



COUNT ● ● ●
EVERY
● ● ● CHILD

The Right to Birth Registration



Plan

About Plan

Founded more than 70 years ago, Plan is one of the largest child-centred development organisations in the world. Plan is independent, with no religious, political or governmental affiliations. Operational in 66 countries, we work together with communities in 48 developing countries, reaching a total population of 28.2 million children across Africa, Asia and the Americas.

Core to our work is raising awareness of children's rights in order to tackle the root causes of poverty, and helping to build the capacity and commitment of those responsible for ensuring children's rights are met. We believe that when children and adults work together to find solutions, it is more likely that those solutions will be successful and sustainable. Our work is guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

This is a summary of the report *Count Every Child: The Right to Birth Registration* (Plan, 2009). A complete list of references can be found in the full report. Download the report at plan-international.org/birthregistration or contact us at:

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Find out more about Universal Birth Registration:
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Published by Plan Limited, Chobham House,
Christchurch Way, Woking, Surrey GU21 6JG.

Plan Limited is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Plan International, Inc. (a not-for-profit corporation registered in New York State, USA). A Limited Company registered in England. Registered number 03001663.

First published 2011. Text and photos © Plan 2011.
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ISBN: 978-1-906273-24-8
Designed by Elly Grandison.

Cover photo: © Plan / Elber Nosolini.
Mother and her baby from Guinea-Bissau
with Personal Record Book.

Count every child

The right to birth registration

Launched by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in 2005, Plan's Universal Birth Registration campaign has worked with grassroots organisations, governments and international agencies to raise awareness about every child's right to registration, draw attention to the impact of not being registered, find innovative ways to overcome obstacles and ultimately to get every child a birth certificate.

Plan calls on everyone engaged with child rights to replicate and adapt the campaign's innovations and good practice to ensure that all children are registered.

"Universal birth registration is impossible to ignore and entirely possible to achieve"
Archbishop Desmond Tutu

From 2005 to 2009, we helped over **40 million** people, mostly children, in **32** countries to register.

Our advocacy work led to improved laws in **ten** countries, making **153 million** children eligible for free birth certificates.

How we did it

Working with partners, we have used different methods in different countries depending on the context and reasons behind non-registration. We have addressed the problem from several angles and at different levels – working with children and their communities, local authorities and national governments. We have also lobbied international agencies and children's rights organisations.

Innovative solutions get results

Harnessing every means at our disposal, we have come up with some innovative solutions. Here are some examples.

New technology

- Mobile phones – in Kenya, networks set up for banking were used to text birth notifications to authorities.
- Satellite kits, mobile phones and internet access were given to ten civil registration teams in Ecuador to record and store data in remote areas. Between 2006 and 2008, they registered 304,000 people.

Mass communication

- Messages encouraging registration were broadcast on national radio and television channels and during a football competition involving four leading teams in Malawi.
- Films illustrating the impact of non-registration were shown at Africa's largest film festival in Burkina Faso, and special radio programmes made by children were broadcast in ten West African countries.
- We produced TV adverts and films carrying birth registration messages in Vietnam and Nepal.
- Animated films encouraging registration were aired in Delhi and Maharashtra in India.

Engaging with local communities and systems

- Traditional village registers were scanned to update national population figures in Tanzania.
- 492 birth attendants were trained to register births in Paraguay.
- Health unit staff have been trained as birth registration clerks so that children can be registered immediately in Sierra Leone.

Children as spokespeople

- More than 500 children from various organisations took part in a seminar on the right to an identity and made recommendations about the birth registration process in India.
- As well as becoming advocates for registration in schools and on radio, children have been involved in lobbying local policy makers about their rights to registration in Indonesia.
- We joined a coalition promoting birth registration as crucial in protecting children against sexual abuse in Uganda. Hundreds of primary schoolchildren presented a petition to Parliament calling for birth registration to be made mandatory and for birth certificates to be free.

Mobile registration units

- Our mobile units cut the distance parents had to walk to register their children from as much as 75km to as little as 1km in Mozambique. Between November 2007 and January 2008, with the provincial government we organised five four-person mobile registration brigades which travelled to 37 communities registering 35,000 children and adults.
- Our mobile registration brigades were so successful in Bolivia that the national electoral court and UN have set up a permanent team and fully equipped mobile unit to carry on the registration process.

Cambodia – working on all fronts



In Cambodia, less than 5 per cent of the population was registered at the start of Plan's campaign. Many people had destroyed their documents for fear of the Khmer Rouge.

In 2004, Plan piloted a mobile registration scheme, which took the ability to register children directly into communities, as well as raising awareness of the importance of registration. The project was supported by the Ministry of the Interior and the Asian Development Bank.

