWIDE HAVE NOT BEEN REGISTERED; 4 IN 10 INFANTS DO NOT POSSESS A BIRTH CERTIFICATE

Fig. 4: Percentage distribution of infants under age 1, by registration status and region

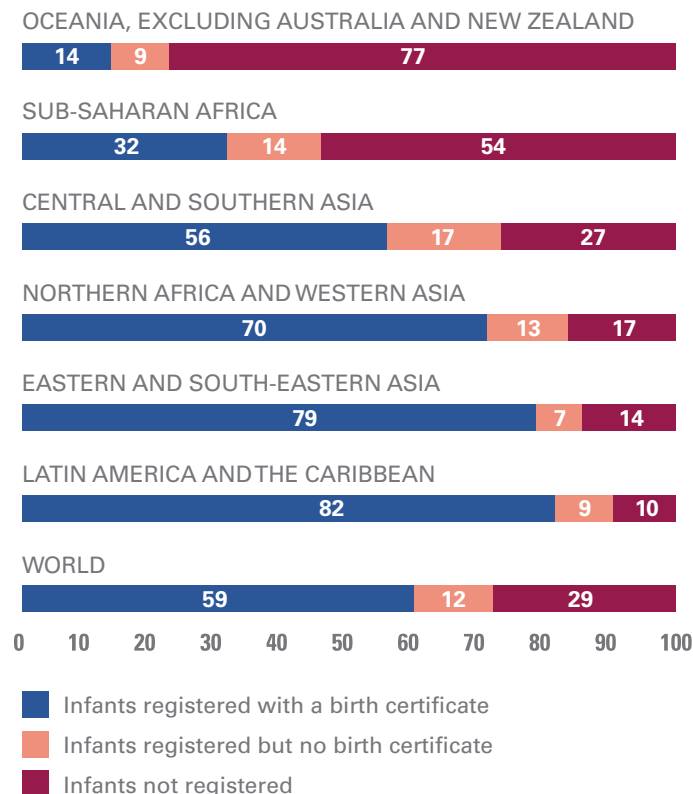
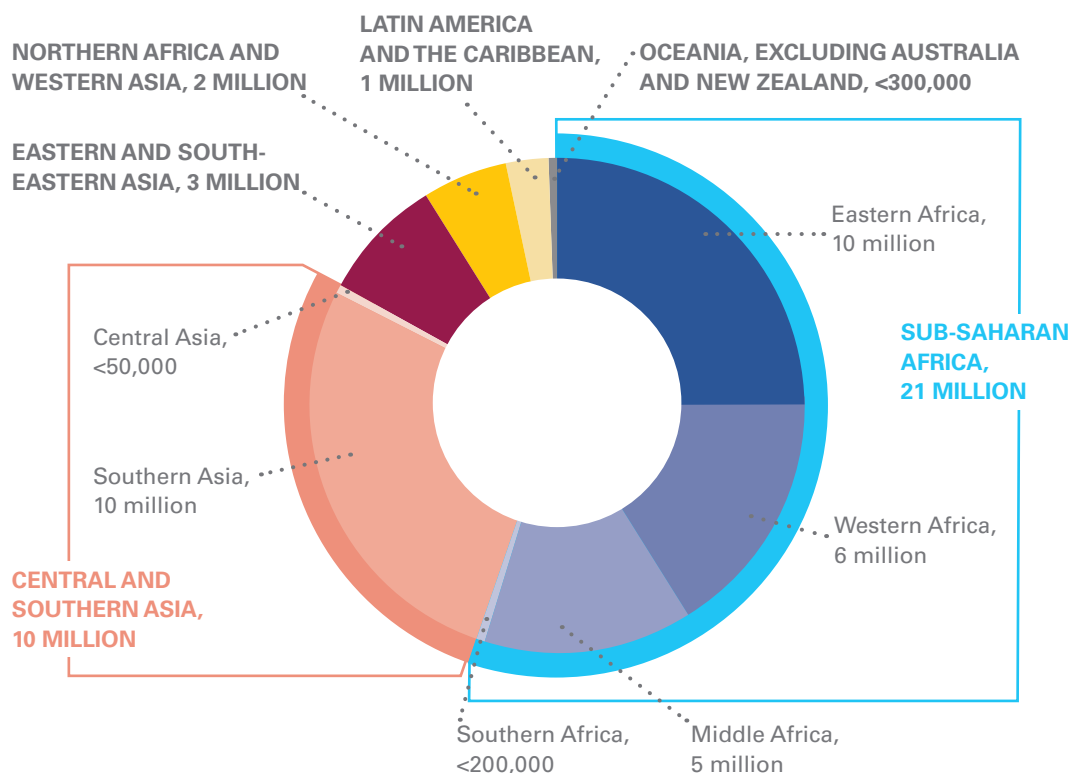


