

## Position Statement

# Birth Registration

### Background

Society first acknowledges a child's existence and identity through birth registration, as mandated by Articles 7 and 8 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>1</sup>. The right to be recognised as a person before the law is a critical step in ensuring lifelong protection and is a prerequisite for exercising all other rights.

Civil registration is the process by which a person's legal identity is bestowed, and it conventionally commences with the recording of an individual's birth and the issuance of a birth certificate<sup>2</sup>. 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<sup>3</sup>, and provides them with other (social) rights.

Governments should make birth registration available to all children, free of charge, with no fine in case of late registration, and regardless of the circumstances under which they are born (e.g. war, asylum seeker). However, the births of 166 million children under age 5 are not registered worldwide, and millions of people are without fundamental legal trace of their existence (UNICEF, 2019, WHO, 2017, p. 7). Unregistered and/or undocumented children do not have legal recognition of their existence, identity, or nationality<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations General Assembly (1989) Convention on the Rights of a Child <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

<sup>2</sup> World Health Organization & United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). (2021). Health sector contributions towards improving the civil registration of births and deaths in low-income countries: guidance for health sector managers, civil registrars and development partners. World Health Organization. <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/341911>

<sup>3</sup> PLAN (2014) Birth Registration in emergencies: a review of best practices in humanitarian action.

<sup>4</sup> NGO Position paper for an UNHCR Conclusion on Birth Registration <http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/sites/default/files/documents/3465.pdf>

The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015<sup>5</sup> placed birth registration firmly on the international development agenda. It included a dedicated target (16.9) under Goal 16: to provide legal identity for all, including birth registration, by 2030<sup>6</sup>.

Birth Registration is essential for protection of Human Rights and as a prerequisite for the welfare of the child. Possession of a birth certificate can protect a child from exploitation, such as child labour, forced participation in armed conflict, child marriage, and sexual exploitation<sup>7</sup>.

Birth registration assists governments in calculating accurate population statistics and sustainably planning for health, education, and other services (Plan, 2009<sup>8</sup>; WHO 2021<sup>9</sup>). It contributes to equity in access to these services, (social) rights and other needs of children<sup>10</sup>.

The stillbirth rate is a sensitive indicator of quality of care in pregnancy and childbirth and a marker of a health system's strength<sup>11</sup>. In many low-income and lower-middle-income countries, stillbirths are often not recorded in the same way as live births, making it difficult to produce reliable and timely stillbirth data and statistics<sup>12</sup>. Data collection will enable the burden of stillbirths to be more accurately estimated so that targeted strategies can be developed, and their impact evaluated.

Not registering a stillbirth can make it difficult to arrange for burial, and make it difficult for parents to use parental and/or bereavement leave.

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<sup>5</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, Birth Registration for Every Child by 2030: Are we on track?, UNICEF, New York, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> (ibid)

<sup>7</sup> PLAN (2014) Birth Registration in emergencies: a review of best practices in humanitarian action.

<sup>8</sup> PLAN. 2009. Count Every Child - The Right to Birth Registration.

<sup>9</sup> World Health Organization & United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). (2021). Health sector contributions towards improving the civil registration of births and deaths in low-income countries: guidance for health sector managers, civil registrars and development partners. World Health Organization. <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/341911>

<sup>10</sup> UNICEF (2007) The "Rights" Start to Life - A Statistical Analysis of Birth Registration.

<sup>11</sup> UNICEF (2020) A Neglected Tragedy The global burden of stillbirths. Report of the UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/845141602114822604-0090022020/original/AneglectedtragedystillbirthsIGMEreportEnglish2020.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> L Hug et al (2021) Global, regional, and national estimates and trends in stillbirths from 2000 to 2019: a systematic assessment. Lancet. Aug 28 [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736\(21\)01112-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(21)01112-0)

## Position

ICM recognises the right of every child to be registered at birth, and the potential protective effect of birth registration for children. The ICM further underlines the importance of birth registration for maternal, neonatal, and child health outcomes.

ICM believes midwives have a responsibility to:

- Raise awareness of the importance of birth registration at individual, community, and national level;
- Initiate and support action to determine the extent of birth and stillbirth non-registration in their countries;
- Take part in developing and implementing plans to facilitate easy and free birth registration for all children, including those stillborn.

## Recommendations

Midwives Associations are urged to:

- Raise awareness of the importance of birth registration among their members and the public.
- Ensure that the importance of birth registration is part of education programmes of midwives and other health professionals.
- Ensure that midwives are legally eligible to be part of the birth registration procedure in all birth settings.
- Ensure that midwives are familiar with their national birth registration procedures/process to ensure that they can use all opportunities to promote, or - where necessary- directly assist parents to register their child.
- Assess the registration processes/procedures in their country to determine the scope of the non-registration of births in their country and take appropriate action.
- Advocate for policy makers to facilitate and simplify the registration procedures, if needed.

## Related ICM Documents

- o ICM. 2011. Position Statement. Midwives, Women and Human Rights.
- o ICM. 2014. Position Statement. Women, children and midwives in situations of war and civil unrest.

### Other Relevant Documents

- o Muzzi, Mariana 2010. UNICEF Working Paper: Good Practices in Integrating Birth Registration into Health Systems (2000-2009), UNICEF.
- o PLAN. 2009. Count Every Child - The Right to Birth Registration.
- o PLAN (2014) Birth Registration in emergencies: a review of best practices in humanitarian action.
- o Save the Children. 2013. Position paper for an UNHCR Conclusion on Birth Registration.
- o UN. 1989. Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- o United Nations Children's Fund, Birth Registration for Every Child by 2030: Are we on track?, UNICEF, New York, 2019.
- o UNICEF. 2013. A Passport to Protection: A Guide to Birth Registration Programming.

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