



# Birth registration in emergencies:

a review of best practices in humanitarian action



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## Acronyms

CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRVS	Civil Registration and Vital Statistics
DRM	Disaster risk management
EPI	Expanded Programme on Immunisation
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
GAVI	Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation
GTZ	German Technical Cooperation
IDP	Internally displaced people/person
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
MoH	Ministry of Health
MSF	Doctors Without Borders
NCR	National Civil Registry
NGO	Non-governmental organization
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
UDAPV	Care Unit for Vulnerable Population
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WHO	World Health Organization

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## Executive summary

Registering a birth is the first legal acknowledgement of a child's existence; without proof of identity a child is invisible to the authorities. In many countries a birth certificate is a key document to gain access to basic services and to exercise fundamental human rights.

In emergency situations, a child's vulnerability to abuse is very high; boys and girls routinely become separated from their families or care givers and are vulnerable to physical abuse, neglect, sexual and economic exploitation, discrimination, gender-based violence and recruitment into armed groups. Birth registration as part of a functional CRVS system can help build a protective environment for children in many ways. Where children are registered and the records are well kept, family tracing for separated children becomes easier as there is documentation of their parents and their origin. In cases of child marriage or the worst forms of child labour, proof of age can help aid children and prosecute perpetrators. Birth registration also offers a degree of legal protection, and can help children claim their inheritance rights.

This report brings together the findings of a literature review on birth registration in emergencies, Plan's own experiences, and experiences from other agencies. In total, 21 interviews were held with a range of humanitarian practitioners worldwide, and seven case studies of birth registration interventions in emergency situations were conducted. The review has led to the identification of several key factors and good practices which help to determine the effectiveness of birth registration:

## Good practices...

### **...in preparing birth registration in emergencies:**

- Work in child protection alliances with UN agencies and other NGOs
- Conduct a situation analysis or baseline assessment
- Raise community awareness
- Use information to develop action plans
- Involve children and communities in the design of birth registration interventions.

### **...in conducting birth registration in emergencies:**

Build on (pre-)existing systems to make them accessible to affected populations

Establish systems for issuing birth notifications

Exploit the use of mobile phone technology

Integrate birth registration with primary health care services.


### **...in ensuring sustainability of birth registration systems:**

- Adapt or formalise temporary birth registration mechanisms
- Decentralise birth registration down to sub-district level
- Advocate for legal reform
- Ensure ongoing monitoring.

Based on this review, it is recommended that governments ensure that CRVS and Disaster Risk Management line ministries work closely together and with humanitarian actors to identify appropriate measures for strengthening CRVS systems in emergencies; that humanitarian actors include birth registration in their situational assessments and in their preparedness, response and recovery work; and lastly, that donors allocate funding for this issue in humanitarian response.







# Why conduct birth registration in emergencies?

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# 1. Why conduct birth registration in emergencies?

Registering a birth is the first legal acknowledgement of a child's existence; without proof of identity a child is invisible to the authorities. Registration entitles children to their rights and helps build a protective environment against abuse, exploitation and violence,<sup>2</sup> especially during and after disasters or conflicts, when the state, community and social structures break down.<sup>3</sup>

Articles 7 and 8 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)<sup>4</sup> acknowledge the importance of the right to an identity, including name and nationality. However, globally, the births of nearly 230 million children under age five have never been recorded. Asia is home to more than half of these children (59 per cent); another 37 per cent live in sub-Saharan Africa; the remaining 4 per cent are from other regions. In 2012 alone, 57 million infants – four out of every ten babies delivered worldwide that year – were not registered with civil authorities.<sup>5</sup> This report focuses on the importance of birth registration in emergency situations and provides case studies of successful programme work that could be scaled up to ensure more children are visible.

## 1.1 What are birth registration, civil registration and vital statistics?

Birth registration is the official recording of a child's birth through an administrative process of the state, coordinated by a particular branch of government. It is a permanent and official record of the existence of a person before the law. A birth notification is the notice of the occurrence of a birth, during which midwives or others report to civil registrars, who in turn register the birth. A birth certificate is a personal document issued to an individual by the state to prove birth registration. The notification of a birth, registration and the issuing of a birth certificate are three distinct but related steps. Some birth registration systems automatically include the issuing of a birth certificate, while others require a separate application.<sup>6</sup>

Ideally, birth registrations are part of an effective civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) system that acknowledges the existence of the person before the law, establishes the newborn's family ties and tracks the major events of the individual's life.

Civil registration is the continuous, permanent, compulsory and universal recording of the occurrence and characteristics of vital events, pertaining to the population as provided through decree or regulation in accordance with the legal requirements of a country. Civil registration is carried out primarily for the purpose of establishing the legal documents provided by the law. These records are also a main source of vital statistics. Complete coverage, accuracy and timeliness of civil registration are essential

for quality vital statistics. Vital events that are typically recorded include live birth, death, fetal death, marriage, divorce, adoption and recognition/legitimation. The resulting repository or database is called the civil register or civil registry.

A fully functional CRVS system should be based on fundamental principles to ensure it is universal, permanent and continuous and that it preserves the confidentiality of personal information. It should collect, transmit and store information effectively and guarantee data quality and integrity. Such a system fulfils human rights as well as supporting the normal functioning of society.<sup>7</sup>

### Why birth registration?

If a child is not registered at birth, he or she will not have a birth certificate, and be unable to legally prove his or her name or the relationship to his or her parents. Individuals acquire important benefits from the legal status that a certification ensures. Registration entitles a child to their rights and bestows the responsibility for that child, throughout his or her life, on the state in which they are born. In many countries, proof of identity is essential to gaining access to basic services and to exercising their fundamental rights. Without a birth certificate a child may not be able to sit for school exams, receive free health care or claim rights to inheritance or legal protection in courts of law. As an adult without a birth certificate, a person may not have the right to marry, vote, be employed in the formal sector, acquire a passport to travel outside their country of birth, or even register their own children's births.<sup>8</sup>



#### The principles of jus soli and jus sanguinis:<sup>9</sup>

A country's constitution generally determines who is a national, who is an alien and how nationality can be acquired or lost. Some governments follow the principle of jus soli, whereby those born within a country's borders are nationals, even if one or both parents originally come from another country. In this case, birth registration gives the child an automatic right to citizenship of the country in which he or she was born, such as in Central and South America, the Caribbean and many English-speaking countries in Africa.

Other countries grant nationality according to the principle of jus sanguinis. In this case, a child does not have an automatic right to citizenship of the country of birth if neither parent is a national of the state. This system applies in most of Asia and the majority of countries which follow Islamic law as well as Rwanda, Liberia and India. In some countries applying jus sanguinis, such as Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon, nationality may only be passed on by a father who is a national.

In the jus soli system, the entry of birth in the civil registry is enough to ensure nationality. But under jus sanguinis, nationality may depend on documentary evidence, such as a birth certificate, supporting that at least one parent is a national of the country in question. In countries that follow the jus sanguinis system, difficulties may arise for children of parents who are nationals of a jus soli country. In such cases there is a risk that their children can become stateless and they may also be denied a birth certificate, even where this does not automatically grant them nationality.

The format of birth registration and the birth certificate varies from country to country, but the following is the minimum information that should be recorded:<sup>10</sup>

- Full name of the child.
- Child's sex.
- Full names of parents, their nationalities and address.
- Name of attending physician, midwife, birth attendant or other witnesses.
- Date and place of birth.
- Name and signature of the civil registrar.

Other commonly recorded information includes:

- Age of the mother.
- Names of and nationalities of all grandparents.
- Child's height, weight and gestational age.
- Child's immunisation status.



### Definition of key terms:<sup>11</sup>

- **A birth notification** is the notice of the occurrence of a birth by health workers, birth attendants, midwives or others to civil registrars, who then register the birth.
- **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 the existence of a person before the law.
- **A birth certificate** is a personal document issued to an individual by the state to prove birth registration. The document includes the individual's name, parents' names, date and place of birth, nationality as well as other details.

## 1.2 Why is birth registration important in emergencies?

In almost all emergency situations, whether armed conflicts, disasters caused by natural hazards or mass population displacements, children can become separated from their families or care givers. Without the protection and care of their families, they are vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, violence and neglect. Unregistered children may also be at higher risk of becoming involved in hazardous work, sexual exploitation, trafficking, recruitment into armed groups and being treated as adults in the justice system.<sup>12</sup> Unregistered children in particular can be at risk as there is no legal evidence of their existence, which makes them far more difficult to trace and their perpetrators much more difficult to prosecute. It can also be harder for unregistered children to receive aid.<sup>13</sup> Thus, birth registration potentially represents a key tool of protection for boys and girls in times of emergency.<sup>14</sup>

The implications of not having a (proof of) registration can be serious in the long-term. In some countries, no birth registration means no nationality. Depending on the country

context, people may become stateless when they are not able to prove parentage or place of birth. Individuals who are stateless are especially vulnerable, as they become overlooked by states and other service providers.<sup>15</sup> Having a legal identity also offers a degree of legal protection and can help children claim their inheritance rights, which is particularly important for orphans and child-headed households.

Ensuring birth registration of children both before, during and after a crisis can:

- Help identify unaccompanied or separated children and help facilitate their reunification with their parents, siblings or other members of family.
- Facilitate access to entitlements and services, including food, education and health care, in the short and long term.
- Provide governments and aid agencies with accurate population data and statistics to focus emergency efforts efficiently.
- Help prevent the trafficking of vulnerable children by proving the identity of a child's parent or care giver, and to reunite trafficked children with their communities and prosecute abductors.
- Help protect children from recruitment into armed groups by providing proof of their age and identity, and to prosecute abductors by legally establishing a child's age at the time of recruitment.
- Help enforce laws relating to the minimum age for employment and assist in efforts to prevent child labour.
- Help counter early marriage.
- Facilitate the acquisition of nationality and therefore help prevent child statelessness.

Many of the above ways in which birth registration can assist and benefit children are dependent on the local context and availability of laws, systems and mechanisms that create the environment for birth registration to be an effective tool for protection.

When an emergency arises, it is imperative to (re)establish CRVS systems in order to protect children. Emergencies can also provide an opportunity to revise or develop CRVS systems. However, such methods require the presence of a functional government and a stable situation, conditions which may not prevail until after a peace agreement has been negotiated, or after recovery from a disaster. The importance of registration in protecting children's rights cannot be delayed. Thus, interim measures need to be put in place to provide birth registration, even in the midst of an ongoing conflict or a rapid-onset disaster, in order to remedy the effects of a disaster on registration.<sup>16</sup>


### 1.3 Challenges of birth registration in emergencies

Emergency situations, such as armed conflicts, natural disasters and mass population displacements, frequently disrupt national CRVS systems, as well as magnify pre-existing weaknesses and present new challenges. For instance, where formal systems are in place but not adequately supported or managed, conflict and disasters will aggravate existing problems and prevent access to registration services and facilities.

