**Plan International submission best practices for birth registration**

**Plan International Inc.**

Plan International, Inc. is an independent non-governmental organisation with no religious, political, or governmental affiliations and isin Special Consultative Status with ECOSOC. Founded in 1937, Plan International is one of the oldest and largest child rights organisations in the world. We strive to advance children’s rights and equality for girls in both development and humanitarian contexts. Working with children and young people in more than 70 countries around the world, we tackle the root causes of inequality faced by children, especially girls.

Legal identity and registration is a fundamental right. However, globally, around 290 million children do not have a birth certificate.[[1]](#footnote-1) Articles 7 and 8 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child acknowledge the importance of the right to an identity, including name and nationality. Target 16.9 of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, recognises the importance of identity and aims to “provide a legal identity to all, including birth registration by 2030.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Birth registration as part of a functional civil registration and vital statistics system (CRVS) is an important tool to enable access to other basic rights and benefits. Girls, for example, are too often hidden from sight—not just in their communities, but also in the statistics that drive government policy. When their births or (early) marriages have not been registered, they are effectively made invisible. Until we can at the very least count them, the chances of transforming the position of girls in society remains vanishingly small. It is for exactly this reason that Plan International will continue to make every girl and every boy visible in the eyes of the law, so that they count and can claim their rights.

Registering children at birth can therefore be the first step to reducing statelessness and in securing their recognition before the law, safeguarding their rights, and ensuring that any violation of these rights does not go unnoticed. In simpler terms: birth registration can be the first step towards being able to go to school, get medical treatment, get a job, and more.

In emergencies birth registration services may cease and documentations lost or destroyed, leaving children, in particular, at a greater risk. Therefore, effective birth registration is critical to build a protective environment against abuse, exploitation and violence.[[3]](#footnote-3) Plan International`s work highlight the importance of registration as part of a robust and comprehensive CRVS system to make every child visible. The organisation has contributed to law changes and helped register more than 40 million children in 32 countries. Plan International continues to support the development of technology for quicker processes as well as the implementation of mass mobile registration units to be able to reach those who are vulnerable, isolated and marginalised.

Plan International recently published “*Innovations in Birth Registration” (*see attached publication), calling for a change in the way we approach birth registration and the way in which we identify solutions that can contribute to universal birth registration globally.[[4]](#footnote-4) While global birth registration rates have increased in the past 10 years, more than 100 countries still do not have well-functioning CRVS systems in place to register key life events[[5]](#footnote-5). New approaches are required to overcome current challenges and make the large improvements required to achieve universal birth registration. This document combines guidance on innovation with design thinking methodologies to identify and create solutions for birth registration in all contexts and includes concrete cases studies and lessons learned from Plan international`s work - some of which are highlighted below.[[6]](#footnote-6)

1. *Use of Technologies:*

Incorporating digital technologies in birth registration processes holds important potential for expanding the reach of registration and its benefits. Success stems from the ability of digital technology to streamline registration processes and improve data quality, overcoming both the geographic and bureaucratic barriers that often keep registration low [[7]](#footnote-7)(see attached document for further details). Digitised registrations can also reduce further vulnerabilities in particular the effects of lost documentation during emergencies and conflict. Digital technologies can be used to increase accessibility to registration, provide legal documentation of vital events and produce visually digestible statistics that are complete and accurate.[[8]](#footnote-8) (See attached document for further details).

In Kenya, Plan Internationalhas partnered with Kenya’s Civil Registration Services, to develop a notification system for births and deaths using mobile technology used by community based registration agents (Assistant Chiefs and Maternal and Child Health providers). The mobile application notifies the occurrence of births and deaths to the existing central CRVS system and simplifies the work of the Registrar through the use of online validation. The system then sends an SMS to parents with an identification number and further instructions regarding certificate collection.[[9]](#footnote-9) The use of data visualisation in a dashboard function has further provided the local and national government with a real-time mechanism to monitor registration performance.

Mobile technology is also being used in a similar manner in Pakistan, a country with a birth registration rate of less than 30%. Mobile devices are used by health workers and Nikah Registrars (marriage registrars) at the community level to notify births to the registration office, simplifying the process and making it more accessible to the community.[[10]](#footnote-10) This notification application is also being further developed to enable health actors to notify births that occur at health facilities, ensuring that the birth registration process is accessible immediately and from where births occur.

