



The births of nearly 230 million children under-five have never been registered; approximately one in three of all children under-five around the world officially do not exist, according to a [report](#) launched by [UNICEF](#) today.

“Birth registration is more than just a right. It’s how societies first recognize and acknowledge a child’s identity and existence,” said Geeta Rao Gupta, UNICEF Deputy Executive Director. “Birth registration is also key to guaranteeing that children are not forgotten, denied their rights or hidden from the progress of their nations.”

The new report, [Every Child's Birth Right: Inequities and trends in birth registration](#), collects statistical analysis spanning 161 countries and presents the latest available country data and estimates on birth registration.

Globally in 2012, only around 60 per cent of all babies born were registered at birth. The rates vary significantly across regions, with the lowest levels of birth registration found in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

The 10 countries with the lowest birth registration levels are: Somalia (3%), Liberia (4%), Ethiopia (7%), Zambia (14%), Chad (16%), United Republic of Tanzania (16%), Yemen (17%), Guinea-Bissau (24%), Pakistan (27%) and Democratic Republic of the Congo (28%).

Even when children are registered, many have no proof of registration. In Eastern and Southern Africa, for example, only about half of the registered children have a birth certificate. Globally, 1 in 7 registered children does not possess a birth certificate. In some countries, this is due to prohibitive fees. In other countries, birth certificates are not issued and no proof of registration is available to families.

Children unregistered at birth or without identification documents are often excluded from accessing education, health care and social security. If children are separated from their families during natural disasters, conflicts or as a result of exploitation, reuniting them is made more difficult by the lack of official documentation.

UNICEF is using innovative approaches to support governments and communities in strengthening their civil and birth registration systems. In Kosovo for example, the UNICEF Innovations Lab has developed an efficient, effective, and low-cost means of identifying and reporting unregistered births, built on the RapidSMS mobile-phone based platform.

In Uganda, the government – with support from UNICEF and the private sector – is implementing a solution called MobileVRS that uses mobile phone technology to complete birth registration procedures in minutes, a process that normally takes months.

“Societies will never be equitable and inclusive until all children are counted,” added Rao Gupta. “Birth registration has lasting consequences, not only for the child’s wellbeing, but also for the development of their communities and countries.”