Many documents, including birth certificates, may get lost or are left behind in the chaos of an emergency and the rush to flee to safe places, alternatively they are destroyed by floods or fire.

Thus, the following issues are among the most critical challenges of conducting birth registration during emergency situations:<sup>17</sup>

- It may be harder to identify unregistered children since they may not be counted by authorities.
- Birth records and identity documents that are necessary to issue a birth certificate may be destroyed or lost.
- Civil registration offices and registration records necessary for issuing replacement documentation may be destroyed, damaged or inaccessible.
- Emergency situations can lead to the collapse of the civil registration system.
- Population displacements within or across state borders may prevent parents from registering their children.
- The fact that only males can register a child in some countries further limits registration when families are separated in emergencies and left without a male representative.
- Fear of ethnic, cultural or religious discrimination, particularly in civil conflicts, may prevent parents from registering their children.
- Insufficient political will and resources are devoted to birth registration in the light of other competing priorities, such as basic survival.
- Lack of capacity at national level thwarts or postpones the establishment of functional civil registration and the necessary decentralisation of services.



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## 2. Summary of the best practices across different emergency situations<sup>18</sup>

This report brings together the findings of a literature review on birth registration based on Plan's own experiences, and experiences from other agencies. Seven case studies of birth registration interventions in emergency situations were conducted. Drawing from the case studies, several key factors which help to determine the effectiveness of birth registration have been identified in this review.

1. The elements of a functional CRVS system include a free, simple and user-friendly birth registration process, or the political willingness and capacity of responsible government authorities to put such a system into place. In emergency efforts, linking the birth registration with the CRVS is also key.
2. Functional coordination mechanisms are put in place to organise stakeholders within the child protection sector, particularly with regard to the involvement and support of UN agencies such as UNHCR and UNICEF as well as international and national NGOs, including Plan.
3. An effective advocacy strategy is set up to engage and influence governments to include birth registration on the emergency response agenda.
4. A flexible, decentralised civil registration system exists with provisions for registration at the sub-district level, and is easily accessible to parents and care givers. This system may include mobile civil registration teams that are able to access affected areas and target populations on a temporary or permanent basis in order to address specific birth registration needs of all children in emergency situations.
5. There should be a range of trained and active local community leaders, midwives and medical officers, who are authorised to issue birth notifications and work closely with district level registrars in their respective areas to facilitate prompt birth registration.
6. Government regulations should be put in place to manage the issuing of birth certificates to refugee children who have not received one from their country of origin.

Based on experiences across a range of emergency situations, the following good practices have been highlighted regarding birth registration:

### 2.1 Start up and prepare to respond to the need for birth registration in emergency situations

#### a. Work in child protection alliances with UN agencies and other NGOs

Plan staff in Colombia, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Sudan noted that being members of protection and child protection clusters and other alliances, and working in conjunction with UNHCR, UNICEF and other local and international NGOs not only



fosters the sharing of information on birth registration issues, but also promotes the efficient use of scarce financial and human resources in addressing birth registration challenges.

#### **b. Conduct a situation analysis or baseline assessment**

In the immediate aftermath of rapid-onset disasters or the sudden influx of displaced people and refugees into an area, one of the first steps Plan staff initiated was a thorough and rapid situation analysis. For example, the situation analysis conducted in Burkina Faso after the floods, in Sri Lanka after the tsunami and in Niger following the influx of Malian refugees, were aimed at documenting the extent of documentation issues faced by victims of the emergency situations. This included assessing the numbers of people affected, their location, the type of documents currently in their possession, the number and type of documents lost or destroyed and the number and type of documents which had never been applied for or issued.

Information from the situation analyses was used for the identification and planning of Plan's interventions, as well as being fed into wider national child protection strategies, such as those implemented by UNHCR and UNICEF in Mali and Sudan.

In Sudan, INGOs and the government took the situation analysis one step further. They commissioned a national birth registration baseline to gather comprehensive qualitative and quantitative data on the causes and effects of low birth registration, to inform development of future birth registration strategies.

#### **c. Raise community awareness**

In many countries, the main reason for non-registration is simply the general lack of awareness among parents and caregivers of the need for and importance of birth registration and certificates for their child's future. This lack of awareness and understanding leads in turn to a low demand for registration, as the short- or long-term benefits are not clear.

For example, in Sri Lanka, staff noted the need to undertake a focused education and awareness strategy, in which staff provided detailed feedback, circulated information material and appropriate forms. Further, they helped to determine the correct application forms and the procedures individuals needed to complete in order to recover lost or destroyed documentation or to apply for documents for the first time. Staff recommended that such information and awareness campaigns were best conducted during house to house visits, as mass meetings were only effective for imparting general information about where and when services could be accessed.

Prior to mass registration campaigns or the arrival of mobile birth registration units in remote areas in countries such as Colombia, Burkina Faso and Indonesia, Plan assisted the process by launching awareness community campaigns to highlight the importance of birth registration and to demonstrate that it is more than just expensive bureaucracy or a legal formality.

#### d. Use information to develop action plans

Armed with current information on the extent of birth registration needs among affected people, Plan was in a stronger position to engage and influence the relevant government authorities regarding the initiation of an appropriate response. For example in Burkina Faso, Plan entered into negotiations with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Security to develop an action plan and to identify roles and responsibilities of stakeholders for effectively responding to the birth registration needs of flood victims in Ouagadougou.

#### e. Involve children and communities in the design of birth registration interventions

The involvement of children and communities in the design of birth registration programmes helps to ensure that they are realistic, address local barriers to birth registration and are relevant to the local context and type of emergency situation. For example in Sri Lanka, specific assessment and awareness campaigns were also developed to target key groups, such as parents of pre-school children to raise their understanding of the challenges they faced in registering their children. The information gathered was used to design messages and interventions to ensure that parents obtained new birth certificates or had the missing documents replaced for their children.

## 2.2 Conducting birth registration in emergencies

### a. Build on existing official CRVS systems to make them accessible to affected populations

The most effective responses to birth registration needs during emergencies, involved adapting existing CRVS systems and developing flexible procedures using existing staff to address the difficulties and differences in people's lives. This involves establishing mobile registration units for remote rural areas or nomadic populations and more decentralised, locally accessible services during localised emergencies. For example, promoting temporary mobile registration teams in Burkina Faso, supporting the establishment of permanent mobile registration units in Colombia, or establishing a regular schedule of visits of civil registrars to refugee camps in Kenya, Niger and IDP transitional shelters in Indonesia.

The systems that worked most effectively tended to involve the identification of relevant government departments responsible for birth registration, the negotiation of the secondment of civil registrars to form temporary or permanent registration teams and the facilitation of the expansion of their activities through the provision of technical and financial support by UN agencies or Plan. Such support includes refresher training in mass birth registration procedures, transport, equipment and stationery.

### **b. Establish systems for issuing birth notifications**

Birth notifications have been identified as a critical first step in the birth registration process by Plan staff in Kenya, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Niger and Sudan. While a birth notification is not a replacement for an official birth certificate, it is regarded by civil registrars as evidence that a birth has occurred. Birth notification forms are frequently listed as one of the documents required for birth registration, e.g. in Sri Lanka, Kenya and Colombia.

The issuing of birth notifications is standard practice in many health facilities and hospitals. The case studies note that Plan staff have had success in training midwives, community health workers and traditional birth attendants. They have been trained to maintain birth notification registers, to issue notifications to mothers when attending a birth, and submit copies of forms to refugee camp managers, health facilities and district registrars in order to facilitate the birth registration process. Furthermore, they efficiently monitor current data on the number of newborns in an area, which is of particular importance during an emergency situation when access to up to date population data is essential to respond promptly to people's basic needs. For example, in the Dadaab camps in Kenya, midwives and medical officers are required to submit birth notifications to UNHCR within 72 hours of a child's birth.

In addition, the prevalence of birth notifications significantly increase the chance of birth registration taking place and mothers being issued with birth certificates for their newborns. Thus, 'notifiers' such as midwives and birth attendants play a critical role in explaining the benefits of registration to families and extending the coverage of birth registration in remote or conflict-affected areas.

### **c. Exploit the use of mobile phone technology**

During interviews, respondents mentioned the rise in the use of mobile phone technology, especially in remote rural communities and nomadic groups. Respondents also noted that mobile phone systems were among the first systems to be re-established during an emergency. Thus, mobile phone systems were increasingly being used to record and transmit data by relief workers. For example, Plan Indonesia described the use of mobile phone technology in capturing and transmitting birth notification data during the aftermath of the tsunami. It proved to be an excellent, if expensive, way of recording real-time information, including GIS coordinates, photographs and bio data to facilitate civil registration. Further research is required in this area to explore the use of this methodology in birth registration.

### **d. Integrate birth registration with primary health care services.**

During emergencies, integration of birth registration with existing social services, such as primary health care, immunisation and school enrolment is generally regarded as cost effective, efficient and sustainable. This is especially the case with health services,

which tend to be among the first to be re-established during both rapid-onset disasters and long-term armed conflicts. For example, WHO, UNICEF and Plan Sudan have had great success integrating birth registration with the regular annual schedule of vaccination campaigns currently implemented by the MoH's Expanded Programme on Immunisation in Sudan. This collaboration has enabled civil registrars to access high-risk conflict-affected areas, remote rural communities, IDPs and nomadic groups in order to increase the level of birth registration among children in these communities.

## 2.3 Ensuring ongoing sustainability of birth registration systems

### a. Adapt or formalise temporary birth registration mechanisms

Experience from the field suggests that temporary birth registration mechanisms, such as mobile birth registration teams, need to be effective enough to resolve the issue rapidly, so that they can be phased out over time. Otherwise these mechanisms need to be formalised and incorporated into the official birth registration system of the country. Staff in Plan Indonesia and Colombia noted that while mobile registration teams are effective in increasing the coverage in remote communities and conflict-affected areas, they tend to be unsustainable in the long term and expensive to operate, as they require substantial additional funding, qualified staff, specialised transport and equipment.

### b. Decentralise birth registration down to sub-district level

Decentralisation is one of the most effective ways of formalising temporary birth registration systems. Designating increased authority and responsibility to sub-district mayors, community and religious leaders, health workers, midwives and birth attendants can greatly improve both the efficiency and cost effectiveness of maintaining a civil registry. However, this requires effective advocacy efforts and policy reform. In some cases birth registration authority has been extended to include community leaders, as in the case of Burkina Faso. Plan Indonesia also successfully worked with the Aceh Besar Civil Registration office to support the development and implementation of decentralisation procedures of birth registration at sub-district level. Through this intervention additional authority and responsibility was devolved to village leaders, school teachers and midwives.