Based on Plan International’s extensive experience in birth registration and expertise in CRVS digitisation, it is currently developing OpenCRVS – a standardised and free CRVS solution designed by and for civil registrars. This platform provides an alternative to proprietary software solutions that all too often do not reflect the needs of a country, and time and again create something new that, in different forms, already exists. OpenCRVS will be standardised, conforming to UN standards; be configurable, meeting country specific needs and regulations; interoperable, with health, education, National ID and other government systems; be safe and secure, with data protection and confidentiality at the core of the design; and facilitate simple and accessible registration services for citizens[[11]](#footnote-11)(See attached document for further information). Recognising that technology alone cannot bring about a sustained increase in birth registration rates, Plan International has developed an integrated digital birth registration programme that ensures a comprehensive response to current system weaknesses with specific activities focusing on the demand for and supply of birth registration services[[12]](#footnote-12). It is important to view technology as an enabler for improved birth registration, however it must always respond to a problem or a need, and be implemented as part of a holistic scope of work.

1. *Integrated systems of services*:

The use of an integrated system i.e. offering birth registration services alongside other existing services such as immunisation, allows for greater access to target populations and reduces the required effort for citizens; an effective and efficient response for both mass and continuous birth registration and the provision of other essential services. Plan International`s work in Sierra Leone involved the development of an integrated system of immunisation services with birth registration services. This proved to be a cost effective method, which resulted in one drive providing both services, meaning that children who had originally missed out on one service could access both at the same time. The integration of birth registration services with existing services such as primary health care, which tends to be one of the first to be re-established during both rapid-onset disasters and long-term armed conflicts, [[13]](#footnote-13)(see attached document for further details) immunisation or school enrolment is an important approach which can be taken in situations with requirements of mass registrations, and in particular in emergency or conflict contexts.[[14]](#footnote-14)

In Sudan, Plan International, along with WHO and UNICEF, supported the expansion of Sudan’s immunisation programme to integrate birth registration within the regular annual schedule of vaccination campaigns. This integration of the systems allowed for further reach of birth registrations enabling civil registrars to access high-risk conflict-affected areas, remote rural communities, IDPs and nomadic group’s.[[15]](#footnote-15) The numbers of registration among these groups increased significantly due to the use of an integrated system.[[16]](#footnote-16)

In Uganda, Plan International, working with the National Identification & Registration Authority (NIRA), Office of the Prime Minister Department for Refugees, and other partners, has developed integrated services for both mass and continuous birth registration in refugee settlements and host communities. By identifying priority service points for mothers/caregivers and using these for birth registration, birth registration services can be prioritised and provided with less effort. In Uganda the existing movement of mothers with their children to both health facilities (for birth, vaccination and outpatient services), as well as refugee registration sites where children are added to attestation cards, are being leveraged to drastically improve awareness of and accessibility to birth registration.

1. *Emergencies and humanitarian situations:*

In humanitarian situations many non-essential services cease to function and a child’s vulnerability to abuse is very high. It is more difficult to trace unregistered children and often more difficult for them to receive essential services. Birth registration remains critical throughout this time as strong systems can reduce the effects of these situations and the resulting vulnerabilities that persons, particularly children, may face.

Emergency situations frequently disrupt national CRVS systems, present new challenges and intensify pre-existing weaknesses.[[17]](#footnote-17) This impacts in particular on women and girls who have less access to legal documentation, resources and information prior to a crisis, and are less likely to have the supporting documentation required to register vital events. Existing authorising agents are often overwhelmed responding to the emergency and registration systems experience significant delays preventing individuals from registering within the legal timeframe required. Women and girls may also be prevented from accessing the government officials to whom they must talk in order to register events, due to mobility concerns, pre-existing gender norms that prevent involvement in public and legal affairs, and even the lack of legal standing in their country prior to the crisis. For example, domestic laws may require a woman to be married, be represented by a male guardian, or have signed approval of a husband or father prior to registering a marriage or birth.[[18]](#footnote-18) Furthermore access to population data which is essential for delivering essential services is not accessible.