Fig. 5: Number of infants under age 1 whose births are not registered, by region

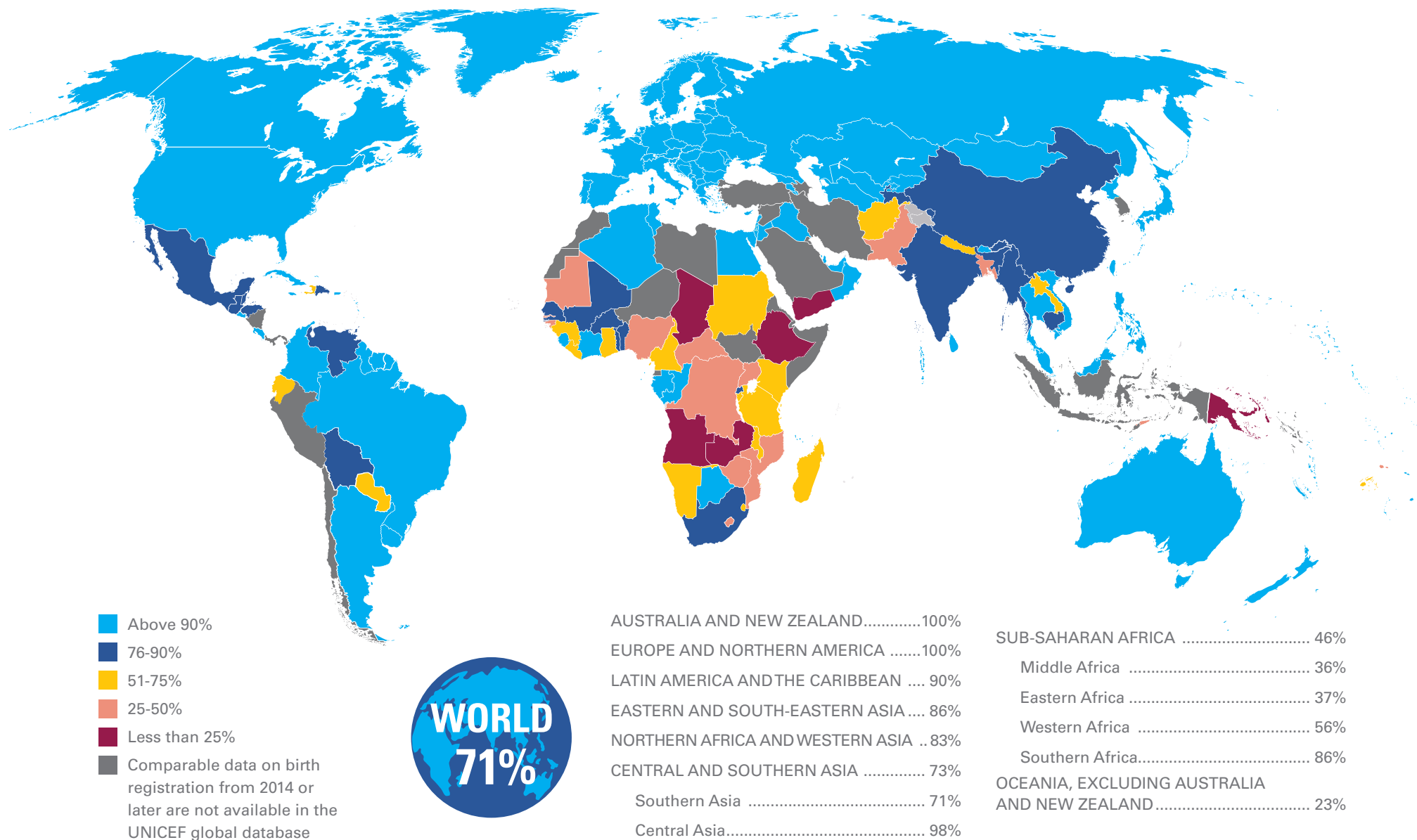


MORE THAN 8 IN 10 UNREGISTERED INFANTS LIVE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA AND SOUTHERN ASIA

Notes: In the regions of Europe and Northern America and Australia and New Zealand, 100 per cent of children are estimated to be registered with a birth certificate on the basis of civil registration coverage. The totals for some regions do not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

COUNTRIES IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA AND SOUTHERN ASIA HAVE THE LOWEST LEVELS OF BIRTH REGISTRATION AMONG INFANTS

Fig. 6: Percentage of infants under age 1 whose births are registered



Note: Refer to the Technical Notes for map disclaimer and footnotes on country data.





BARRIERS AND DISPARITIES

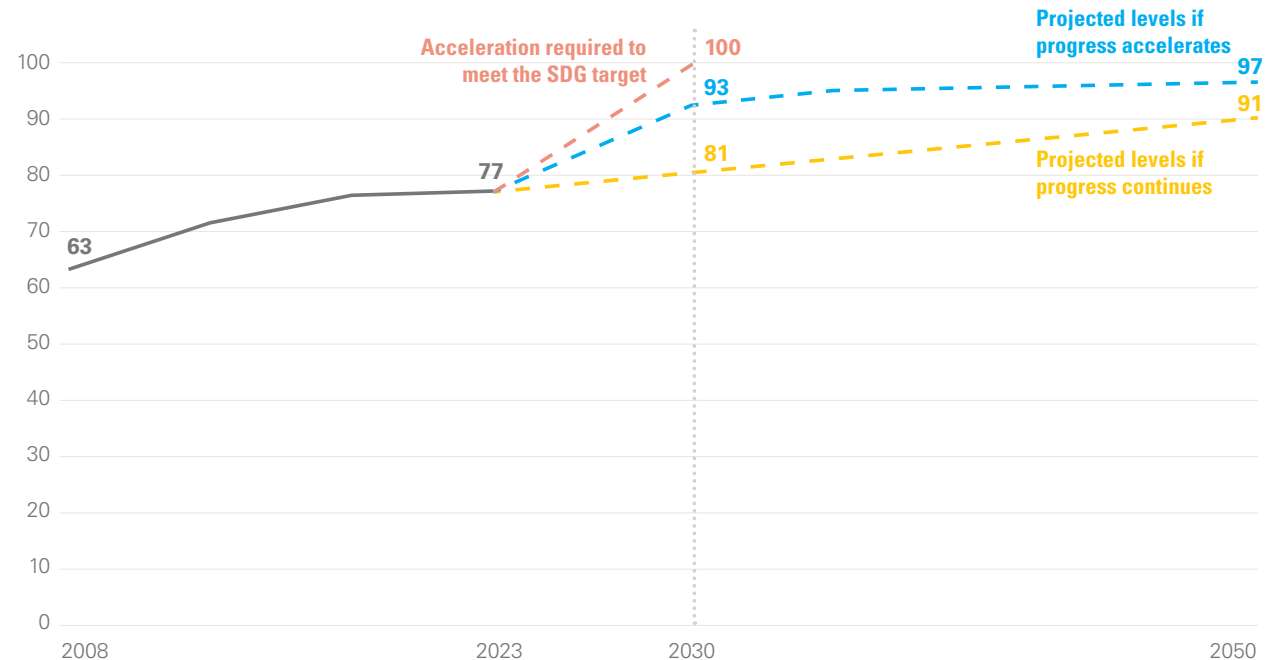
- ◆ Lack of knowledge about the registration process continues to be an obstacle to progress in many places. In the 51 countries with available data, a majority (53 per cent) of mothers/caregivers of unregistered children say they lack knowledge of how to register a child's birth. The other half (47 per cent) of mothers/caregivers are aware of the birth registration process, suggesting other barriers to registration.
- ◆ Evidence also reveals disparities in birth registration based on a mother's education. Globally, 83 per cent of children under age 5 whose mothers have at least a secondary education have their births registered compared to 66 per cent of children whose mothers have no education.
- ◆ No region shows significant differences between boys and girls in the prevalence of birth registration. Gender parity in birth registration has been achieved in practically all countries with available data. Gender inequality, however, might still impact registration. For example, in some countries, single mothers, mothers who have not registered their marriage or mothers without a marriage certificate may not be allowed to register the birth of their children.
- ◆ Children from the poorest households are less likely than their richest counterparts to have their births registered. Even in countries where there are no fees for birth registration, there are often opportunity costs, including those related to travel, that are difficult to measure but can directly affect registration levels. Globally, children from the poorest 20 per cent of households are one quarter less likely to have their births registered than children from the richest 20 per cent of households. This gap is especially pronounced in some regions: In sub-Saharan Africa, children in the poorest quintile are half as likely to have their births registered as those in the richest quintile. In Southern Asia, 87 per cent of children under age 5 from the richest quintile have their births registered compared to 64 per cent of those from the poorest quintile.
- ◆ Globally, children living in urban areas are around 30 per cent more likely to be registered than their rural counterparts. Targeted campaigns in rural areas aimed at boosting levels of birth registration may partly explain why a clear urban advantage is not systematically seen across all countries.

ASSESSING PROGRESS AND LOOKING AHEAD

Over the last 15 years, the world has seen a steady increase in birth registration levels. Advances have also been made to close the gap between the poorest and richest children, most significantly in Central and Southern Asia. There, the poorest children were over 2.5 times less likely to be registered around 2008 compared to about 1.5 times today. But progress has slowed over the last decade, and would need to be 5 times faster than it has been over the last decade for the world to achieve the SDG target of universal birth registration by 2030.