### c. Advocate for legal reform

It is often necessary to reform national legislation in order to ensure that the civil registration system is free, simple, accessible and non-discriminatory. Several of the countries studied above have recently reviewed and updated existing legislation and passed new regulation governing registration, including Colombia, Kenya, Indonesia, Niger and Sudan.

#### d. Ongoing monitoring

Ongoing monitoring is essential to ensure the continued functioning and responsiveness of the birth registration system to people's situation and needs. Thus, Plan continues to play an important role in monitoring the implementation of the new legislation as government departments are often slow to enact new regulations, especially at local levels. For example, in Sri Lanka during the aftermath of the tsunami, Plan held regular meetings with civil registrars to highlight issues and find practical solutions to challenges. Such meetings and relationships help to address bureaucratic obstacles, streamline procedures, provide one-stop decentralised services and reduce processing times as well as to build the technical capacity to issue birth certificates immediately.





# Country case studies

Birth registration in rapid-onset disasters caused by natural hazards

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## 3. Country case studies

A range of case studies regarding birth registration in different emergency situations is explored in section 3 of this paper. These case studies demonstrate that birth registration can be accomplished effectively during and after a disaster, as well as have a significant impact on the lives of children.

### 3.1 Birth registration in rapid-onset disasters caused by natural hazards

Disasters caused by natural hazards often strike unexpectedly, but with alarming regularity. They frequently destroy lives, homes, businesses and schools, as well as profoundly disrupting the social fabric of communities. The immediate humanitarian response is to save lives, by providing medical assistance, protection, temporary shelter, clean water and food. After people's basic needs have been met, priorities rapidly shift to recovery. Establishing conditions that ensure the protection of all children's rights is vital in such conditions.

In addition to the loss of life and destruction of infrastructure and property, many victims of disasters lose all their possessions. This might include vital documentation concerning birth, marriage, education, death or other certificates. Land documents or documents relating to litigations or disputes and banking may also be lost, and certified copies of complaints made by individuals to law enforcement authorities and others.<sup>19</sup> Birth registration services may also be disrupted by the disaster, leaving a backlog of unregistered children.

#### 3.1.1 Burkina Faso: birth registration during floods<sup>20</sup>

##### a. Background



##### Overview<sup>21</sup>

In 2009-2010, in response to an emergency situation caused by extensive flooding in Ouagadougou, Plan Burkina Faso supported mobile teams of government officials from the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Security (Ministère de l'Administration Territoriale et Sécurité) to reissue lost or destroyed birth certificates to 25,000 children and to register and issue new birth certificates to 6,500 children.

On 1 September 2009 torrential rains caused extensive flooding throughout West Africa, especially in Ouagadougou, capital of Burkina Faso. Almost 300 millimetres of rainfall was recorded in just 12 hours, one-third of Ouagadougou's annual average of 900mm, flooding the Kadiogo River and breaching embankments of canals, reservoirs and dams. The rain and subsequent flooding caused a loss of lives, serious infrastructural damage and destruction of public buildings and houses. All five districts of Ouagadougou were severely affected.



According to Government information, eight people died and approximately 150,000 people were affected, including 90,000 who were displaced. The displaced people, of whom a large proportion were women and young children, lost their homes, possessions, assets and documents. A high proportion of those affected were extremely poor, typically earning their living in the informal sector. They survived on one meal a day prior to the disaster, and as a result of the flood, were thrown into total destitution.<sup>22</sup>

### **b. Rationale for Plan's response**

Coordinated by the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT), the government and humanitarian organisations, such as Plan Burkina Faso, initiated a swift response in all accessible areas. Priority assistance included support for food security, health care, preventative medicine, and improvement of access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene, rehabilitation of basic shelter and schools as well as the provision of non-food items.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to the destruction of infrastructure and property, many flood victims lost all their vital documents. At the time, Plan was involved in a universal birth registration campaign in Burkina Faso, as part of the global *Count Every Child* initiative. Thus the organisation initiated an additional project, in conjunction with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Security, which focused on the replacement of vital documentation, especially birth certificates, which had been lost in the flood.

This project was implemented in the five affected districts surrounding Ouagadougou between 25 November 2009 and 24 January 2010, approximately three months after the flood had occurred, during the recovery phase of the disaster. During the two-month project, 25,000 children successfully applied for and received replacement birth certificates and 6,500 children were registered and issued with new birth certificates. 2,500 adults received replacement marriage certificates and 1,500 adults received replacement national identity documents.

### **c. Implementation of birth registration**



#### **Official birth registration system in Burkina Faso:**

- 77% of children under five are registered in Burkina Faso, 93% in urban areas and 74% in rural areas.<sup>24</sup>
- Birth registration is the responsibility of the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Security.
- Birth certificates are issued by civil registration officers and/or mayors based at civil registration centres at provincial (department) and district (commune) level.
- Birth registration is free if parents register the birth of their child within 60 days/two months.
- After this period, a fee of 600 CFA (US\$ 1.50) is levied for late registration.
- The *Code des Personnes et de la Famille* (Code of Persons and the Family) (1990) outlines the regulations governing birth registration and other vital events.

Plan initiated the birth registration project by conducting a situation assessment. This involved scanning the affected districts and collecting names, details and locations of all adults and children who had lost documentation during the flood, especially birth certificates. Using the results of the assessment, Plan identified potential government stakeholders to engage in the process of restoring the lost documents. An agreement was drafted between Plan and the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Security, the ministry responsible for registering people and issuing vital documents, and an action plan was developed to guide the implementation of the project.

The Ministry appointed key officials to form mobile registration teams and arranged a schedule for teams to visit the flood affected communities in order to undertake the process of restoring people's documentation or registering people for new documents.

The mobile registration teams usually consisted of five to six officials and included a supervisor (a senior official from the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Security trained in and familiar with official registration procedures); a legal representative (a senior court official/ commissioner of oaths) and three to four local officials from the relevant local municipality or district.

The mobile teams visited communal locations within each of the five affected districts surrounding Ouagadougou. Depending on the number of adults and children applying for documents within targeted communities, the team usually remained at each location for a period of two to three days, to assist people to complete application forms, process applications and verify data.

If a child or adult was born in Ouagadougou, and accurate data was provided on the application form, the original birth certificate or vital document could be traced relatively easily and a copy of the original certificate reissued within two weeks. If the applicant was born outside Ouagadougou, or if data had to be traced from another area (where birth was registered), or if the application was for a new birth certificate, the process could take up to four months.

Requirements for registration of a new or reissued birth certificate included:

- Completed and signed, handwritten birth registration form (or provide verbal information provided to an official in order for them to complete the form on the applicant's behalf).
- Either a parent or guardian to physically accompany the child to make the application for a birth certificate.
- Parent or guardian to provide proof of identify (national identity document) and to show own birth certificate.
- Mother of child to provide proof of marriage (her marriage certificate) or father of child to provide proof of identity (his own national identity document), in order to register the child in the father's name.
- Unmarried mothers were required to provide proof of identity and present their own birth certificate, to register the child in their name.

If the parent/guardian was unable to produce his/her own birth certificate and other documentation, he/she had to first apply for their own documents to be issued or replaced, before applying for the child's birth certificate to be issued or replaced.

Under normal circumstances, birth registration is free within 60 days after the child's birth. After this time has lapsed, parents need to pay a late registration fee of 600 CFA (US\$ 1.50) to apply for birth registration. Parents also need to be accompanied by two witnesses and apply for a special 'judgement' in order to finalise the birth registration application process. These applications may only be made at the district capital. However, many poor parents are unable to afford the transport costs to travel to the district office and this often precludes poorer children in remote rural areas from being registered.

During the emergency intervention, once the mobile team had processed the application forms, verified the data on the national computerised database in Ouagadougou, and sourced or checked the original documentation, a copy of the birth certificate was reissued or a new certificate was issued and printed. The mobile team then returned to the community to deliver the birth certificates to the local government office. Local officials notified parents or guardians that their documents were available for collection and people were required to visit the local government office to collect them.

Plan assisted this process by providing funding for birth registration activities conducted by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Security officials, and assisted in identifying adults and children in need of a birth certificate and observing birth registration activities at community level.

#### **d. Successes**

The project reported the following successes:

- Plan's initial needs assessment activities raised awareness among community members of the need for children to be registered and increased the demand for birth certificates when mobile teams visited their locations. Over 27,500 children were either issued with a replacement or new birth certificate in the process.
- During the registration process many adults and children, who had never had a birth certificate before, were able to apply for and get a birth certificate issued for the first time.
- Mobile registration teams visited many remote rural sites where people were hosted from poor areas, enabling easy access to birth registration services, previously only available in main district centres or the capital city.
- Government officials had recently received training in mass birth registration procedures during a national campaign to register all Burkinabe citizens who did not have a birth certificate, regardless of age and gender. Thus, the mobile registration teams were trained, qualified officials who were familiar with the procedures of official birth registration, with skills and prior experience regarding birth registration in emergency situations.

### e. Challenges

Several challenges were experienced during the implementation process:

- Data errors on application forms, such as the misspelling of names or locations, took time to verify and correct.
- Some parents or guardians did not understand the registration process, in particular whether they should apply for a new birth certificate or replacement documentation.
- The potential for double registration led to significant time delays in the application process. This occurred when registered children or adults applied for a new birth certificate instead of the reissue of existing documentation. All applicant information had to be double checked in order to accurately differentiate between new vs. replacement applications, which led to the unnecessary delays.
- The Ministry of Territorial Administration and Security requested funding from Plan based on the number of new applications for birth certificates processed. Thus, some officials tended to 'register' more people than was necessary, adding further to the workload related to and the confusion between new applications vs. the reissuing of existing documentation.
- Many birth certificates remained uncollected by parents or caregivers as adults were unaware that they had been issued or were unable to afford the transport costs to travel to local government offices to collect them.

### f. Key lessons and recommendations

Based on the experiences in conducting birth registration after the floods in Burkina Faso, staff made the following recommendations:

- Spend time educating communities on the entire birth registration process – ensure that parents and caregivers understand the difference between applying for replacement documentation vs. new birth registration and how to determine which is applicable to their situation.
- Build safeguards into the process early on to prevent double registration.
- Use Plan staff to observe the registration process to ensure it is conducted in an ethical manner.
- Streamline the document collection process once birth certificates have been issued, to ensure parents and caregivers receive documents once they have been delivered.

### 3.1.2 Sri Lanka: replacement of vital documents destroyed during the tsunami<sup>25</sup>



#### Overview

97% of children under five are registered in Sri Lanka, 97% of children in urban areas and 98% in rural areas.<sup>26</sup>

In the wake of the destruction caused by the tsunami in 2004, Plan Sri Lanka collaborated with Sewa Lanka Foundation to assist nearly 10,000 people to apply for the replacement of vital documentation

6,890 vital documents, including birth certificates were reissued as a result of the two year project.