The mobile scheme was so successful that

the Ministry replicated it across the country. The government also made birth registration free within 30 days of birth. After ten months, more than seven million Cambodians, close to 50 per cent of the population, had birth certificates.

As damage to important household documents was a common occurrence in Cambodia, we also distributed protective document covers, with a message promoting birth registration, to more than one million households.

We encouraged and supported Cambodian officials to continue these schemes, for example by arranging for them to visit the Philippines to see the benefits of that country's computerised registration system.

As a result of our work, we have supported the registration of more than **12 million Cambodians**. The Asian Development Bank estimates that 90 per cent of the population is now registered.

Reaching the most excluded people

- Hundreds of nomadic Baka people, who had been unable to gain official status, became citizens of Cameroon for the first time.
- Birth certificates were given to 77,220 previously unregistered children living on the streets of Dhaka, in Bangladesh.
- We produced and distributed a citizens' guide to registration in five languages and in leaflet, audio and video formats in Mali.

Governments and the law

- After persistent lobbying the Bangladesh government has introduced a law making birth registration free.
- The government of Sierra Leone was persuaded to decentralise registration and allow health workers to issue birth certificates.
- A legal review put an end to colonial laws discriminating against minority groups in Indonesia. We are working with the government and local authorities to decentralise registration services and achieve universal birth registration in 2011.
- We supported the Ministry of Health to set up a national database to integrate registration into the National Health Information Scheme in Bolivia.

Birth registration – every child’s right

Every child has the right to an identity. Articles 7 and 8 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child acknowledge the importance of birth registration and the right to an identity including name and nationality.

Without an identity children are denied access to other rights – such as healthcare, education and protection. If they are not able to prove who they are and where they come from, children whose parents have died, for example from AIDS, may be denied their right to inherit property or land. Without an official identity, children separated from their parents by conflict or who are trafficked may never be reunited with their families.

“...some young girls ... drop out ... in the primary school as they cannot write the Class 7 final examinations for lack of a birth certificate ... What fate awaits these young girls at this age when they are not able to continue school because of the birth certificate?”

Nan, 15, Cameroon

Being able to prove a child’s age can be vital in challenging some of the worst forms of exploitation, including sexual abuse and early marriage, trafficking, child labour and recruitment into armed groups. It can also prevent

children below the age of criminal responsibility being prosecuted and imprisoned with adults.

“The provision of legal birth and marriage registration certificates is critical for the protection of young women from the deeply rooted problem of early marriage and related problems of fistula.”

Ubah Mohammed, State Minister in the Ministry on Women’s Affairs, Ethiopia

Without birth registration, as they get older, young people may find it harder to get any kind of identity card. This can stop them getting a passport or driving licence, prevent them from working legally and mean that they cannot open a bank account. If they have a baby, often they can’t register their own child.

Without registration, countries are not able to count their population or predict trends such as rising birth and death rates. This means that donors and governments are not able to estimate what services – such as schools and hospitals – are needed, and it is impossible to track progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. Without the right documents, people cannot work in the formal sector, so governments miss out on tax revenue.

51 million children a year are still not registered at birth. Why?

Despite the success of Plan’s campaign, millions of people are simply unaware of the importance of registration. For many it is a non-essential legal formality, especially for those who are struggling against poverty and malnutrition. For families living in remote rural areas, registration offices are often too far away and too expensive to get to. Parents whose legal status is insecure or who face

discrimination, for example because they belong to a minority ethnic group, may be too afraid to register their child – or simply denied the right. Many countries charge for registration, and many parents are too poor to pay. Even where governments have the will to register all their children, they may not have the resources or infrastructure to support a comprehensive birth registration system.

Registration – a step towards protecting children and ending poverty

“Because of this campaign, I believe children will be better protected from all kinds of age-related discrimination, exploitation and abuse and I will continue to champion this cause until we achieve 100 per cent registration!”

Anil Kapoor, Actor and Plan India’s ambassador for birth registration

Birth registration is not the solution to all the problems children face. But it is a first step towards promoting children’s rights and ending poverty.

- In Vietnam, under-fives with a birth certificate can get free healthcare. Without one, they may be denied vital vaccines and immunisations.
- In Nepal, lack of birth registration increased the risk of young Dalits and children displaced by conflict being recruited by armed groups.
- In Uganda, it was difficult to reunite children abducted by the Lord’s Resistance Army with their families because they had no identity papers.
- In Ghana, child traffickers and cocoa industry employers could not be prosecuted because there were no birth certificates establishing a child’s age.
- In India, trafficked Bangladeshi and Nepalese girls rescued from brothels languished in institutions for months and years because no one could prove where they were from.
- In the Philippines, half of all child abuse cases could not be prosecuted because children could not produce birth certificates to prove they were minors.
- In Bangladesh, boys thought to be as young as seven but who could not prove their age have found themselves in court on charges of murder, rape and arson, despite 13 being the age of criminal responsibility.
- In India, between 80 and 90 per cent of disabled children did not have birth certificates, making them ‘invisible’ and unable to access care services.