WHILE BIRTH REGISTRATION LEVELS HAVE BEEN STEADILY INCREASING WORLDWIDE, PROGRESS HAS SLOWED OVER THE LAST DECADE, THREATENING THE PROMISE OF UNIVERSAL REGISTRATION BY 2030

Fig. 7: Percentage of children under age 5 whose births are registered, observed and projected



HOW TO READ THE PROJECTIONS

The projection scenarios build on existing trends. They show expected levels of birth registration in the future if different conditions are met:

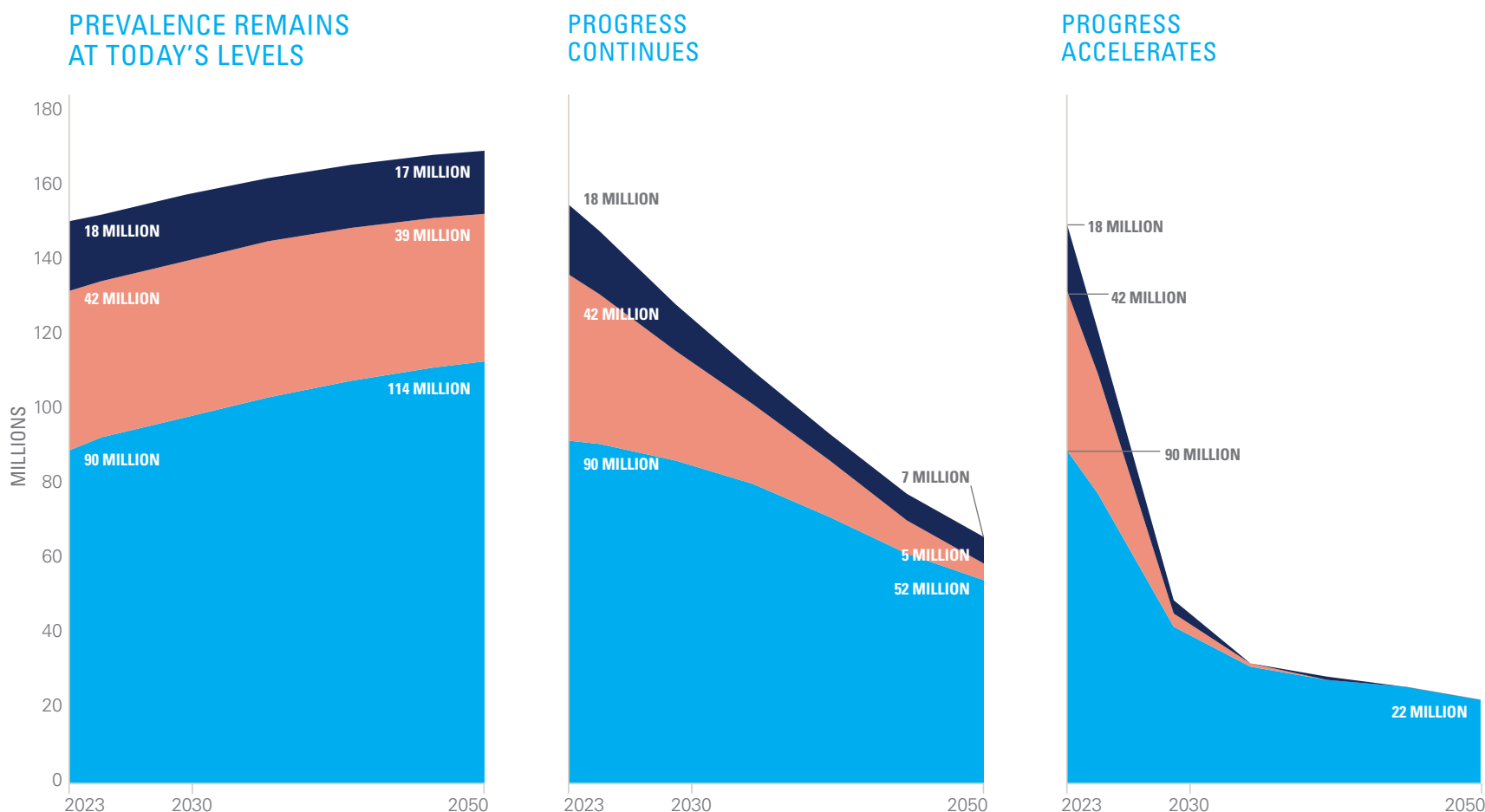
- **Progress continues:** This scenario shows what could happen if all countries with increasing levels of birth registration continue to progress at the same pace, and all countries with flat or declining levels of birth registration remain stable.
- **Progress accelerates:** This scenario shows what could happen if all countries with increasing levels of birth registration accelerate to match the pace seen in the top 10 percentile of countries, and all countries with flat or declining levels of birth registration accelerate to meet the average pace.
- **Acceleration required to meet the SDG target:** This scenario shows the progress that is required to meet universal birth registration by the 2030 target.

The first two scenarios take into account a slowing effect as countries near universal coverage of birth registration, in light of the observed challenges in completing 'the last mile'.

THE TOTAL NUMBER OF UNREGISTERED CHILDREN IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA COULD SURPASS 100 MILLION AFTER 2030 IF PREVALENCE LEVELS REMAIN AS THEY ARE TODAY. WITH SUSTAINED PROGRESS, THE REGION COULD CUT THE NUMBER OF UNREGISTERED CHILDREN IN 2050 BY NEARLY HALF; ACCELERATED PROGRESS COULD MEAN 68 MILLION FEWER UNREGISTERED CHILDREN THAN THERE ARE TODAY

Fig. 8: Number of children under age 5 whose births are not registered, observed and projected

■ Sub-Saharan Africa ■ Central and Southern Asia ■ Rest of the world



SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Over the last 15 years, sub-Saharan Africa has made slow, but steady, advances to improve the level of birth registration. Considering the population growth witnessed in the region casts improvements in birth registration in an especially positive light. The births of millions of children have been registered, reaching a growing share of the under-five population even as the total size of such population has rapidly grown.

Three policy-driven, evidence-based strategies — interoperability, decentralization and digitalization—have advanced birth registration by embedding it within essential public services, making the process routine and more accessible for families. Since 2010, these strategies have been supported across Conferences of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration, making them core strategies for the development of civil registration and vital statistics on the continent. Underpinning these strategies is the fundamental right of every child to an identity, as enshrined in Article 6 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

Among subregions, Western Africa has witnessed the strongest progress over a 15-year period. The region has its share of success stories. In **Côte d'Ivoire**, birth registration prevalence rose steadily from 65 per cent in 2012 to 96 per cent by 2021,

although still only around half of children under 5 possess a birth certificate. This acceleration reflects a targeted initiative to integrate birth registration into maternal and newborn health-care services, including immunization, thereby facilitating birth registration in public health facilities. A 2017 Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministries of Health, Justice and Interior and the enactment of a law in 2018 on civil registration are also contributing factors.

Sierra Leone registered a sharp increase in birth registration levels from just over 50 per cent in 2008 to nearly 80 per cent in 2010, reaching 90 per cent in 2019. The Ministry of Health played a pivotal role in these improvements by signing a Memorandum of Understanding in 2018 with the National Civil Registration Authority, which mandated health officials to register births occurring in public health facilities. Since then, the Ministry has expanded the number of facilities offering birth registration services from 1,123 in 2018 to 1,459 in 2020. Concurrently, the National Civil Registration Authority's decentralization strategy has significantly expanded its presence with 17 offices nationwide by 2024.

After a prolonged period of little change, signs of progress are appearing in Eastern Africa. In **Rwanda**, birth registration among

children under 5 remained stable between 2000 and 2015, with around 60 per cent of children registered, and reached over 80 per cent in 2020. This significant rise is attributable to the decentralization of services to health facilities and cell offices and the implementation of a robust legal framework. The enactment of Law 32/2016 and its amendment in 2020 further decentralized birth registration responsibilities to health facility staff and cell office secretaries. The introduction of the National Centralized and Integrated Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System allowed for electronic registration of vital events, including births. This has streamlined the process, with over 600 health facilities, 2,148 cells and 416 sector offices now offering real-time registration services.

Levels of birth registration in the **United Republic of Tanzania** rose from around 10 per cent in 1999 to 26 per cent in 2016; subsequently, the country more than doubled birth registration prevalence to over 60 per cent in 2022. The Government's Registration Insolvency Trusteeship Agency made civil registration processes more accessible and affordable through a decentralized 'one-stop' process. The country's Simplified Birth Registration System allows parents to register births, get their children immunized, and access nutrition services in a single visit to local health facilities and community ward executive offices. The system is now

operating in all 26 regions of the country's mainland, increasing registration points from 97 in 2013 to 11,376 in 2024 and addressing logistical challenges.