#### a. Background

On 26 December 2004, the tsunami crashed onto the shores of Sri Lanka, severely affecting the lives of hundred thousands of people. The disaster left thousands dead, homeless and damaged, both physically and psychologically. Victims of the tsunami also lost all their possessions including vital documents that ensure basic human rights.

#### b. Rationale for Plan's response

Due to the large amount of such vital documents destroyed by the tsunami, many people faced extreme difficulties in getting access to various parts of government and other services. Although the Government of Sri Lanka was attempting to address the issue, they were overwhelmed by the enormity of the task. Therefore, several national and international non-governmental organisations launched programmes to expedite and compliment the government's efforts to help the affected families recover their legal documents.

Working in collaboration with Plan Sri Lanka, Sewa Lanka Foundation, a local NGO, launched a similar initiative during 2005 assisting nearly 4,000 families residing in the transitional shelters established by Sewa Lanka in Galle, Matara and Hambantota. During this initiative nearly 9,867 individuals submitted requests for various legal documentations to the concerned government departments, of which 6,890 such documents were reissued. As a response to the demand for similar assistance among families living outside the transitional shelters, the programme was extended to the southern and western provinces of Sri Lanka in 2006.

### c. Implementation of birth registration



#### Official birth registration system in Sri Lanka<sup>27</sup>

- Birth registration has been the responsibility of the Department of the Registrar General in the Ministry of Public Administration and Home Affairs since 1867.
- Birth registration has been decentralised to 42 Divisional Secretariats.
- Birth declarations are issued by Grama Niladaris (re home births) and hospital reports by medical officers (re hospital births) and help to facilitate application for birth certificates.
- Birth registration is free if parents register their child within 90 days.
- After this period a late registration fee LKR 1.00 - 5.00 (US\$ 0.00763 - 0.03817) is levied.
- Birth certificates are issued by the district registrar in the Divisional Secretariat in which the birth occurs.

Programme interventions in a particular transitional shelter location or community, typically started with a campaign to raise awareness among community members about the importance of birth registration. Awareness programmes were conducted at village level, at local clinics, in camps or at schools. In some districts, a special awareness programme was conducted for parents of pre-school children.

During the birth registration campaigns, project staff either went house to house or gathered and met with community members in a central location. The purpose was to develop lists of households requiring documentation, their location and the number and type of missing documentation. These lists were later used for monitoring purposes by the project. Sewa Lanka staff also distributed the relevant government forms and helped people to fill in the required information.

Completed forms were later collected and information was verified at a community meeting, during which a lawyer was present in order to check any outstanding issues related to applications. Sewa Lanka then arranged for completed forms to be delivered to the relevant government departments and later followed up with government officials to expedite the processing of applications. Once the birth certificates or other documentation had been issued, Sewa Lanka staff arranged for the new documents to be collected by hand or by post from the government agency concerned, before they were distributed to the applicants. Documentation was usually delivered to the relevant households during community 'distribution ceremonies', overseen by local government officials, community leaders and Sewa Lanka staff.

#### Requirements for registration of a new birth

Home birth:

- Inform the local Grama Niladari within seven days of the birth and obtain a birth declaration – as proof that the birth occurred.

- Complete and sign a handwritten birth registration form (or provide verbal information to Grama Niladari or Plan project staff in order for them to complete the form).
- Supply a marriage certificate of the parents – if available
- Submit all documentation to the district registrar of the Divisional Secretariat in which the birth occurred.

Hospital birth:

- Completed and signed, handwritten birth registration form (or provide verbal information to Medical Officer at the hospital in order for them to complete the form).
- Obtain a hospital report – as proof that the birth occurred.
- Submit all documentation to the district registrar of the Divisional Secretariat in which the birth occurred.

The application process is free if registration is done within 90 days of the date of birth. A late registration fee of Rs 1.00 is payable if registration is done within three to 12 months of the date of birth, or Rs 5.00 is payable if registration is done more than 12 months after the date of birth.

#### **Requirements for registering past births:**

- Submit marriage certificate of parents
- Submit Grama Niladari's declaration of birth, or hospital birth report or certified copy of estate birth report – as proof birth occurred
  - If any of these documents are not available – submit instead a certificate of baptism, health development record, certified copy of school admission register or the estate welfare officer's report
  - If none of these documents are available – applicant/witness can submit any known details about the date and place of birth in a signed affidavit.
- Submit late registration fee.

#### **Requirements for the reissuing of existing birth certificates:**

- Submit an application form for the reissue of an existing birth certificate to the district registrar of the Divisional Secretariat where the birth occurred.
- Submit the relevant search fee:
  - If the birth certificate number and the birth registration date are known, the search fee is Rs 25.00
  - If the birth certificate number and registration date are unknown, a three month search period is Rs 50.00 and a two year search period is Rs 100.00.

During the implementation of the project, Sewa Lanka staff held regular monthly meetings with divisional secretariat staff and district secretariat staff to review progress, discuss issues and to find solutions to pertinent problems. The project also provided stationery and equipment to district secretariat staff to assist with the processing of applications. In some cases project staff also assisted government officials by searching for records of missing documents.

#### d. Successes

- The Child Protection Cluster, consisting of UN agencies, Plan Sri Lanka, other INGOs, local NGOs and government staff, provided much needed coordination of child protection and birth registration initiatives in the wake of the tsunami.
- The project successfully increased community awareness regarding the importance of birth registration and the need to obtain a birth certificate.
- The project helped to develop the capacity of divisional and district secretariat officials to find and reissue missing documentation.
- Over 80% of applications for missing documents were successfully resolved and reissued during the course of the project.

#### e. Challenges

- Many families were unable to provide accurate data required to complete the application forms, especially in the case of orphans, such as full names of parents, registration number of birth certificate, name of marriage registrar and date of marriage. Guessing at the information also caused unnecessary delays in reissuing the documentation.
- Significant delays were also experienced by applicants who were born in remote areas, or areas removed from their current location.
- Gathering target communities in a common place was found to be an inefficient method of collecting information on missing documentation. Thus, staff opted for house to house visits to collect the necessary information and assist families to complete the relevant application forms. However, home visits were only possible after hours when household heads were likely to be available and able to provide the required information. This necessitated staff to work overtime on a frequent basis.
- Households residing in transitional shelters were frequently relocated to permanent shelters during the course of the project, and staff had difficulty locating them when their documentation had been reissued.
- Trained and experienced officials within local government agencies were scarce, and the short government work hours were insufficient to cope with the volume of applications and the demand for services.

#### f. Key lessons and recommendations

Based on the experiences conducting birth registration after the tsunami in Sri Lanka, staff made the following recommendations:

- In emergency situations victims of disasters experience many competing priorities. An ongoing, active communication campaign is required to make people aware of the importance and benefits of a birth certificate for children.
- Managing high community expectations is important. NGOs need to provide constant communication regarding the status of applications, and to be available to conduct regular follow up visits to maintain the trust and cooperation of community members.



### 3.1.3 Indonesia: replacement of vital documents destroyed during the tsunami<sup>28</sup>



#### Overview<sup>29</sup>

53% of children under five are registered in Indonesia, with 71% in urban areas and 41% in rural areas.<sup>30</sup>

The Universal Birth Registration campaign, initiated in 2005 and conducted by Plan Indonesia in conjunction with the Government of Indonesia, is bearing fruit. However, no formal updated data is available on birth registration.

The Tsunami Response Programme, initiated by Plan Indonesia in 2005, assisted in registering children affected by the disaster and providing 5,000 birth certificates.

#### a. Background

Since the beginning of its Tsunami Response Programme in 2005, Plan Indonesia has been working to ensure that every child in Aceh has a birth certificate. The work started with providing cost subsidies to register 5,000 children in Aceh Besar. To ensure sustainability, Plan Indonesia conducted advocacy activities, targeting communities, local NGOs and district governments to promote free and universal birth registration. This included efforts to introduce a new district qanun (local regulation) on birth registration. In December 2006, the new qanun was adopted by the local parliament. Significantly, the regulation provided that birth registration would be free for children up to six years old.

Plan Indonesia also worked with the Aceh Besar Civil Registration Office to support the development and implementation of decentralised procedures of birth registration at the sub-district level. This involved regular communication, workshops and training for village leaders, midwives and school teachers.<sup>31</sup>

#### b. Rationale for Plan's response

The recovery of vital documents, in particular birth certificates destroyed during the tsunami in 2004, was an extension of an existing campaign implemented by Plan to ensure that all children have a birth certificate.

Thus, Plan implemented a specific intervention focused on assisting adults and children with the recovery of lost documents for a period of two years after the tsunami. The project was implemented in conjunction with UNICEF and GTZ, who provided funding and equipment. Plan was responsible for social mobilisation of volunteers and raising awareness at community level. Between 2005 and 2006, the project assisted in the issuing of 5,000 new and existing birth certificates as well as of other vital documentation.

### c. Implementation of birth registration



#### Official birth registration system in Indonesia

- Birth registration is the responsibility of the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- The recent decentralisation process has resulted in 500 provincial cities and districts being given decision-making powers and registration authority. In 2009, 300 of these districts were providing free birth certificates to children.<sup>32</sup>
- Provincial and district civil registrars are authorised to issue birth certificates.
- The Law on Child Protection (2002) and the Law of Population and Administration (2006) stipulate free birth registration for children registered within 60 days of birth. The Ministry of Home Affairs has also established key guidelines for registration; including policies, mechanisms, requirements and standard forms to be used.
- Parents who fail to register the birth of their child within 60 days of birth, have to pay a late registration fee of Rp 1 million (US\$110.00) and have to appear in a district court in order to register their child.

In the aftermath of the tsunami, Plan worked to simplify and decentralise the birth registration process, as part of its wider birth registration campaign in Indonesia. With so many people displaced by the destruction of the tsunami, Plan worked to establish two kinds of birth registration processes:

- **Establishment of temporary mobile registration offices in IDP camps.** This process involved advocating for the funding of mobile civil registrars and lobbying to the Ministry of Home Affairs, the ministry responsible for birth registration, and encouraging their periodical visits to IDP camps so that applications were processed and birth certificates issued. In between visits, teams of volunteers, who had been mobilised by Plan and were based in the IDP camps, would assist the civil registrars by helping to raise awareness among parents and guardians of the need to recover lost documentation and to register new births. As part of the universal birth registration campaign, Plan had designed a specific training module on child rights and birth registration procedures for IDP camp volunteers, as well as for village midwives, post office staff, education stakeholders, religious leaders and health centre leaders. Thus, the camp volunteers were able to conduct rapid birth registration assessments, to determine what documents people had in their possession, what documents had been lost and needed to be replaced and how to complete the necessary application forms. The volunteers also documented the number of adults and children in need of different types of documentation within specific locations. During mobile visits, the civil registrars collected application forms and were responsible for safeguarding all information and transferring applications to a central office for the processing and issuing of birth certificates.

