



Strengthening Zimbabwe's Civil Registration System

LESS THAN HALF OF BIRTHS IN ZIMBABWE ARE REGISTERED, MOST OF WHICH ARE ALREADY THE POOREST AND MOST EXCLUDED

The situation

Civil registration and vital statistics systems are critical to any country's development. Once a child has had its birth registered, it has a legal identity. This means rights to social protection, education, health and legal protection. It can be quite the opposite for children without birth certificates: cut off from routine vaccinations, health care, social assistance, school enrolment, registering for exams or inheriting property.

A well-functioning civil registration and vital statistics system registers all births and deaths, issues certificates and compiles vital statistics, including cause-of-death information. Compared with other countries in the region, Zimbabwe has an advanced civil registration system, and with one standout technology: the capability to assign a digital identifier to each person which lasts for the duration of a citizen's life.

And yet, though Zimbabwe's birth registration rates are rising, they are still low, with only 49% of the population being registered. In rural areas this figure drops to 40%, whereas in urban setting it stands at 69% [Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2019]. Across the country, unregistered children are almost inevitably the children of the poor and excluded.

The provinces with a particularly challenging situation in terms of accessing national documentation, are Matabeleland and parts of Midlands, where death certificates of parents or guardians remain a challenge, resulting in generations of unregistered persons. Without death certificates to prove parentage, birth certificates and national IDs are not issued.

The COVID-19 pandemic was disastrous for civil registry in Zimbabwe. Most children born between April 2020 to September 2021 were not registered and are now technically and legally invisible to the State, resulting in limited or no access to key social services such as health, social protection and welfare.

In response, the Government launched a six-month catch-up national mobile registration exercise in 2022. But because of limited capacity and human resources in the civil registry service, the impact of COVID-19 on civil registration status is expected last for years. Fast action to scale-up the civil registration of children in Zimbabwe is imperative.



UNICEF Response

UNICEF supports Civil Society Organizations to assist communities in addressing the many challenges around birth registration, using different approaches. One successful method included integrating birth registration services into social assistance programmes, such as cash transfers, addressing the most vulnerable children

UNICEF plans specific interventions to scale-up the civil registration of children, including:

- Addressing legislative, operational and policy bottlenecks, and social barriers to hamper accessing birth registration and certification.
- Supporting the Government of Zimbabwe to develop and pilot digital innovation to link birth notification to birth registration systems in selected health facilities.

- Enhancing the awareness of the importance of birth registration and how to obtain a birth certificate registration.
- Scaling up of decentralization of civil registry services, including establishing services in hard-to-reach areas.
- Targeting mobile registration in hard-to-reach areas, disaster-prone areas, left-behind communities and in selected districts in Matabeleland and Midlands Provinces, where some ethnic and religious minorities have lower birth registration rates than the national average.

Target beneficiaries

20,000 children access birth registration services, including birth certificates

Communities in 63 districts with the lowest civil registration levels

Mobile civil registration in 10 poorest and vulnerable districts with minority ethnic populations, disaster-prone and hard to reach communities (to include convergence districts with other UNICEF programmes, e.g. health).

10 health facilities and civil registry offices digitally connected for e-birth notification

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TWO YEAR BUDGET \$3,9m

Civil Registration assessment and development, printing, dissemination and launch of the Costed Strategic Action Plan (national and subnational levels)	\$150k
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Technical support for civil registration legal, regulatory and policy reform, including national and subnational level consultations with stakeholders	\$3m
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Mass media, awareness campaigns, including mobile methods, advocacy and campaign to increase civil registration uptake in 63 districts with the lowest civil registration levels	\$250k
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Supplies for civil registration offices, including ICT equipment for digital innovation	\$1,2m
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Operational and coordination costs to support mobile civil registration in 10 districts	\$1,5m
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Technical Assistance, coordination monitoring and operational support cost	\$500k
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