Burundi has one of the highest levels of birth registration in the subregion (over 80 per cent as of 2017). Recent developments include the temporary removal of the requirement of provincial authorization and payment of fees in the case of late registration. Further, a joint ministerial decree and operational protocol between the Ministries of Interior and Health are further advancing efforts to improve birth registration by integrating civil registration systems with health facilities.

Southern Africa has had the highest level of birth registration among the subregions for at least 15 years. It has witnessed modest improvements over time, with some countries, such as Botswana, achieving universal birth registration in recent years.

While there has been no evidence of progress for Middle Africa as a whole, some countries in the subregion are showing signs of recovery from previous declines. For example, **Chad's** birth registration prevalence stood at just under 30 per cent in 2000 before falling to around 12 per cent in 2015; it subsequently rebounded to around 26 per cent in 2019. Reaching underserved and hard-

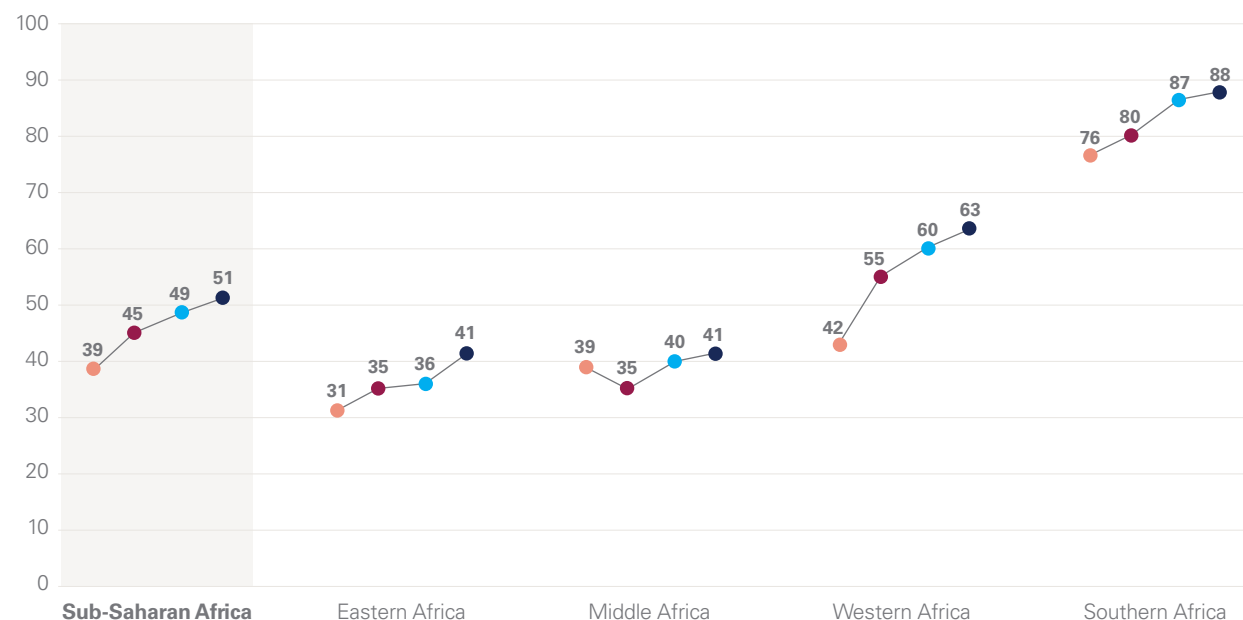
to-reach populations has been a priority in strengthening civil registration in the country. The introduction of 'Tasdjil' (Arabic for 'registration'), a comprehensive digital civil registration solution launched in 2022, has been instrumental in this effort since it operates both online and offline, ensuring accessibility in remote areas with limited or no Internet connectivity. Its flexibility enables the deployment of mobile registration units and digital access points. As of 2024, 60 per cent of provincial and district hospitals have set up 'one-stop-centres' with Tasdjil for immediate birth registration and issuance of certificates.

The **Democratic Republic of the Congo** experienced a decline in birth registration from 38 per cent in 2000 to 25 per cent in 2014, but later saw a recovery, reaching 40 per cent in 2018. The recently introduced integration of birth registration with the immunization register within the District Health Information System has demonstrated promising results. This initiative is currently being tested in four provinces where health workers digitally capture newborn registration details into the information system's platform. The civil registration offices access this information to complete the registration process and issue birth certificates at health facilities. The country aims to capitalize on routine maternal and newborn health-care services to significantly boost birth registration coverage in the coming years.

SINCE AROUND 2008, SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA HAS MADE STEADY PROGRESS IN RAISING BIRTH REGISTRATION LEVELS, WITH THE STRONGEST GAINS IN WESTERN AFRICA

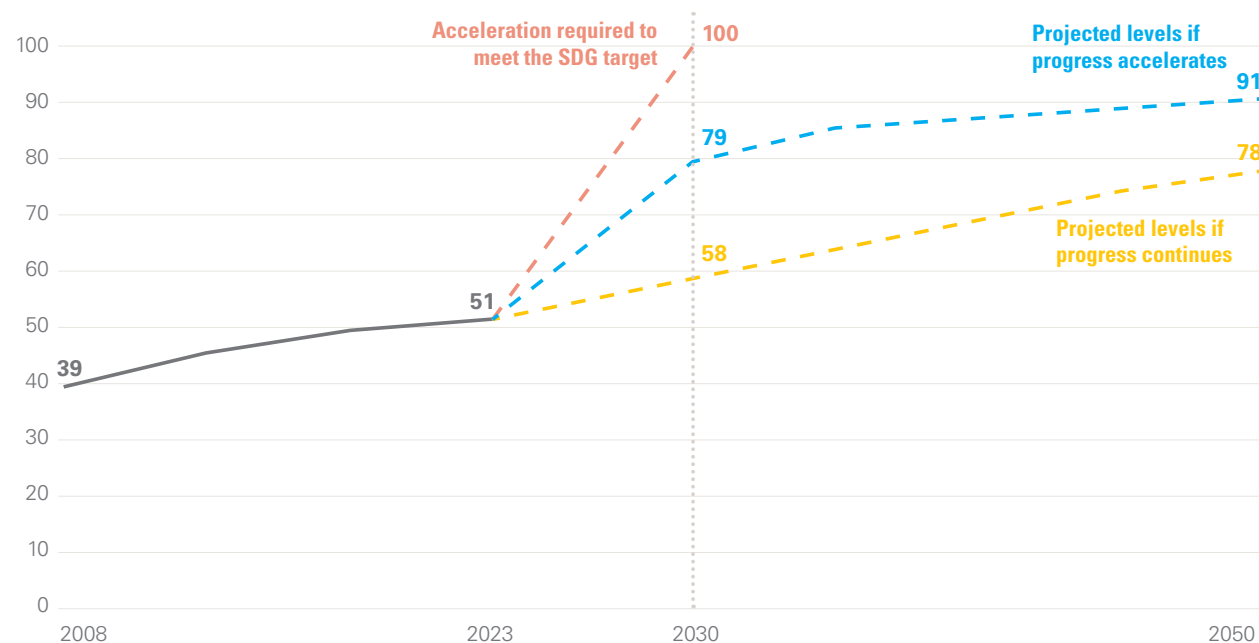
Fig. 9: Percentage of children under age 5 in sub-Saharan Africa whose births are registered