- **Decentralisation of birth registration from district to sub-district levels.** This process involved advocating for village secretaries to get them authorisation to act as local civil registrars, with the power to process birth registration forms and submit information to the relevant district office, who in turn issued birth certificates. This option proved to be a more accessible and sustainable solution for communities in the longer term, as it enabled parents and guardians to continue to register the births of their children in an easier, more convenient and less costly manner.

During the aftermath of the tsunami, Plan staff also used mobile phone technology to capture birth notification data electronically and to transmit them to a central database using POIMAPPER software. Using this technology, staff could visit a household, enter coordinates, obtain required data and a photograph and upload the information onto a central website. While this approach was extremely useful in capturing real-time data, mapping the rate and scale of different types of incidents, it was expensive to operate and required constant mobile phone service and internet access. It was also difficult to roll out within government as the technology was costly and not available at this level.

Requirements for registration of a new or reissued birth certificate included:

- Completed and signed, handwritten birth registration form (or verbal information provided to the relevant official in order for them to complete the form on the applicant's behalf).
- Proof of parent's or guardian's identity (e.g. national identify document).
- Family card – as proof that parents are married and form a family
- Proof of parents marriage (e.g. marriage certificate).
- A copy of birth notification of child, issued by the health facility in which the child was born in or by the midwife who assisted with the birth.

However, during the tsunami many people lost all their vital documents and many government offices and official records were destroyed. Thus, the official regulations had to be adjusted. Victims of the tsunami could apply for a one-year exemption from having to provide documentary proof of identification etc while they applied for vital documents to be reissued. During this time, parents/guardians only needed to provide a national identification number in order to register the birth of a child. In this situation a temporary birth certificate was issued (valid for one year) and was free of charge. In the intervening year, parents or guardians were expected to apply for the replacement of lost documents, and for a formal birth certificate to replace the temporary one.

Under normal circumstances, birth registration is free for 60 days after a child's birth. After 60 days has lapsed, parents must pay a registration fee, which varies district to district. If registration is done more than one year after the child's birth, parents have to obtain a special district court order to obtain a birth certificate.

If parents or guardians were able to register their child's birth at sub-district level, a birth certificate could be issued within three days. The process was prolonged if done via the mobile registration teams, or if information had to be validated before an existing birth certificate could be reissued.

#### d. Successes

- In 2006 a new Administration and Population Law was passed by the Government of Indonesia, which admitted free birth registrations for newborns up to two months old.
- The mobile birth registration teams model proved to be very effective for getting children registered in IDP camps, and enabling children to obtain a new or reissued birth certificate. An efficient schedule of visits was established by the civil registrar and visits to IDP camps took place at regular intervals to process birth registration applications.
- However, in the long term this model was not sustainable. Thus, Plan advocated for the establishment of a second option, i.e. decentralisation of birth registration from the district to the sub-district level and the authorisation of a permanent official, such as the village secretary, to process birth certificate applications locally.

#### e. Challenges

- The mobile registration teams were expensive to operate, as the teams required funding to cover transport and equipment costs, and internet access to process applications and to issue birth certificates.
- The mobile registration teams were a temporary measure and needed to be replaced by a more permanent solution, involving the decentralisation of birth registration to sub-district levels.
- In some areas birth registration applications were processed manually, due to lack of access to computers, equipment and electricity. In these cases, birth certificates could not be printed and issued on the spot, but needed to be issued by the central office and returned to the IDP camp or to a relevant applicant at a later date. This process proved to be much slower and more cumbersome to manage.
- In 2005, the Ministry of Home Affairs issued guidance on birth registration, specifying the policy, mechanism, requirements and standard forms to be used. However, decentralisation has posed new challenges, as some district governments view civil registration as a source of revenue, and there is no assurance that registration at district levels conforms to universal principles. According to Plan project reports, only 220 of the 440 regencies and towns have a district regulation on free birth registration, although the age limit for this varies considerably – from 60 days up to 18 years.<sup>33</sup>
- Few district governments understand the need to compile statistics on birth registration to help develop a policy on the protection and welfare of the child, and few have birth registration systems that collaborate with hospitals, health centres or village midwives to make the service more simple and accessible.
- Turnover among official staff often led to inconsistencies in birth registration procedures applied from district to district.

#### **f. Key lessons and recommendations**

Based on the experiences in conducting birth registration after the tsunami in Indonesia, staff made the following recommendations:

- Temporary, mobile birth registration systems need to be formalised as soon as the possible as they tend to be unsustainable in the long term and expensive to operate (requires additional funding, transport and equipment).
- Birth registration needs to be easily accessible, convenient and free for parents and guardians to access immediately after the birth of a child.
- Decentralisation of birth registration to sub-district/ village level should be promoted, but must be implemented uniformly across the country and needs to be accompanied by comprehensive staff training and monitoring to ensure uniform application of official procedures and powers of authorisation.

### **3.2 Birth registration in long-term conflict situations**

During armed conflict, the challenges to birth registration are frequently aggravated or severely increased. Birth records may be destroyed and fighting may prevent access to the civil registry. In some cases, hostilities can result in the collapse of the official registration system. Other barriers to birth registration include displacement within or across international boundaries, lack of resources and ethnic or religious discrimination. Conflict also exacerbates existing obstacles to birth registration, such as legal barriers, lack of financial and human resources, penalties for late registration and distance from registration centres.

In the midst of armed conflict, aid workers often focus on the urgent need to deliver assistance for basic survival. Failure to register children however, can sometimes result in the lack of access to life-saving assistance, safe water, food, shelter and health care, and may also result in further marginalization and ineligibility for school enrolment. In addition, children with no legal status are at greater risk of neglect, exploitation and under-age recruitment into fighting forces.<sup>34</sup>

The following case studies illustrate the types of approaches to birth registration that have been adopted in countries which have experienced a variety of emergency situations, including a large-scale influx of refugees, internal displacement and long-term armed conflict. In some cases, temporary measures have been implemented to sustain the official registration process. In others, the existing birth registration procedures have been specifically adapted to suit the affected population or used as an opportunity to restructure the official birth registration system to function more effectively.

### 3.2.1 Colombia: birth registration among internally displaced people<sup>35</sup>



#### Overview<sup>36</sup>

In 2005, before the launch of Plan Colombia's Universal Birth Registration campaign, 84% of children under five were registered, including 88% in urban areas and 76% in rural areas.

By 2010, the proportion of registered children under five had increased to 97%, including 97% in urban areas and 95% in rural areas.

Plan Colombia has worked in alliance with other INGOs, including UNHCR, UNICEF, OIM to promote birth registration and implement national identification campaigns.

Plan has also helped to strengthen the state's capacity by providing technical assistance to the National Civil Registry (*Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil*) to improve its response and to coordinate public policy.

#### a. Background

Ongoing internal armed conflict and human rights abuses have caused massive internal displacement in Colombia over the past 50 years. Armed opposition groups, which emerged after the demobilisation of paramilitary organisations and the Colombian security forces, continue to cause displacement of people. The launch of a recent peace process and the implementation of the 2011 Victims' Law have positively impacted the registration of internally displaced persons (IDPs) as the law now allows for possible reparation and land restitution. In December 2012, there were 4.9 million IDPs on the government registry.<sup>37</sup>

Most people have been displaced from rural areas in the coastal departments of Antioquia, Nariño, Cauca, Valle del Cauca and Córdoba. Ethnic minority groups, including indigenous and Afro-Colombian people, continue to make up a significant proportion of IDPs. Their territories are in rural areas where most of the confrontations between armed opposition groups and government forces take place. A disproportionate number of women and youth under the age of 25 have also been displaced.

IDPs continue to have only limited access to basic necessities, particularly housing and livelihood opportunities. They also have less access to basic services than the general population. 94% live below the poverty line and 77% live in extreme poverty.<sup>38</sup>

#### b. Rationale for Plan's response

Plan has implemented a Universal Birth Registration campaign in Colombia since 2006. During the campaign, it became clear that birth registration was not available to all children, especially with regard to internally displaced children, the poor, those who are victims of armed conflict and those in remote rural areas.

Thus, Plan Colombia undertook the following strategies to increase birth registration: to provide technical assistance to the National Civil Registry to improve its response to birth registration; to implement a national identification campaign; and to collaborate with UN agencies, including UNHCR, UNICEF, OIM and other organisations to support and finance the establishment of mobile civil registration units or UDAPVs (mobile care units for vulnerable populations).

### c. Implementation of birth registration



#### Official birth registration system in Colombia

- The National Civil Registry (*Registraduría Nacional del Estado Civil*) is responsible for organising independent elections, the civil registry and the identification of people. Within the NCR, the National Department of Civil Registration is in charge of the official registration of births, marriages, deaths and other vital events.
- At present birth certificates are issued by civil registrars. The government is however in the process of passing a regulation that will authorise medical officers at hospitals and specifically trained midwives to issue birth certificates. Currently they are only authorised to issue birth notifications.
- Birth registration is free if parents register the birth of their child within six months.
- The main laws governing the registration of births include the Request of the Registry of Birth (Decree 2737 of 1989) and the Statute of the Registry of the Civil Status of the People (Decree 1260 of 1970).

The mobile civil registration units provide an ongoing registration service to remote communities to ensure that people have access to civil documentation. They tend to target ethnic minority groups and unregistered people, displaced by armed conflict.

The mobile units usually consist of two all-terrain vehicles which are fully equipped with generators, satellite internet connections, printers, computers, cameras, blood sampling and other equipment needed to process and issue a variety of civil registration applications in situ. The units focus on providing three main types of official documentation: birth certificates, national identify cards for teens and national identity cards for adults.

The mobile units are staffed by a group of six – ten staff from various government departments, including a project leader, civil registrars, photographer, finger printer, bacteriologist, data entry clerks, technicians and drivers.

Prior to a visit to a targeted community by the mobile unit, UNHCR and Plan Colombia intend to organise a media campaign to raise awareness of the importance of birth and civil registration in the community. Information concerning where and when the mobile units will be present at a certain location, and the requirements for registration is also provided.

Mobile teams usually remain in a community for up to two days, depending on the volume of applications that require processing. Typically they have the capacity to process approximately 400 applications per day.

Requirements for registration of a birth certificate included:

- Proof of parent or guardian's identification (e.g. national identification card)
- Presentation of birth notification – if the child was born in a health centre/hospital
- If the child was born at home – two witnesses are required to sign a statement identifying the parents of the child. In areas where the church is active, a baptism certificate is also accepted.
- For single mothers, the presence of a witness is necessary to register the child.

Birth certificates are issued free of charge for a period of six months after the birth of the child. Certificates may only be issued by the civil registrar, but the government is in the process of passing a regulation that will authorise the issuing of birth certificates by medical professionals based in hospitals. (At present they are only authorised to issue birth notifications.) After six months, a fine of 185 pesos (US\$ 0.10) is charged for late registration or 380 peso (US\$ 0.20) after six years. During the month of April, according to an agreement with the Ministry of Finance, registration is completely free and all fines are suspended.