As part of Plan International`s work on CRVS and, in response to the ongoing global humanitarian crisis and resultant mass movement and migration, Plan International has developed a Birth Registration in Emergencies (BRiE) toolkit. BRiE encompasses interventions that promote and improve girls and boys access to continuous, permanent, and non-discriminatory birth registration services in humanitarian situations. The BRiE toolkit is a step-by-step guide, developed to support the analysis, design, and testing of birth registration interventions before, during and after an emergency in a low-cost manner. (<https://www.brietoolkit.com/>)

In situations of emergencies, Plan International has worked with countries to build on and strengthen existing official CRVS systems.[[19]](#footnote-19) This often requires several different approaches aimed at establishing mobile registration units for remote, rural or nomadic populations as well as de-centralising services so they can be accessed at the local level.[[20]](#footnote-20) For example in Burkina Faso, Plan International has provided support as part of their *Count Every Child* initiative. Plan International provided resource support in the areas of refresher training in mass birth registration procedures, transport, equipment and stationery, as well as supporting mobile teams of government officials to re-issue and register birth certificates.[[21]](#footnote-21)

In Uganda, Plan International used the BRiE toolkit to develop a BRiE model that can be replicated by the government and other partners in all affected areas. Plan conducted mass birth registration drives and issuance of birth certificates for South Sudanese refugee children born in the country. Following this, and building on the awareness that was raised during the drives, continuous birth registration services are being offered at a limited number of health facilities and refugee registration points to ensure that births are registered immediately, recognising the transient nature of the movement of affected populations and the importance of proof of registration being issued immediately.

1. *Mobile Birth Registration Units*:

Plan International has supported the development of mobile teams with the aim of reaching the most marginalised young populations. Mobile birth registration units were used by Plan International in Colombia during their Universal Birth Registration Campaign, partially in response to the conflict to remove the barriers of access which vulnerable groups were faced with. Due to registration services only being available in urban centres many groups including Internally Displaced Persons, victims of armed conflict and those in remote and rural areas[[22]](#footnote-22) were not registered and had no proof of identity. Plan International provided technical assistance to the National Civil Registry to improve responses and policies regarding registration. Plan International also worked in collaboration to establish mobile registration units[[23]](#footnote-23) and supported the National Registry of Civil Status to develop Vulnerable Population`s Attention Unit which immediately provided persons with registration and identity documents.[[24]](#footnote-24) The equipment used was easy to transport, install and was lightweight making the registration process possible in many areas previously unreachable.

1. *Ensuring ongoing sustainability of registration systems:*

Many measures, particularly those introduced in emergencies or conflicts are short-term and temporary. There is a need for practices to ensure ongoing stability for future systems. For measures to be long term they need to be formalised and incorporated into the national system.[[25]](#footnote-25) For example (as found by Plan International Indonesia and Plan International Colombia) although mobile units allow for increased coverage in remote and conflict areas, they have been found to be unsustainable in the long term as they are expensive to operate, requiring additional funding, qualified staff and specialised equipment and transport.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Work towards decentralising current systems and extending the scope of birth registrations is a long-term area which Plan International is also providing support in. As part of the *Count Every Child* initiative, Plan International staff in Burkina Faso worked to extend the authority to issue birth registrations to community leaders.[[27]](#footnote-27) This extension in turn removed the obstacles of location, which many people previously faced. Plan International Indonesia also worked with registration offices to support the creation of a decentralised system that could work at the sub-district level creating more authority and responsibility for village leaders, schoolteachers and midwives.[[28]](#footnote-28) The decentralised system, along with use of technology allowed staff to visit households and enter all the data and upload the information onto a central website.[[29]](#footnote-29)

Ongoing monitoring of services is essential to ensure that birth registration systems continue to respond to people’s situations and needs. To do this states and organisations will need to continue to engage in, and hold regular meetings with civil registration authorities and governments to highlight issues and find practical solutions to challenges.[[30]](#footnote-30)