● 2008 ● 2013 ● 2018 ● 2023



DESPITE RECENT ADVANCES IN SOME PARTS OF SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA, THE SDG TARGET REMAINS OUT OF REACH. EVEN WITH ACCELERATED PROGRESS, THE PROMISE OF UNIVERSAL BIRTH REGISTRATION COULD STILL FALL SHORT IN 2050

Fig.10: Percentage of children under age 5 in sub-Saharan Africa whose births are registered, observed and projected







CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN ASIA

Since 2008, birth registration coverage has steadily increased in Central and Southern Asia – from 40 per cent 15 years ago to nearly 80 per cent today. This trend largely mirrors the progress observed in its most populous country, **India**, where several initiatives have played a crucial role in expanding coverage. The Office of the Registrar General of India maintains a countrywide database of medical facilities where births and deaths occur and is currently rolling out an updated portal jointly with state governments. National initiatives also include the computerization of the Civil Registration System, a centralized software for online and offline registration of births and deaths, and systematic capacity building of registrars in different languages. State-level efforts are ongoing to link Civil Registration System portals with national legal ID systems and social registries. A new Registration of Births and Deaths Act came into force in 2023. Other innovations to further interoperability and expand coverage include linkages with labour room digital registers. To boost demand and offset costs related to accessing services, several cash transfers are conditioned upon the family registering the birth of girls.

Some of the strongest progress witnessed in the region has been achieved by **Bangladesh**, which saw no significant change in birth registration levels until a dramatic rise after

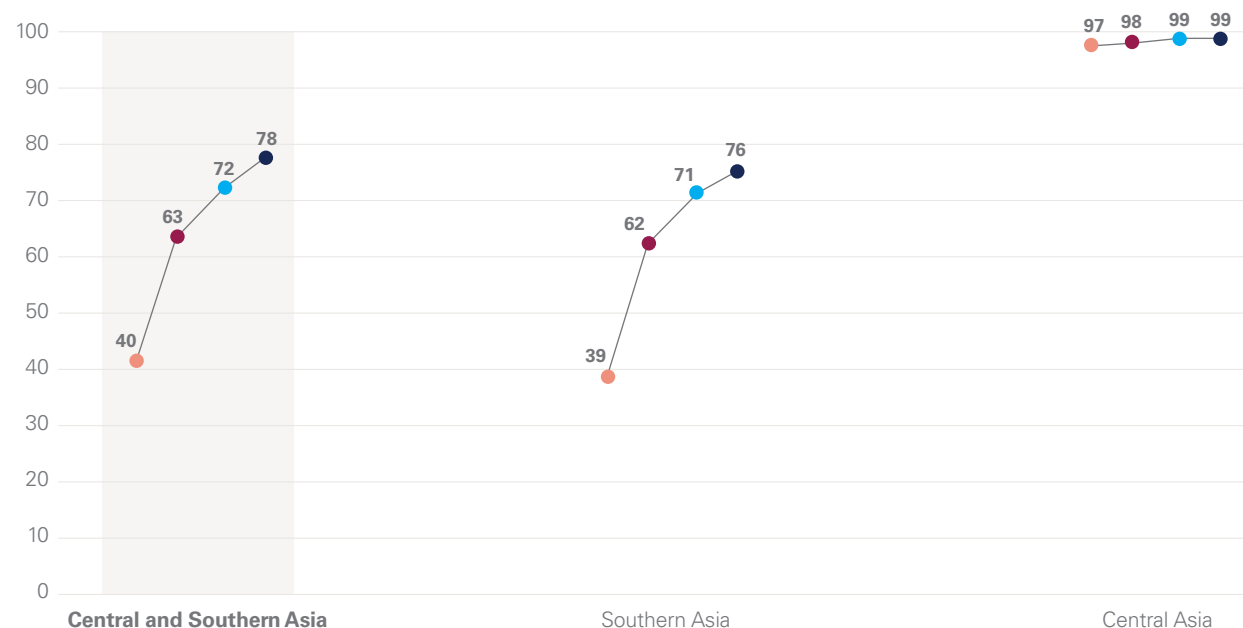
2013 – from close to 40 per cent to nearly 60 per cent in 2019. A major success in Bangladesh has been the introduction of the Birth and Death Registration Information System in 2010 (and its revised version in 2019), which prompted steady progress in birth registration coverage. In addition, over the past decade, the Government has implemented various interventions, including the Kalgan Model, legal reforms and campaigns to clear unregistered vital events. More recently, in 2022, the Government began using the health sector database for birth and death notifications through the District Health Information System, which significantly increased birth registration within the legal time frame.

Other countries in Southern Asia are also making huge strides, including **Nepal**, where birth registration nearly doubled over an eight-year time frame – from just over 40 per cent to nearly 75 per cent as of 2022. Since 2017, the online civil registration system has expanded to cover over 90 per cent of all local government registration centres.

CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN ASIA HAS SEEN COVERAGE OF BIRTH REGISTRATION IMPROVE OVER THE LAST 15 YEARS, A TREND THAT LARGELY MIRRORS THE PROGRESS OBSERVED IN THE REGION'S MOST POPULOUS COUNTRY – INDIA

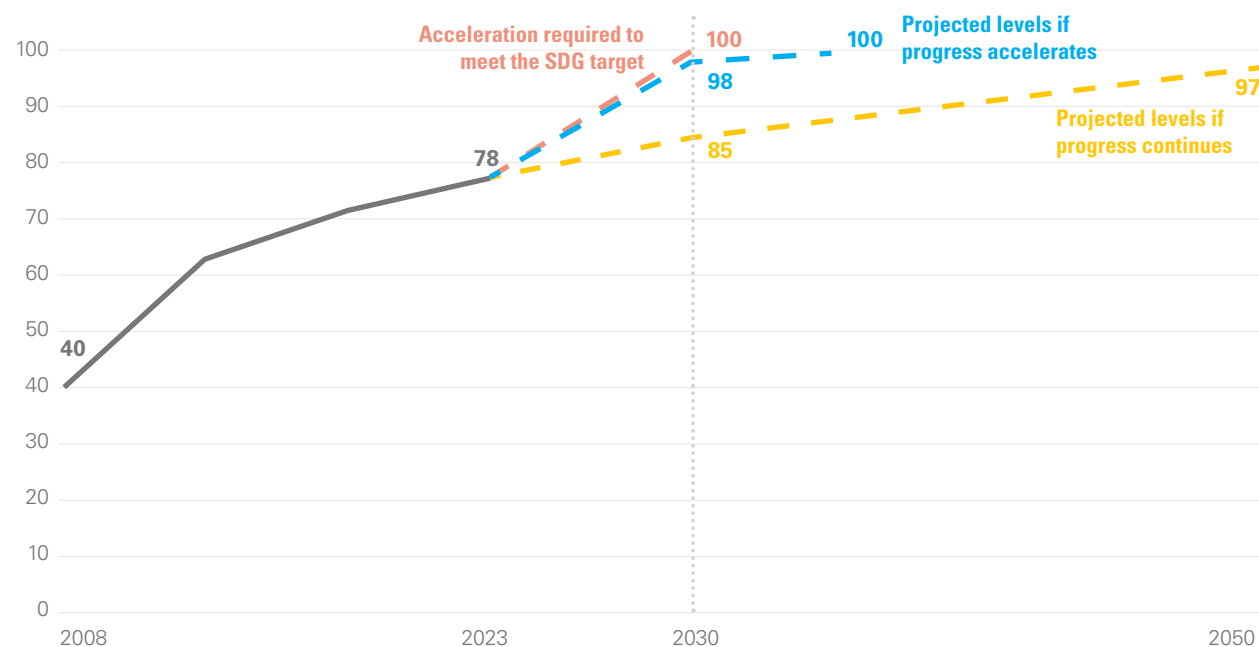
Fig. 11: Percentage of children under age 5 in Central and Southern Asia whose births are registered

● 2008 ● 2013 ● 2018 ● 2023



EVEN WITH AN ACCELERATION OF PROGRESS, THE REGION MAY FALL SHORT OF MEETING THE SDG TARGET OF UNIVERSAL BIRTH REGISTRATION BY 2030, BUT IT COULD BECOME A REALITY FIVE YEARS LATER – IN 2035

Fig. 12: Percentage of children under age 5 in Central and Southern Asia whose births are registered, observed and projected





LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN, EASTERN AND SOUTH-EASTERN ASIA, AND NORTHERN AFRICA AND WESTERN ASIA

In **Latin America and the Caribbean**, the level of birth registration has hovered above 90 per cent for the last 15 years. Even if observed progress is sustained, it will still be insufficient to reach the SDG target of universal birth registration by 2030. With an acceleration of progress, however, the target could be within reach.