As the civil registration system is computerised and linked to a central government database, double registration is easy to detect and duplicate files are deleted before a birth certificate or identity document is issued.

#### **d. Successes**

- Media campaigns have increased community awareness about the need to register the birth of children and to obtain teen and adult identity cards.
- The joint collaboration among Plan Colombia, UNICEF, UNHCR, OIM and the Government's National Registration Office has led to the successful establishment of mobile civil registration units.
- The mobile units have allowed much greater access to the registration services in remote areas. Furthermore, mobile services have greatly reduced the costs of travelling, photographs and blood tests required to obtain birth certificates or national identity cards.
- These services have ensured that many marginalised and hard to reach community groups, including ethnic minorities, nomadic groups, orphans, street children, migrants and refugees, have been issued with birth certificates and national identity cards. This has had a significant impact on people displaced by armed conflict. In general, families and children displaced by armed conflict tend to leave behind their civil documents, and/or have children born during the displacement period who have yet to be registered. Against this background, the mobile units have been able to reissue documents when required.

#### **e. Challenges**

- Mobile services are costly to operate and maintain and will require additional government funding as UN agencies gradually reduce funding over time.



- Mobile registration campaigns have reached the most isolated populations, allowing more people access to key social services and an official identity.
- Ongoing armed conflict in coastal areas has disrupted the activities of mobile registration units and prevented them from accessing certain areas.
- Roads in some remote, mountainous areas are impassable; thus, some communities have remained inaccessible to the mobile units.

#### **f. Key lessons and recommendations**

Based on the experiences conducting mobile birth registration within Colombia, staff made the following recommendations:

- Working in alliance with other organisations and the Government of Colombia has been essential, not only because it enhances learning from experience, but due to its effect on efficient resource management.
- The mobile registration campaigns have reached the most isolated populations, changing the pattern of people with access to key social services and an official identity.

### **3.2.2 Sudan<sup>39</sup>**



#### **Overview<sup>40</sup>**

Working in conjunction with the Ministry of Health's Expanded Programme on Immunisation, UNICEF and Plan Sudan have assisted teams of civil registrars to join forces with vaccination teams in their well-established schedule of annual vaccination visits. The aim has been to conduct birth registration activities in remote and high-risk conflict areas, such as Darfur State.

#### **a. Background**

The operating environment for humanitarian organisations in Western Sudan is complex and challenging due to the continuous displacement and movement of population, as an effect of the persistent armed conflict between the government and rebel groups. Although current population figures are contested, it is estimated that there are approximately 2.3 million internally displaced people, 140,000 refugees, 7,000 asylum-seekers and hundreds of thousands of persons at risk of statelessness in Sudan.<sup>41</sup>

Disagreements over oil-sharing between Sudan and South Sudan, the shutting down of oil exports, unresolved post-independence issues in the Protocol Areas and the ongoing violence in Darfur, continue to fuel the armed conflict. The persistence of the conflict has led to further internal displacement of people as well as large outflows of refugees into Ethiopia, South Sudan and Chad.

Refugees from neighbouring states and internally displaced people in eastern Sudan also face acute poverty and lack of access to healthcare, education and employment. Persistent drought has degraded the land and shrunk pasture lands, leading to malnutrition among refugees and host communities.

Despite the expulsion of some INGOs from Sudan, UNHCR, working in conjunction

with UNICEF, Plan Sudan and other international NGOs, have attempted to address statelessness among refugees and IDPs by providing technical advice and support to the Government of Sudan to issue nationality documentation in Sudan. NGOs are also monitoring the protection of those at risk of statelessness and UNHCR is encouraging government authorities to address the need for refugee status determination, documentation, basic supplies and employment for refugees and IDPs.

### **b. Rationale for focus on birth registration**

As part of the Universal Birth Registration campaign, Plan Sudan is working in conjunction with UNICEF to strengthen national child protection systems and to reduce the obstacles to birth registration in order to ensure free and universal birth registration. Key actions initiated to support birth registration include legal and policy reform, civil registry strategic planning, capacity building and awareness raising, the integration of birth registration into other services, such as health and education, community based registration and social mobilisation campaigns.

The programme commenced in 2005, with a national baseline assessment of birth registration. This was followed by a national conference on birth registration in 2007 and the establishment of a national task force on birth registration to guide further work on this issue.

During the process, internally displaced people, rural communities and nomadic groups in high-conflict areas, such as the Darfur State, were identified as key target groups. Due to security issues and the difficulty of access, these groups have very low levels of birth registration. Thus, a specific birth registration programme was developed in conjunction with UNICEF and WHO's health care and vaccination campaigns which were implemented in the same region.

### **c. Implementation of birth registration**



#### **Official birth registration system in Sudan:**

- Birth registration is the responsibility of the Civil Registry (established in 2005) under the Ministry of the Interior.
- Birth certificates are issued by civil registrars in 285 centres and 1,024 mobile registration units across Sudan. Ministry of Health medical officers at primary health care facilities, health centres and hospitals are also authorised to register children born at their facilities.
- Birth registration is free but parents must pay a fee of US\$ 2.00 to receive a copy of their child's birth certificate. Late registration fees are also levied.
- The Civil Registry Act (2011) governs the procedures for birth registration.
- Children need an official birth certificate in order to enrol in education facilities, to sit national examinations, to enter university and to apply for other civil documents, such as a passport.

on Immunisation (EPI).<sup>43</sup> Ten years ago, one third of Sudan's children missed out on vaccinations against polio, measles, tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis and tuberculosis, putting them at risk of death and disability. However, due to the success of the EPI, more than 90% of children in Sudan are at present vaccinated.

The biggest challenge of the EPI was to overcome insecurity in the Darfur region, to ensure the vaccination of children in remote areas and hard to reach groups. Access by the vaccination teams into these areas is difficult and risky, but continuous negotiations between the government, armed groups, local communities, INGOs and UN agencies have led to the team being granted access into these areas.

In high-risk areas, the vaccination teams adopted a "hit and run" strategy to enter an area under military protection, to immunise the children and leave as soon as possible. The government also allowed volunteers from armed conflict areas to travel into government-controlled areas for training and collection of new vaccines and additional support, so that they could go back and vaccinate children in areas where it was too risky to send in a team of outsiders.

The other challenge for vaccinators was to access the 10% of Sudan's population who belong to nomadic pastoralist groups. By training volunteer vaccinators from these groups, the EPI has managed to reach approximately 80% of their children. This was done by designating a focal person in each group and developing maps to show their locations and movement routes as they follow the rainfall patterns to feed their grazing animals during the dry and rainy seasons. The rapid spread of mobile phones among nomads also helps vaccination teams to keep in contact with the groups and to plan the location and timing of temporary vaccination clinics. Whenever the groups pass a vaccination post, they collect more vaccines and submit health information and update MoH vaccination records. Since the start of the programme, more than 4,000 temporary vaccination clinics have been established in Sudan, forming the main infrastructure to support a regular schedule of annual vaccination campaigns across the country.<sup>43</sup>

Given the effectiveness of the vaccination teams, their ability to access high-risk and insecure areas, and to systematically cover remote areas and nomadic groups, it was deemed strategic to coordinate birth registration through the EPI. Over the last two years, UNICEF and Plan Sudan have worked with civil registrars, equipping them and providing them with training in birth registration procedures, and coordinating the formation of teams of registrars to join the MoH vaccinators in order to accompany them when they visit target communities in high-risk areas.

In Darfur State, civil registrars join the vaccination teams during their annual vaccination campaigns in the region. Teams of approximately 10 vaccinators and civil registrars will spend up to two days per site. They are able to vaccinate and register approximately 50-70 children per day, depending on the size of the population and number of children in need of services.

Civil registrars have also helped to train community-based health workers, such as traditional birth attendants, midwives and other entrusted people to issue birth notifications and to make the registration system more efficient for communities, especially for people living in remote rural or insecure areas.

Requirements for birth registration include:

- Fill in and sign a handwritten birth registration register (or provide verbal information to a health worker or official in order for them to complete the form on the applicant's behalf.)
- Mother of the child to provide proof of identity, such as a national identity card or refugee identity card.
- Provide a birth notification, if child was born in a health facility or if the birth was attended by a midwife.

Birth registration is free, but parents are required to pay US\$ 2.00 to receive an official birth certificate. The handwritten birth registration registers are submitted monthly to the Civil Registry office in Khartoum where data is entered into a national computerised database. Birth certificates are completed by hand and issued to parents immediately after they pay the required fee.

Late registration involves a more complex registration process. Parents must provide proof of identity and obtain a certificate from the court to certify that they are the parents of the child. The necessity of having to travel to the nearest court, the cost of travel and the lack of required identification documents further discourage parents from registering their children.

#### **d. Successes**

- The combined strategies of community awareness sessions, the use of local media to spread information, the training of midwives and local authorities in birth registration techniques and establishing mobile registration units, has proved effective in increasing the national number of children who are registered at birth.<sup>44</sup>
- District-level registration centres issue court declarations to ensure that unregistered children under 15 years are able to become registered and receive birth certificates.
- Coordination of vaccination campaigns and birth registration has been very successful in helping people in remote communities and conflict-prone areas to register their children.
- Through training, civil registrars are fairly knowledgeable about the procedural aspects of birth registration.
- A network of civil registration offices and mobile units has been established in most parts of the country.
- Through the national task force, the Government of Sudan has demonstrated commitment to establishing a civil registration system and enacting legislation.

#### **e. Challenges**

- Parents and caregivers have a low level of awareness about birth registration as a basic right and the future negative implications of non-registration.
- Ongoing political instability and armed conflict, vast geographic areas, poor roads and continued insecurity, cause the inaccessibility of many areas of the country. In addition, the disruptive effect of the repeated displacement of adults and children poses a big challenge.
- There is weak infrastructure and a lack of clear coordination and understanding of

the different roles and responsibilities of the various entities concerned with birth registration.

- The birth registration system is manual, very labour intensive and cumbersome.
- There is a lack of systematic training of civil registrars at all levels.
- Lack of birth registration forms and stationery in remote areas.
- Poor quality of paper used for birth certificates, making them less durable over time.
- Fees charged for obtaining a birth certificate discourage parents from completing the registration process and obtaining birth certificates.

#### f. Key lessons and recommendations

- Coordinate birth registration activities with health service providers, such as vaccination teams for maximum coverage of remote rural areas and mobile population groups.
- Abolish fees required for birth certificates and promote universal, free birth registration for all children.
- Review the implementation of birth registration systems in remote rural and conflict-prone areas in order to streamline the process and coordinate the different role players. The roles of different stakeholders, such as MoH medical officers, civil registrars and community-based health workers needs to be further clarified and documented to ensure they work together more efficiently.
- Explore the use of mobile technologies to make birth registration easier and more cost effective for people in remote rural communities, inaccessible conflict-prone areas and nomadic groups.