1. *Recommendations*

* States should make CRVS systems available and accessible at the community level to all and free of charge with no fines for late registration, in all situations. Furthermore, proactive efforts must be made to ensure that women, children, and vulnerable groups are identified and provided gender and age sensitive information regarding CRVS systems, their rights, and how to register life events.
* Existing CRVS systems must be rights-based and accessible without discrimination of any kind, including those vulnerable to exclusion on the basis of the child’s, or the child’s parents’, immigration status, social origin, sex, ethnicity, language, disability or birth out of wedlock. This is particularly important for children and families living in an irregular migration situation, for refugees and for asylum seekers, and children belonging to marginalized groups.
* States must ensure that all girls and boys unable to provide documentation should be able to access essential services, and be afforded the same protection and rights as all children within that State or Territory.
* States should take measures to permanently store and protect civil registration records and to prevent the loss or destruction of records due to emergency or armed conflict situations.
* States should improve access to registration for individuals in rural areas, by taking advantage of the most recent advances in information technology and innovative technical solutions. Including adopting de-centralising procedures, and the integration of birth registration with other existing services, such as health and education and mobilising communities to allow flexibility to ensure that individuals are not denied registration.
* States should seek innovative solutions and consider the use of technology, where appropriate to meet the needs of national civil registration and vital statistics systems, in accordance with international human rights standard in collaboration with relevant stakeholders.
* States should recognise and use data available from humanitarian sources for civil registration purposes. For example, refugee and asylum seeker children are often registered in UNHCR’s ProGres system, but not within the formal civil registration process of the country, leaving them without the legal recognition of the State.
* CRVS line ministries should work closely with disaster risk management line ministries and humanitarian actors to ensure CRVS systems are strengthened to withstand shock from a humanitarian situation. This should include the use of CRVS in humanitarian assessments.

1. UNICEF statistics on birth registration, 2016 from: [http://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/birth-registration/#](http://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/birth-registration/) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. SDG Target 16.9 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://plan-international.org/publications/birth-registration-emergencies> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Plan International 2017 *Innovations in Birth Registration*. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. WHO, World Bank Group, 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Plan International 2017 *Innovations in Birth Registration*. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Plan International 2015, *Identifying and addressing risks to children in digitised birth registration systems: a step-by-step guide.* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Plan International 2016, *Digital Birth Registration Technical Analysis.* [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Plan International 2017 *Innovations in Birth Registration*. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Plan International 2016, *Digital Birth Registration Technical Analysis.* [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Plan International OpenCRVS: A standards Based solution for civil registration. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. <https://plan-international.org/birth-registration/digital-birth-registration>. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Plan International *2014 Birth Registration in Emergencies: a review of best practices in humanitarian action.* [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Plan International 2017 *Innovations in Birth Registration*. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Plan International *2014 Birth Registration in Emergencies: a review of best practices in humanitarian action* [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Plan International *2014 Birth Registration in Emergencies: a review of best practices in humanitarian action.* [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Plan International *2014 Birth Registration in Emergencies: a review of best practices in humanitarian action.* [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. This information was taken directly from Plan International`s 2017 submission to OHCHR report on *Protecting the Rights of the Child in Humanitarian Situations*, p.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Plan International *2014 Birth Registration in Emergencies: a review of best practices in humanitarian action* [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Plan International *2014 Birth Registration in Emergencies: a review of best practices in humanitarian action.* [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Plan International *2014 Birth Registration in Emergencies: a review of best practices in humanitarian action.* [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Plan International *2014 Birth Registration in Emergencies: a review of best practices in humanitarian action.* [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Plan International *2014 Birth Registration in Emergencies: a review of best practices in humanitarian action.* [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Plan International 2017 *Innovations in Birth Registration.* [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Plan International *2014 Birth Registration in Emergencies: a review of best practices in humanitarian action.* [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Plan International *2014 Birth Registration in Emergencies: a review of best practices in humanitarian action.* [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Plan International *2014 Birth Registration in Emergencies: a review of best practices in humanitarian action* [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Plan International *2014 Birth Registration in Emergencies: a review of best practices in humanitarian action.* [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Plan International *2014 Birth Registration in Emergencies: a review of best practices in humanitarian action* [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Plan International *2014 Birth Registration in Emergencies: a review of best practices in humanitarian action.* [↑](#footnote-ref-30)