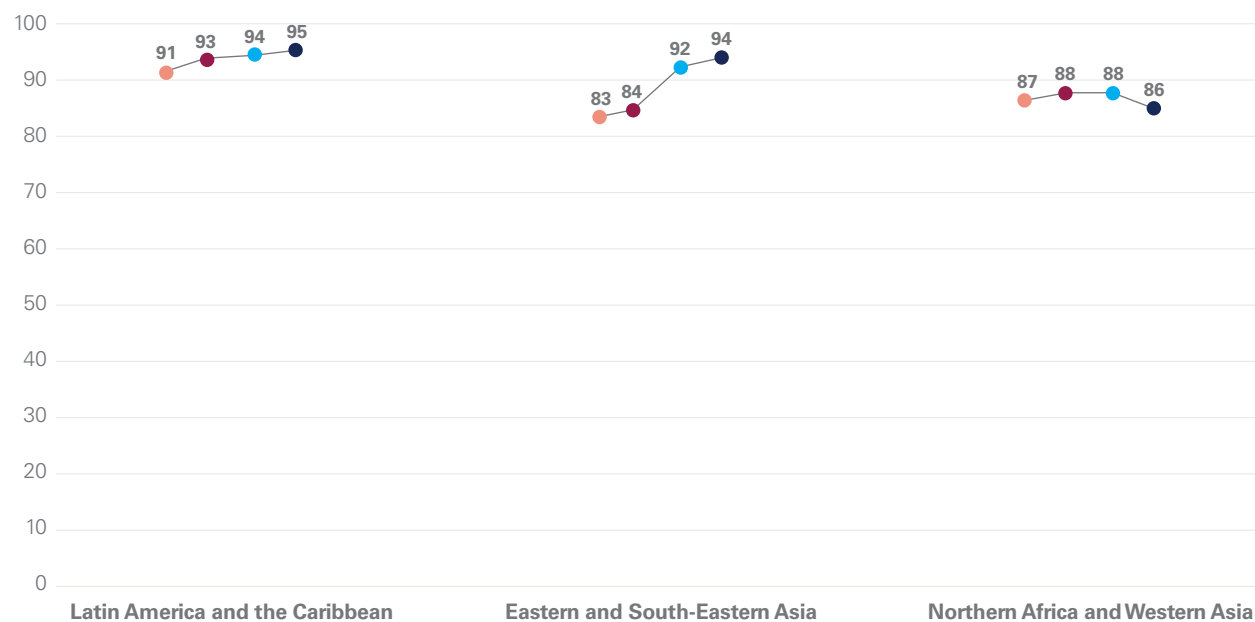
In **Eastern and South-Eastern Asia**, birth registration coverage remained constant at around 80 per cent between 2008 and 2013. Nevertheless, recent years have seen an increased rate of change. Among its subregions, Eastern Asia has historically had relatively high levels of birth registration over time, whereas South-Eastern Asia has recorded a strong rate of progress over a 15-year period that has slowed slightly in recent years. In Eastern and South-Eastern Asia overall, registering the birth of every child could become a reality by 2045 if country progress is sustained. However, with accelerated efforts, universal registration could be achieved by 2030, the end of the SDG era.

Northern Africa and Western Asia has generally had high levels of birth registration, above 85 per cent, with no evidence of substantial change over time. With a few exceptions that likely reflect the lingering impact of conflict and instability, almost all countries in the region have prevalence levels above 95 per cent. However, with practically no change over time and if current trends continue, it would be decades until universal birth registration is achieved. On the other hand, if progress is accelerated, this milestone could be reached five years after the SDG target date – in 2035.

IN REGIONS WITH HISTORICALLY HIGH LEVELS OF BIRTH REGISTRATION, REACHING UNIVERSAL COVERAGE WILL REQUIRE A LASER FOCUS ON THE MOST MARGINALIZED GROUPS

Fig. 13: Percentage of children under age 5 in Latin America and the Caribbean, Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, and Northern Africa and Western Asia whose births are registered

● 2008 ● 2013 ● 2018 ● 2023



ACHIEVING UNIVERSAL BIRTH REGISTRATION: WHAT WILL IT TAKE?

Birth registration is an essential prerequisite for legal identity and the fulfilment of children's rights. By registering children at birth and providing a birth certificate – a passport to lifelong protection – their exposure to rights violations are minimized and their access to essential services are enabled. Despite significant global progress, the need for accelerated action remains urgent in a majority of countries in Africa. The estimates presented in this report also serve as a timely reminder to countries in Asia, the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean to prioritize last-mile strategies to achieve their ambitions for children.

Progress can be accelerated, and coverage expanded, through sustained investments in proven, high-impact strategies. Partnering with the health sector enables timely registration at maternity wards and immunization clinics, while decentralizing services makes registration more accessible by bringing it closer to communities. Streamlining processes into a 'one-step, one-visit' system allows registration and certification to happen simultaneously, reducing obstacles for families. Safe and cost-effective digitalization efforts have also enhanced accessibility and improved service delivery, and legal reviews and policy reforms continue to align national laws with international standards, further strengthening civil registration systems globally.

To achieve global progress, it is crucial to secure engagement and buy-in at all levels, from governments to local communities. Governments must recognize that birth registration is a smart investment, both from a human rights and a development

perspective. The costs of taking action are significantly lower than the costs of inaction. Prioritizing CRVS strengthens its role as the cornerstone of the identity ecosystem, enabling the full realization of benefits from investments in health, national identification systems and advancements in digital public infrastructure. Communities, on the other hand, must understand why and how universal registration benefits them, recognizing it as a fundamental right that they should actively demand.

As we enter the final years of the Sustainable Development Goals and Decade of Action, achieving universal birth registration will require a concerted, discrimination-free approach. Efforts must be grounded in collective action by partners engaged in strategic global and regional initiatives, with targeted investments to enhance the efficiency of routine systems and to make them more responsive to the needs of all children – particularly those affected by humanitarian crises, migration, health emergencies and statelessness. Only through sustained commitment can we make universal birth registration a reality for every child.



UNICEF CALLS FOR FIVE ACTIONS TO ENSURE LEGAL IDENTITY FOR ALL CHILDREN

1

REGISTER EVERY CHILD AT BIRTH AS THE FOUNDATION OF A LIFECYCLE APPROACH TO LEGAL IDENTITY

Registering a child at birth is crucial to initiating a lifecycle approach to legal identity, linking various life events from birth to death. This requires registering all births – whether in health facilities or at home – immediately after birth or within the legally allowable time period. Assigning a unique identification number during birth registration establishes an organic link with population registers and national identification (ID) systems, shifting from a CRVS to an integrated Civil Registration, Vital Statistics and Identity approach as recommended by the UN Legal Identity Agenda. This streamlined approach ('collect once, use multiple times') facilitates data flow across systems and moves information rather than people.