Birth registration can be relatively inexpensive. In Peru, where over 5.7 million children were registered in just four years, registering a child costs US \$0.05.

Ensuring sustainability

By establishing an effective birth registration system, a country is investing in its future. Our campaign has proved that it is possible, even in the most difficult circumstances, and that it does not have to be expensive. With political will and commitment, small interventions can have a large, lasting impact. And with the right effort, governments can fulfil their obligation to ensure that every child has an identity.

It is vital that the systems we help to introduce are sustainable. That's why we work with existing networks and local and national groups. In Peru, we managed to create greater impact by supporting an existing birth registration campaign, and could be confident that local groups would remain committed to the cause.

In Vietnam, we trained 128 trainers who in turn trained 2,653 community workers to increase their knowledge and skills in birth registration. Through our work with local partners, justice staff, police officers, teachers, health workers and midwives now all coordinate their work around registration. As a result, all newborn babies are registered shortly after birth.

In Sierra Leone, registration offices were integrated with health units, which meant that registration was sustainable. And in Zambia, trained volunteers – including traditional birth attendants and community health workers – now assist district registrars and help local people to fill out registration forms. In Togo, a Committee for Registration of Births has been set up in every community to raise awareness about the importance of birth registration.

Mukembau, one of our community-based partners in Kenya, discovered that many parents did not know their children's date of birth and many did not have health clinic cards. This means that young people are struggling to get identity cards when they reach 18.

Together we have trained a network of volunteers – involving villages, children's clubs, volunteer child officers and community health workers – to collect birth registration data. As well as promoting birth registration, the volunteers ensure that

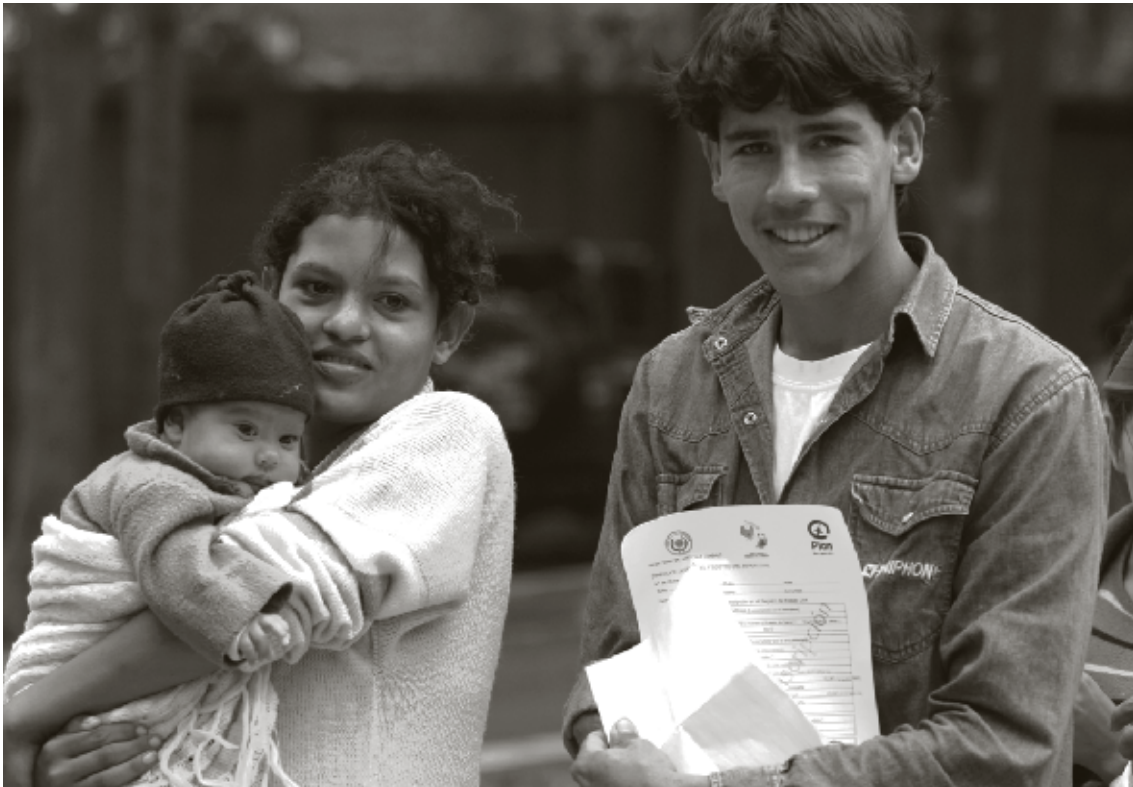
health clinic and identity cards are distributed to families and young people. To create greater awareness and demand, Mukembau holds a celebration ceremony whenever a birth certificate is issued.