### 3.2.3 Kenya: birth registration among Somali refugees in Dadaab<sup>45</sup>

#### a. Background

Dadaab in the North Eastern Province in Kenya, features a UNHCR base that serves



#### Overview<sup>46</sup>

UNHCR currently facilitates the birth registration of an estimated 2,000 children per month in the Dadaab camps.<sup>47</sup>

four refugee camps surrounding the town; including Hagadera, Dagahaley, Ifo and Ifo2. The Dadaab camps were initially constructed in the early 1990s. Ifo camp was first to be settled by refugees from the civil war in Somalia. At present Dadaab hosts people who have fled various conflicts in the larger East Africa region. Most have come as a consequence of the civil war in southern Somalia, including both Somalis and members of Somalia's various ethnic minority groups, such as the Bantu. Many people have migrated from the southern Juba River valley and the Gedo region, while the remainder have arrived from Kismayo, Mogadishu and Bardera. In April 2013, the combined population of the camps was estimated at 441,434.<sup>47</sup>

## b. Rationale for focus on birth registration

The Kenya Births and Deaths Registration Act (2012 [1972]) outlines the rights and procedures for children born in Kenya, including children born to refugee parents. It is essential in camps the size of those in Dadaab for UNHCR to be able to accurately track the number of births and deaths occurring within the area, as well as the number of new arrivals and departures. Thus UNHCR, working in conjunction with the Government of Kenya, has developed procedures to guide birth registration system within the camps.

## c. Implementation of birth registration

Birth registration within the Dadaab camps falls under the mandate of the Ministry of Registration of Persons and is undertaken by district civil registrars, who work in partnership with UNHCR.<sup>48</sup>



### Official birth registration system in Kenya:

- Birth registration is the responsibility of the Civil Registration Department in the Office of the President.
- Birth certificates are issued by district civil registrars in the district in which the birth occurs.
- Birth registration is free if parents register the child within six months of the date of birth.
- After this period, a fee of Ksh 150.00 – 200.00 (US\$ 1.50 – 2.00) is levied for late registration.
- The Births and Deaths Registration Act (2012 [1972]) governs the procedures for birth registration in Kenya.

UNHCR's encampment policy outlines procedures for birth registration within the Dadaab camps. For example, children born to refugee mothers in hospitals in Dadaab are issued with birth notifications by the medical officer on duty. The notification is either entered into a register or documented on an official form (filled out by hand). The birth notification forms are individually numbered and copies are given to the mother, the hospital, and UNHCR. Medical staff are also obliged to notify UNHCR of any home births in the camps within 72 hours of the birth. UNHCR staff estimate that approximately 2,000 children are born in the camps per month.<sup>49</sup>

A copy of the birth notification must be submitted to UNHCR within two weeks of the date of birth of the child. All notifications are then forwarded to the district civil registrar in Garissa. A team of Kenyan government officials, from the district civil registrars' office, visit the Dadaab camps for a period of two weeks every month to process birth notifications and to issue birth certificates.<sup>50</sup> Birth certificates are stamped "refugee" to indicate that the child was born in Dadaab. However, children are still able to access all services normally available to other Kenyan children. Birth certificates are usually issued within one month.

While children who are born in the camps are able to register and get a Kenyan birth certificate issued, the situation of refugee children not born in Kenya is less clear. It is estimated that less than 2% of Somali children have a birth certificate. Thus, the vast

majority of Somali refugee children entering Dadaab do not have a birth certificate.

On arrival in Dadaab, all refugee adults and children undergo refugee status determination before their status is confirmed by UNHCR. Once a refugee's status is confirmed he or she is registered, finger printed and issued with a UNHCR refugee identity card or pass. Adult refugees, regardless of gender or age, are issued with an identification card. Children under the age of 18, are issued with a refugee identity pass or a mandate letter. The refugee identity pass includes a unique ID number, the child's full name, nationality, place of birth, date of birth, gender, date of issue, date of expiry and a photograph. ID cards and passes are valid for a period of one to five years. The mandate letter is an A4 letter on standard-weight copy paper and recognises the status of the holder as a refugee. It includes the same details as the identity pass as well as the seal of UNHCR.

Passes and identity cards are issued free of charge by UNHCR. If lost, a duplicate can be obtained by submitting a police abstract to the UNHCR registration officer. If it expires it can be replaced by following the renewal procedures. Identity cards and passes for camp refugees are produced in Nairobi and delivered to the camps for distribution to the refugees.

While both the refugee pass and mandate letter provide children with proof of age and can be used to access essential social services and ensure a certain level of protection, they do not replace the need for a birth certificate. Critically, these documents cannot serve as a key form of proof of whether a child has acquired nationality by birth or by descent.

#### **d. Successes**

- The birth registration system in the camps works well and children are issued with a birth certificate. This enables them to access basic social services, attend local clinics, enrol in primary and secondary education facilities and write the necessary exams.
- Birth registration figures help UNHCR to better track and estimate population sizes and demand for services within the camps. Birth registration also helps during the repatriation process.
- With a birth certificate, households can prove that their household size has increased and thus they are able to qualify for additional food rations and other support services available in the camps. For parents, this is regarded as one of the most important reasons for registering their newborn children.

#### **e. Challenges**

- Many parents in the camps are still unaware of the importance of birth registration and do not follow up with UNHCR to collect their children's birth certificates.
- The birth registration system is largely manual and relies on hand-written forms. Data management can be poor in these conditions. For example, birth notifications can get lost, which prevents birth certificates from being issued. The process takes time and frequently results in spelling mistakes, requiring birth certificates to be reissued. However, attempts are being made at computerising the system, using UNHCR's computers and database.
- Government staff shortages are an issue; more civil registration staff are needed to process the high volume of birth notifications and to speed up the registration process.

- Inefficiencies at registrars' offices may result in two or three visits to get a birth certificate, which is cumbersome and a disincentive to families seeking registration.
- Additional funding is needed to further improve, streamline and computerise the birth registration system.
- Kenyan law does not contain any provision to address the protection needs of foreign-born refugee children in terms of birth registration and the issuing of birth certificates.

#### f. Key lessons and recommendations

Based on the experiences in conducting birth registration within the Dadaab camps, staff made the following recommendations:

- Birth registration is critical for enabling children to realise their rights as well as providing important population data necessary to respond to the needs of refugees and to manage refugee settlements.
- It is essential to develop birth registration systems within existing government laws and regulations, and to use district civil registrars to implement the required procedures to issue official birth certificates.
- Decentralising the issuing of birth notifications to health centres and medical staff is a useful first step in the birth registration process and ensures the immediate record of the birth of a child within the camps.
- Advocate for government regulations to be put in place regarding the issuing of birth certificates to refugee children who have not received one from their country of origin.

### 3.2.4 Niger: birth registration among Malian refugees in Niger<sup>51</sup>

#### a. Background

In early 2012, clashes between armed rebels and government forces erupted in



#### Overview<sup>52</sup>

32% of children under five are registered in Niger, 71% in urban areas and 25% in rural areas.<sup>53</sup>

Since 2005, the Universal Birth Registration campaign conducted by Plan Niger has contributed to 4.3 million children receiving birth certificates.

Current activities by UNHCR regarding Malian refugees in Niger target approximately 30,000 children, to make sure that all Malian refugee children under 12 months are issued with official Nigerien birth certificates.

Plan Niger supports the decentralisation of birth registration services, reinforces community leaders' capacity in civil matters, supports the functioning of secondary registration centres, collects, collates and transmits registration data to UNHCR and the national statistics institute and builds the capacity of health workers to promote birth registration.



northern Mali and hundreds of thousands of people have been forced to flee their homes. The hostilities have added to the challenges faced by these communities, who are already severely affected by the drought and food insecurity that prevails in the Sahel region. In March 2012, the situation deteriorated further, when elements of the Malian armed forces carried out a coup. The Tuareg rebel group, *Mouvement National de Libération de l'Azawad* (MNLA), and its Islamist allies seized this opportunity to declare the secession of northern Mali. However, the Islamists soon overwhelmed the MNLA and took control of most of the north, including cities such as Timbuktu.

Basic services are no longer provided to the population, and violations of human rights have been reported. This situation triggered the internal displacement of an estimated 204,000 while more than 200,000 Malians have found refuge in neighbouring Mauritania, Niger and Burkina Faso.<sup>54</sup>

On 9 June 2013, UNHCR reported 60,739 refugees registered or awaiting registration in nine camps and locations along the Niger border with northern Mali.<sup>55</sup> Reports estimate that more than half of these people are children, under the age of 18.<sup>56</sup>

The provision of water, sanitation and hygiene, health, education, protection from sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and child protection, are the main priorities of UNHCR and its partner organisations. One of the three main programme objectives is fair protection and documentation. Specific targets for 2013 regarding documentation and birth registration include:<sup>57</sup>

- Increasing the level of individual documentation, such as travel and identity documents
- Strengthening civil registration and civil status documentation, such as providing birth registration certificates to 50% of children under 12 months
- Improving and maintaining the quality of registration and profiling
- Improving reception conditions by providing legal counselling to IDPs.

#### **b. Rationale for Plan's response**

In 2005, prior to the launch of Plan Niger's birth registration campaign, only 27.6% of the population had birth certificates. In 2007, the proportion of those registered had increased to 32%, amounting to an increase in 4.3 million children.

Plan Niger's ongoing activities regarding birth registration include: supporting civil state services by providing logistics for the development and conservation of civil state documents; supporting the decentralisation of registration services; reinforcing community leaders' capacity in civil state matters; making secondary registration centres operational; collecting, collating and transmitting registration data to the national statistics institute and reinforcing the capacity of health agents to promote birth registration among local communities, displaced groups and refugees.

In both Mali and Niger, Plan has conducted field protection monitoring activities by visiting villages within programme areas to identify and assess emerging child protection issues. Information is obtained through discussions with vulnerable groups, such as internally displaced people, as well as community leaders. The information

received regarding child protection issues is reported to UNHCR and has been used to update the Mali National Protection Strategy.

With regard to the current emergency situation involving Malian refugees in Niger, Plan staff have helped to identify mothers who are about to or have given birth, and to report these cases to Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) health workers and medical staff to ensure that birth notifications are issued to mothers immediately after the birth.

### c. Implementation of birth registration

As mentioned above, Plan assists with the identification of expectant mothers, and reports these cases to MSF in order for birth notifications to be issued.