***UNICEF calls on governments** to take decisive action to ensure that every child is registered immediately after birth. This includes adopting the necessary legal, financial and systemic reforms to align CRVS and national ID systems structurally and functionally. By doing so, governments can establish a seamless, integrated legal identity system that serves every individual from birth onwards.*

2

STREAMLINE REGISTRATION PROCESSES TO ENHANCE SERVICE DELIVERY AND DRIVE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

A streamlined business process should ensure that registration and certification are carried out simultaneously, preferably through a 'one-step, one-visit' process, closer to the community. It should also simplify the late and delayed registration processes and be sensitive to the needs of migrant and displaced children, including refugees, internally displaced persons and stateless persons. Registration, as well as a first copy of the birth certificate, should be free for all children.

To derive full advantage from digitalizing CRVS systems, countries should ensure that their efforts mirror these requirements and avoid adding extra steps or deviating from the process. Additional steps and deviations can lead to exclusions, affecting marginalized and vulnerable populations in particular.

***UNICEF urges governments** to adopt a streamlined, one-step registration and certification process that is sensitive to the needs of all children, including migrants and displaced individuals, while ensuring that the digitalization of CRVS systems follows the prescribed business processes and does not introduce inefficiencies or exclusions. Prioritize free registration and first birth certificates for all children.*

3

LEVERAGE HEALTH, SOCIAL PROTECTION AND EDUCATION PROGRAMMES TO BOOST BIRTH REGISTRATION

Visits to maternity wards and immunization desks are prime opportunities to promote timely birth registration. Such interactions can be leveraged to complete the registration process, allowing mothers to leave with the first copy of the birth certificate in hand. Shifting responsibility from merely notifying authorities of a birth to declaring it or facilitating parents in declaring a birth at health facilities can eliminate the need for parents to travel to civil registration offices. Frontline community health workers and social service workers can similarly assist with registering community births. Social protection interventions also

present multiple opportunities to identify and refer unregistered children to civil registration authorities. Similarly, schools are ideally placed to identify unregistered older children and facilitate their registration.

UNICEF urges governments to leverage health, social protection and education services to boost birth registration coverage. Integrating registration processes into maternity wards, immunization desks and community health worker visits can ensure timely and efficient registration. Additionally, social protection programmes and schools must actively identify and refer unregistered children to civil registration authorities.

4

IMPLEMENT KEY LEGAL REFORMS FOR INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE CRVS SYSTEMS

To make CRVS systems more inclusive and equitable, mothers should be empowered to declare a birth independently, eliminating barriers such as requiring the father's name, presence or a marriage certificate, particularly for single and unwed mothers. Newborns should be registered regardless of parental documentation, including in migration and displacement settings, and birth certificates should exclude sensitive details, such as the nationality of the child or parents, to prevent discrimination. CRVS systems must be safeguarded to prevent exclusions, particularly in areas where national IDs have become a prerequisite for birth registration, and CRVS records should never be used to penalize individuals. Sensitive data within CRVS, health and social protection systems should be protected from misuse or repurposing, ensuring that individuals' rights and privacy are upheld.

UNICEF calls on governments to enhance CRVS systems by allowing mothers to declare births independently, removing barriers such as needing the father's name or a marriage certificate, and registering newborns regardless of parental documentation, including in migration and displacement settings. Governments must safeguard CRVS systems to prevent exclusions, never use records to penalize individuals, and protect sensitive data to uphold privacy and rights.

5

EMPOWER COMMUNITIES TO DEMAND CIVIL REGISTRATION SERVICES AS A RIGHT

Some populations, including refugees, internally displaced persons and the stateless, still face significant barriers to accessing civil registration services. Governments should take targeted steps to bring these groups into the CRVS fold by making services more accessible and by empowering them to understand and demand their right to registration, ensuring they are not left behind. Increasing the use of civil registration data within governments improves the demand for, and quality of, services, thereby creating a positive feedback loop that benefits all. The key is to create an environment where civil registration services are understood and embraced as a fundamental right, educating citizens and residents on the importance of birth registration for accessing services and protecting rights, and the processes involved in doing so. Strengthening partnerships with local leaders, health workers, the social service workforce and educators is critical to promoting the value of registration, making it a shared community goal.

UNICEF appeals to governments, civil society and community leaders to work together to ensure that every person is aware of his or her right to registration and can easily access these services. By making civil registration accessible, inclusive and part of everyday life, we can empower individuals, strengthen public health systems, and build societies where everyone is recognized and protected.

TECHNICAL NOTES

INDICATORS ON BIRTH REGISTRATION

Two types of indicators – burden and prevalence – are used in this publication. Burden refers to the absolute number of children under age 5 and under age 1 alive today whose births have not been registered; prevalence refers to the proportion of children under age 5 and under age 1 whose births have been registered. While prevalence is an indication of the likelihood that a child will have his or her birth registered, the burden indicates the magnitude of the problem – that is, the number of children unreached by registration services. Both burden and prevalence are also presented for the subset of children with and without a birth certificate.

This publication presents estimates on both birth registration and birth certification since all children who possess birth certificates are registered, but the opposite is not necessarily true. In other words, children may have their births officially recorded with civil registrars in the country but not have a birth certificate. This can happen for a multitude of reasons, ranging from prohibitive costs to loss or damage of the birth certificate document. Therefore, information on both indicators taken together presents a more complete picture of the global status of birth registration among children and illustrates the gap that exists for some children who are registered but do not have proof in the form of a certificate.

For statistical purposes, universal birth registration is defined as a prevalence of 99.5 per cent or higher.

DATA SOURCES

Data are drawn from the UNICEF global databases, 2024, based on Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys and Demographic and Health Surveys, vital statistics from civil registration systems, censuses and other nationally representative surveys that use a comparable methodology. For detailed source information by country, please see <data.unicef.org>. The UNICEF global database is consistent with the global SDG database for indicator 16.9.1, which includes national-level data that have been verified and approved by national statistical authorities and other government agencies responsible for official statistics.

For some countries, information on the estimated coverage of birth registration within national civil registration systems was obtained from the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), as of April 2023. This was the case for 26 countries in Europe and Northern America and for five additional high-income countries from other regions. For all these countries, an assumption was made that all children have birth certificates on the basis of the estimated coverage of birth registration obtained from UNSD. Several sources are used by UNSD to obtain coverage of birth registration from more than 230 countries and areas. The primary source is the 'Quality of Vital Statistics Obtained from Civil Registration' page on the United Nations Demographic Yearbook Vital Statistics Questionnaire completed

by national statistical offices. For more information, see: <unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/crvs/>.

Demographic data are from the United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects 2024*, Online Edition.

SDG REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

Regional estimates are presented according to the regional classification used for SDG global reporting. These regional groupings are based on geographic regions defined under the Standard Country or Area Codes for Statistical Use (known as M49) of the United Nations Statistics Division. Details can be found at: <unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49/>. The full M49 classification also includes 47 territories, overseas areas and islands.

METHODS AND COVERAGE FOR GLOBAL AND REGIONAL ESTIMATES OF CURRENT LEVELS

The global estimate of children under age 5 whose births are registered is based on nationally representative and internationally comparable data collected between 2014 and 2023 for a subset of 173 countries, representing 98 per cent of the global population of children under age 5. The latest available data for around 80 per cent of these countries are from the last five years. For 10 countries, the latest data pre-date 2014 but were included on an exceptional basis given that levels of registration among children under age 5 were 99 per cent or higher at the time of data collection; an assumption was made that such countries had achieved universal registration that persisted in the intervening years. Population coverage is above 90 per cent for all SDG regions.

