

## FACT SHEET

### Birth registration in Nigeria

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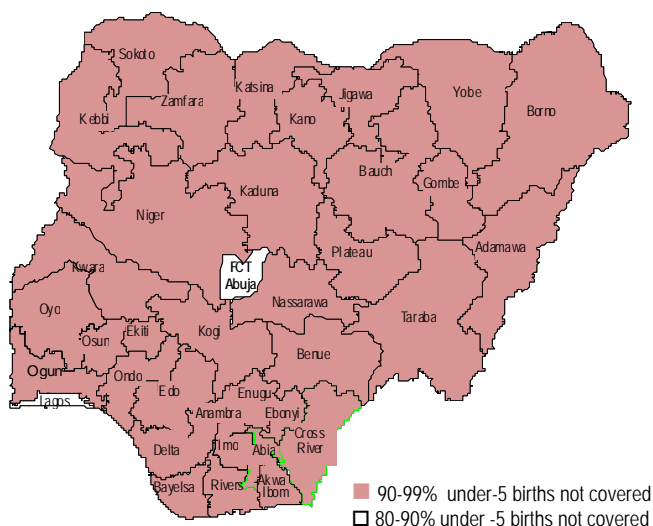
#### Background

Birth registration is the first step towards recognizing a child's inalienable right as a human being. Globally the births of more than 50 million children—more than 40 per cent of total births worldwide—go unregistered each year.

About 70 percent of the 5 million children born annually in Nigeria are not being registered at birth. They have no birth certificate and so, in legal terms, do not exist. Their right to an identity, name and nationality is denied and their access to basic services is threatened.

#### Data<sup>1</sup>

Births registration of children under five years old in Nigeria (2008)	30.0%
Birth registration in the urban areas	48.8%
Birth registered in the rural area	21.7%
Birth registration in South East zone	54.4%
Birth registration in North East zone	13.9%
Birth registration of children in wealthiest quintile	61.9%
Birth registration of children in poorest quintile	8.9%



Source: National Population Commission Report 2008

#### Definition

Birth registration is the official recording of the birth of a child through an administrative process of the State

and is coordinated by a particular branch of government. It is a permanent and official record of a child's existence.

#### Legal framework

In Nigeria, there are provisions in the current legislation for birth registration:

- The Federal Government's decree No. 69 of 1992 on vital registration states that registration shall be carried out free of charge, within a period of 60 days from the date of birth
- Section 5 of the Child Rights Act 2003 states that, "Every child has the right to a name and the birth of every child shall be registered."
- The right of every child to be registered at birth, to acquire a name and nationality, and the responsibilities of the State in this area are also identified in international conventions which have been ratified by the Nigerian government.
- 1948: Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 15
- 1966: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 24: "Every child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have a name. [...] Every child has the right to a nationality."
- 1989: Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 71990:
- African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Article 6.

#### Benefits of birth registration

- Ensures that children enroll in school at the appropriate age
- Provides access to health care services and immunization
- Effectively counters the problem of girls who do not have proof of age being forced into marriage before they are legally eligible
- Ensures that children in conflict with the law are given special protection, and are not treated (legally and practically) as adults.
- Ensures that children are not recruited into armed forces and groups before they are legally eligible.
- Secures the child's right to nationality at the time of birth or at a later stage.
- Helps identify children who are trafficked, and permits their repatriation and reunification with family members.
- Assures the right to a passport and the right to vote, but also useful for opening a bank account or finding employment.

<sup>1</sup> Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2008

- Helps the enforcement of laws relating to minimum age of employment, which supports efforts to prevent exploitative child labor.

Unregistered children are often

- members of particular indigenous, religious or ethnic groups;
- children born out of marriage between people of different nationalities or from cross-border ethnic groups;
- children whose parents are displaced due to war or civil conflicts;
- children from localities where there is low awareness of birth registration, especially rural and remote communities;
- children born in very poor families;
- orphans or children whose parents have separated, divorced or widowed;
- children of single mothers/teenage mothers/out-of-school girls;
- children born by abused or sexually exploited girls and women.

### National response to date

The promulgation of the 1992 Compulsory Registration of Births and Deaths Decree No 69 gave the sole authority to register these events nationwide to the National Population Commission (NPopC).

During its 18 years of operation, the NPopC has made considerable improvements. Today, the NPopC operates a total of 2,773 registration centres (three per Local Government Area (LGA)) in all 774 LGAs in the country.

From 2003 to 2005, the NPopC developed an Action Plan to create a more sustainable birth registration system. The plan included the involvement of every part of society, including local communities and stakeholders, to help raise awareness on the importance of birth registration. The NPopC waived the payment of registration fees for three years (from July 2005 to July 2008).

Payment of fees in the past had hindered considerable number of parents from registering the births of their children. The waiver, coupled with heightened sensitization, resulted in a slight increase of birth registration from a former national figure of 28 percent in 2001 to an average of 30.2 percent in 2006.

### UNICEF's assistance and achievements

- Supported the government to conduct a national campaign on the importance of birth registration. The campaign was launched on 24 July 2007 in Abuja by the Vice-President of Nigeria and brought together over 500 participants including

representatives from government, Parliament, civil society, faith-based organizations, traditional rulers, professional associations, donor agencies, UN agencies and the media.

- Supported the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria to broadcast a three-month campaign on birth registration aired on the national Network from 1 October to 31 December 2007.
- Strengthened institutional capacity of the Vital Registration Department, NPopC to collate, analyze and process and generate birth registration data consistently at the state and federal level.
- Provided financial and technical support for the publication of a situation analysis of birth registration in Nigeria 1994–2007.

### Strategies for promoting birth registration

A long-term approach is needed in Nigeria to create birth registration systems that are sustained to generate consistent supply and demand.

- Creating grass-roots demand for birth registration: in partnership with religious leaders and communities, raise awareness on the importance of birth registration.
- Improving access to birth registration services: provide necessary infrastructure to bring birth registration closer to communities in remote and hard-to-reach areas.
- Ensuring coordination among relevant government ministries and institutions involved in birth registration: integrate birth registration into other governmental activities such as immunization and school enrollment.
- Creating mass social mobilization for registering every child: raise public awareness in partnership with mass media, civil society, parliamentarians, government and children.
- Improving the effectiveness of birth registration services: in partnership with NPopC, strengthen the capacity of government officials.
- Mobilizing resources required to ensure universal and effective system of birth registration.

Other agencies active in birth registration in Nigeria include WHO, UNFPA, ILO, UNAIDS, United Nations Statistics Division, USAID.

### For further information

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