Together, Plan and Mukembau have enabled over 90 per cent of births in the catchment area to be registered – more than double the national average for Kenya.

case study

“When I register a newborn baby I feel satisfaction because I think I've secured the future of a human being.”

Wazir Khan, local councillor, Chitral district, northern Pakistan



Parents show off their baby's new birth certificate. Plan / Luis Vera

Several governments have taken responsibility for our pilot projects and are scaling them up. In Vietnam, the Ministry of Justice is replicating our model for birth registration in mountainous districts. In Sri Lanka, the government is extending our model for computerised certificates all over the country. And in Guinea-Bissau, our early birth registration pilot project has been extended to 20 more communities in partnership with the Ministry of Justice.

At a regional level, Plan organised and took part in several high-level conferences throughout the campaign. We participated in the first civil registration conference for African ministers and in a regional forum on the improvement of

vital statistics and civil registration, organised by the World Bank in Asia. We advocated strongly for registration to be free, and for a special focus to be on children who are more likely to be excluded, including girls, disabled children and children from minority ethnic groups.

At an international level, we helped draft a joint oral statement on child trafficking in response to the 2009 report of the UN Special Rapporteur on trafficking of persons, especially women and children. Our statement stressed the importance of birth registration in protecting and preventing children from being trafficked; and also forming the basis for data collection.



Baby's finger prints being taken for the birth registration process. Plan / Cesar Bazan

What next?

Based on the lessons learned since 2005, we're rejuvenating our birth registration campaign, focusing particularly on those children most likely to miss out on registration. In many countries, this means girls, disabled children, children from minority ethnic groups and displaced and refugee children.

In India, our 2008 to 2010 birth registration strategy focused on registering individuals and communities in difficult circumstances, for example tribes and castes whose registration rates are particularly low. In Sri Lanka, we've shifted our focus to ensure that stateless plantation workers are registered and able to become active and involved citizens.

There is still a need for more research, improved child protection policies and better legal frameworks. There are also new challenges. For example, conflict and poverty mean that more people, including children, are displaced – both within and across borders. Without legal documents, they're more vulnerable to exploitation and being trafficked. In some countries, certain groups have been denied the right to vote in response to terrorism.

Systems must be secure and documents must be of high quality to prevent forgery and identity fraud, and to ensure equitable access to services such as healthcare, education and justice systems. Authentic documents will be even more important as basic services and opportunities become more available in developing countries.

Our aspiration is that every child born in every community is registered. We will continue to work with children, local communities, governments and international agencies to bring this about. This will take continued effort and commitment from all actors.

In particular, Plan is calling for:

National governments with low registration rates to:

- Increase efforts to register all children as soon after birth as possible, for example, by changing the law, making registrars more accessible, raising awareness and waiving fees.
- Make birth registration a priority and integrate it into national development plans of action or poverty reduction strategy papers.
- Integrate registration data into national statistics systems.
- Ensure that registration systems are equitable, non-discriminatory and consistent with local realities so that registration rates increase quickly and are sustainable.
- Ensure that registration data is used consistently in service planning.

UN agencies, multi- and bilateral donors and multinational corporations to:

- Increase efforts towards universal birth registration by incorporating birth registration into their own policies and practices and ensuring that registration is included in partnerships and agreements with others.
- Recognise that birth registration is essential to achieving the Millenium Development Goals, by providing accurate population data to help plan services and track progress.
- Allocate resources to strengthen civil registration systems.

Local organisations to:

- Inform local communities of their rights, and explain the importance of birth registration and the impact of non-registration.
- Empower people to demand their right to a birth certificate.
- Ensure that children and communities are consulted about local registration methods and systems.
- Ensure that children are included in strategies and plans, as is their right.

Every child has the right to an identity. For many children, this right is denied because they don't have a birth certificate. But it doesn't stop there.

If they can't prove who they are and where they come from, a child may be denied access to health services or education. If they can't prove their age, they risk under-age army conscription or early marriage. Without a name or nationality, authorities struggle to reunite trafficked children with their parents. When they have children of their own, they will not be able to register them without proof of nationality.

Plan is working to change this. Our aspiration is that every child in every community is registered at birth.

In just four years, Plan has helped more than 40 million people in 32 countries – mostly children – to register. In ten countries, Plan's advocacy work has changed laws, ensuring that 153 million children are eligible for free birth certificates. This report is a summary of Plan's work since 2005.

To find out more, go to plan-international/birthregistration or email campaigns@plan-international.org

First published 2011. Text and photos © Plan 2011.

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