The global estimate of children under age 1 whose births are registered is based on nationally representative and internationally comparable data collected between 2014 and 2023 for a subset of 162 countries, representing 90 per cent of the global population of children under age 1. Population coverage is above 70 per cent for all SDG regions.

The table on the following page presents population coverage at global and regional levels for the prevalence of birth registration among children under age 5 and under age 1.

Global and regional aggregates were produced for the prevalence of birth registration among children under age 5, the prevalence of birth registration among children under age 1, the prevalence of birth certification among children under age 5, and the prevalence of birth certification among children under age 1. While most countries with data on birth registration had available estimates for all four of these indicators, some countries lacked data for one or more indicators. For coherence and ease of interpretation of results across

these four indicators, some adjustments were made at the regional and global levels to account for missing data. The most complete data availability exists for birth registration among children under age 5 (SDG indicator 16.9.1), with gaps in the other three indicators. The estimates for birth registration among children under age 5 were based on the full set of countries with data in the reference period on that indicator. Based on observed levels among countries with complete data, ratios were calculated for the proportional level of registration (of children under age 1) and certification (of children under age 5 and under 1), compared to the level of registration of children under age 5. These ratios informed the regional and global aggregates for the remaining three indicators, allowing for comparability across the four main indicators while still maintaining full use of the available data for birth registration among children under age 5.

SDG region	Population coverage	
	Birth registration among children under age 5	Birth registration among children under age 1
Europe and Northern America	100%	100%
Latin America and the Caribbean	98%	90%
Central and Southern Asia	100%	97%
Central Asia	100%	100%
Southern Asia	100%	97%
Eastern and South-Eastern Asia	99%	77%
Northern Africa and Western Asia	93%	74%
Sub-Saharan Africa	97%	94%
Eastern Africa	92%	92%
Middle Africa	99%	97%
Southern Africa	100%	100%
Western Africa	100%	93%
Australia and New Zealand	100%	100%
Oceania, excluding Australia and New Zealand	96%	89%
World	98%	90%

METHODS FOR TREND ANALYSIS

A subset of 121 countries that have at least two comparable data points within a period of about two decades were included in the regional trend analysis. This subset of countries represents 88 per cent of the global population of children under age 5. Population coverage was above 80 per cent for all SDG regions for which the regional trend analysis was conducted, except for Oceania, for which trends at the regional level are not presented due to limited data availability. The current level of birth registration for Oceania is largely driven by prevalence in the region's most populous country (Papua New Guinea), which does not have more than one comparable data point. While several other countries in the region have trend data, it was not possible to reconcile the current estimate for the region with the trends seen in these countries, due to the stark difference in the population covered by the available data.

Since data availability varies substantially by country, depending on data sources and national data collection schedules, population-weighted aggregates of available country trend data were produced by region for the following time periods: 2005-2009, 2010-2014 and 2015-2019. A final point in the trendline corresponded to the latest available estimate per country. For each period, aggregates were produced as population-weighted averages of national estimates based on either: (a) a single available data point within the period, or (b) a simple average of available data points within the period, if more than one were available. In cases of missing data within a given period, values were imputed as the midpoint between preceding and following data points. Before and after the span of a country's data availability, there was no assumption of change: If no prior estimates existed for the early periods of the timeline, levels were assumed to be flat; after the latest available estimate for each country, levels were assumed to continue as flat.

Global trends were calculated as a population-weighted aggregate of regional trends.

METHODS FOR PROJECTION ANALYSIS

Projections in the levels of birth registration were calculated according to several scenarios. These scenarios illustrate what levels of birth registration could possibly be in the coming years, building upon observed trajectories and how they might continue or accelerate. Three scenarios are depicted in this publication: (a) a continuation of observed progress among countries that have seen an increase (that is, countries with a positive average annual rate of change), (b) an acceleration of progress based on countries with flat or declining levels matching the average level of progress of countries with a positive rate of change, and countries with any increase in birth registration accelerating to the pace observed in 'exemplar' countries, defined as those in the top 10 percentile for increases in birth registration prevalence and

(c) an acceleration of progress required to achieve the SDG target of universal birth registration by 2030. Scenario (c) represents the most ambitious, followed by (b) and then (a). Scenarios (a) and (b) account for slowing effects in light of available evidence, which suggests that progress slows as levels of birth registration approach 100 per cent and that additional gains and improvement become more difficult to achieve in this 'last mile'.

Projected burdens depict scenarios (a) and (b) as well as a baseline scenario that shows how the burden of unregistered children would grow if there is no progress, that is, if prevalence levels in each country remain exactly as they are today.

MAP DISCLAIMER

Maps are stylized and not to scale. They do not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers. The dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties. The final boundary between the Sudan and South Sudan has not yet been determined.

FOOTNOTES ON COUNTRY DATA INCLUDED IN MAPS

Maps reflect the latest available data point for each country between 2014 and 2023. An exception was made for 10 countries whose data source pre-dates 2014: Barbados, Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Chile, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Islamic Republic of Iran, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Uruguay. At the time the data were collected, however, the level of birth registration among children under 5 in these countries was at or above 99 per cent. In Figure 3, data for Chile refer to children aged 0 to 7 years whose births are registered, and data for the Islamic Republic of Iran refer to children under age 5 with an Iranian parent who has a national identification card.

Data for the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Indonesia, Namibia and Saudi Arabia refer to children with a birth certificate.

In the latest survey for Benin, two sampled clusters could not be visited during fieldwork due to security concerns. In the latest survey for Burkina Faso, data for two regions (Est and Sahel) were not representative of the entire region as many clusters could not be visited due to the security context. The latest survey for Egypt did not include North Sinai due to the special circumstances of the governorate. In the latest survey for Kenya, Mandera County could not be visited during fieldwork due to security concerns. Data for the Lao People's Democratic Republic include children registered in the family book. Data for Lebanon reflect the subsample of Lebanese residents only. Data for Mexico refer to children whose birth was registered in Mexico or another country. In the latest survey for Nigeria, over 100

enumeration areas could not be visited during fieldwork due to accessibility issues, including a significant number in Borno state. As a result, the reported levels of birth registration at the national level and in some states may be overestimated, since those areas of the country for which data collection could not take place are likely to have lower levels of birth registration. Data for Pakistan do not include Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan. In the latest survey for Yemen, roughly 5 per cent of the sample enumeration areas could not be visited because they were inaccessible due to security and safety concerns.

Data for China refer to a proxy indicator on registration of children's permanent residence, known as 'hukou', by the household registration department. Hukou registration is the only indication that birth registration has been completed, and this is one of the most important components of the household management system in that country. The latest available data on children's hukou registration were obtained from the 2020 National Population Census conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics of China.

GENERAL NOTES

Confidence intervals are not shown in this publication. Caution is therefore warranted in interpreting the results since apparent differences may not be significant. All messages were developed in light of the confidence intervals, so where a difference is mentioned in the text, it has been confirmed as statistically significant.

The estimates of current levels of birth registration in this publication replace those previously published by UNICEF, including those in *The State of the World's Children 2024: Statistical Compendium*. Differences are a result of updated population estimates used to derive the weighted aggregates as well as subsequent data updates for a handful of countries. In addition, the trend and projection methods have been revised and therefore, the estimates in this publication should not be directly compared with those previously published by UNICEF.



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All reasonable precautions have been taken by UNICEF to verify the information contained in this publication. For any data updates subsequent to release, please visit data.unicef.org.

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