#### Official birth registration system in Niger:<sup>58</sup>

- Birth registration is the responsibility of the Department of Civil Status and Refugees (*Direction de l'État civil et des Réfugiés*) within the Ministry of Interior and Decentralisation.
- Birth certificates are issued by civil registrars in administrative centres at district or provincial (department) level.
- Officials based in health facilities and administrative posts in smaller towns and villages are authorised to issue birth notifications.
- Birth registration is free if parents register the birth of their child within 45 days.
- A late registration fee of 1000 – 10,000CFA (US\$ 2.50 – 25.00) is levied for births registered after this period.
- The *Politique Nationale de l'État Civil* (Civil Status Registration Policy) (2007) outlines the regulations governing birth registration and other vital events.

The handwritten birth notifications are issued to mothers from a birth notification register by MSF health workers and midwives, who attend the birth or who visit the mother shortly afterwards, if the birth takes place outside a medical centre. UNHCR situation updates report that 84% of birth deliveries are assisted. This indicates that birth notifications are probably being issued to 84% of newborns with in refugee camps.<sup>59</sup>

Three copies of the birth notification are issued by MSF staff. One copy is issued to the mother and one is sent to the UNHCR camp manager for record keeping. The third copy is sent to the camp HQ for collection and processing by the civil registrar at the relevant district administrative centre, in order for an official Nigerien birth certificate to be issued. Plan then follows up with refugee mothers afterwards to ensure that they apply for official birth certificates from the civil registrar on time.

Requirements for registration for a new birth certificate include:

- Completed and signed, handwritten birth registration form (or verbal information

provided to NGO staff in order for them to complete the form on the applicant's behalf.)

- Mother of the child to provide proof of identity, such as a national identity card or refugee identity card.
- Provide copy of birth notification issued by health facility or midwife who assisted with the birth.

Birth certificates are issued free if applied for within 45 days of the birth. After this period, a fine of 1,000 – 10,000 CFA (US\$ 2.50-25.00) must be paid and at least one parent must sign an affidavit in order to apply for a birth certificate. Civil registrars at district and provincial-level administrative centres are authorised to issue birth certificates.

UNHCR has arranged for district civil registrars to collect the birth notification forms from the camps for processing and to return issued birth certificates to camp HQ for distribution to mothers and their children. Usually this process takes up to two months. There is no difference between birth certificates issued to refugee and non-refugee children.

Mothers who give birth to children, but who do not notify camp staff, do not get issued with birth notifications. Thus, they are less likely to apply for birth certificates.

#### **d. Successes**

- UNHCR and its NGO partners have strengthened civil registration and civil status documentation systems, to ensure that provisions are made so that all children under 12 months of age are issued with a birth certificate.
- 84% of births in refugee camps are attended, and the opportunity for the provision of critical health interventions is provided. This includes vaccination and the issuing of birth notifications and advice to encourage parents to register their newborn child.
- The issuing of a birth notification by NGO health workers and midwives is a critical first step in ensuring that newborns are registered at birth and that children under 12 months get issued with a birth certificate.
- Relationships and procedures have been established with district civil registrars to ensure that birth notification forms are recognised by officials and used to issue birth certificates efficiently.
- The adoption of the *Politique Nationale de l'État Civil* (Civil Status Registration Policy) (2007) has helped to streamline the birth registration process, improve registration rates and has increased the number of functional birth registration centres across the country by two thirds.<sup>60</sup>

#### **e. Challenges**

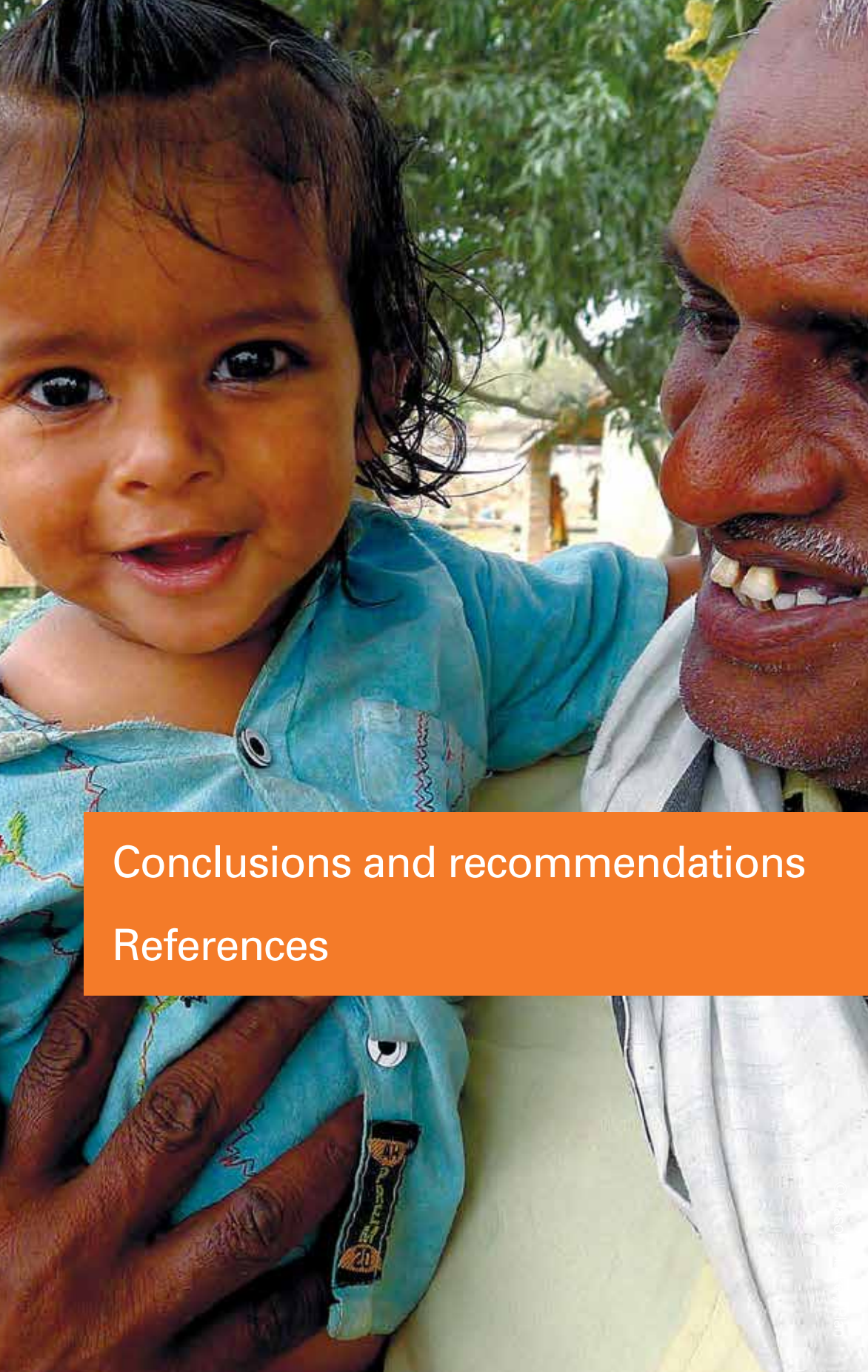
- Observation of children in camps in Niger reveals that the majority of refugee children do not have a birth certificate, often due to negligence or ignorance by parents and due to the fact that most Malian refugees in the Sahel region are nomadic people without any permanent place of residence.
- While the issuing and recognition by the Government of Niger of UNHCR refugee identification cards has solved the problem of access to proper identity documents for Malian refugees, neither the law nor advocacy attempts by UNHCR have

enabled unregistered refugee children older than 12 months to be issued with a Nigerien birth certificate, as current legislation prohibits the registration and issuing of birth certificates to children who were not born in Niger.

- While, some attempts are being made by UNHCR, Plan and other NGOs to source replacement birth certificates of registered children from the relevant authorities in Mali, unregistered Malian children are at risk of being deprived of a nationality as well as access to social services. At present, this situation applies to most Malian refugee children in Niger, Burkina Faso and Mauritania.
- The absence of a computerised civil registration system creates difficulties in storing and retrieving documents, following up on applications and correcting errors.
- There is low coverage and poor spatial distribution of administrative services, especially in remote border regions.
- There is insufficient funding, equipment and trained civil registration staff to operate administrative centres.

#### **f. Key lessons and recommendations**

- Birth registration is critical for enabling children to realise their rights as well as providing important population data necessary to respond to the needs of refugees and to manage refugee settlements.
- The issuing of a birth notification by NGO health workers and midwives is a critical first step in ensuring that newborns are registered at birth and that children under 12 months get issued with a birth certificate.
- It is essential to develop birth registration systems within existing government laws and regulations and to use district civil registrars to implement the required procedures to issue official birth certificates.
- Advocate for government regulations to be put in place regarding the issuing of birth certificates to refugee children who have not received one from their country of origin.



Conclusions and recommendations

References

## Conclusions and recommendations

In emergency situations, universal birth registration as part of a CRVS system can represent an important tool to ensure appropriate care for and protection of girls and boys against violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. Where children are registered and the records are well kept, family tracing for separated children becomes easier as there is documentation of their parents and their origin. Proof of registration and age can help prevent children from being involved in hazardous work, sexual exploitation and trafficking, being recruited into armed groups and being treated as adults in the justice system. Birth registration also offers a degree of legal protection, and can help children claim their inheritance rights.

At the same time, emergencies pose specific challenges to formal Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) systems. Infrastructure may be damaged, documents destroyed or lost and pre-existing weaknesses in the formal registration systems may be exacerbated. These challenges require actions from government and non-government actors, such as the revision, adaptation and/or development of systems, measures and techniques for birth registration.

By reviewing good practices in preparing and conducting birth registration in emergencies and in ensuring sustainability of CRVS systems, Plan International aims to contribute to the development of an inter-agency framework that provides best practices and guidelines on birth registration in different types and stages of emergencies.

### Recommendations

To ensure effective birth registration in emergencies in current and future disaster responses, it is recommended that:

- Governments ensure that CRVS line ministries work closely with disaster risk management line ministries and humanitarian actors, to identify appropriate measures for preparedness and for strengthening CRVS systems in emergencies.
- Humanitarian actors ensure that a situation analysis for birth registration and CRVS becomes an integral part of humanitarian assessments, and that they incorporate birth registration actions as part of emergency preparedness, response and recovery.
- Donors allocate funding for birth and civil registration as part of preparedness in humanitarian response and recovery. While birth registration may not be an immediate, life-saving priority in humanitarian response, it is clearly an important tool for protection before, during and after emergencies. However, funding for birth and civil registration efforts in emergencies may need to link to longer term funding initiatives.

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# About Plan International

Plan has been working for and with children for more than 75 years. We currently work in 50 low and middle income countries across Africa, Asia and the Americas to promote child rights and lift millions of children out of poverty. We focus on the inclusion, education and protection of the most marginalised children in partnership with communities, local and national government and civil society.

Plan works with more than 90,000 communities each year, covering a population of 78 million children.

Plan is independent, with no religious, political or governmental affiliations.

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