

Birth Registration in Sub-Saharan Africa: Current levels and trends

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República de Moçambique
Ministério da Justiça, Segurança Social e Trabalho
BOLETIM DE NASCIMENTO

NASC: _____

Comunidade de _____

Nome do Nascimento: Ismael de Brito

Sexo: Masculino

Idade da Mãe: 24 anos

Nome da Mãe: Maria da Conceição

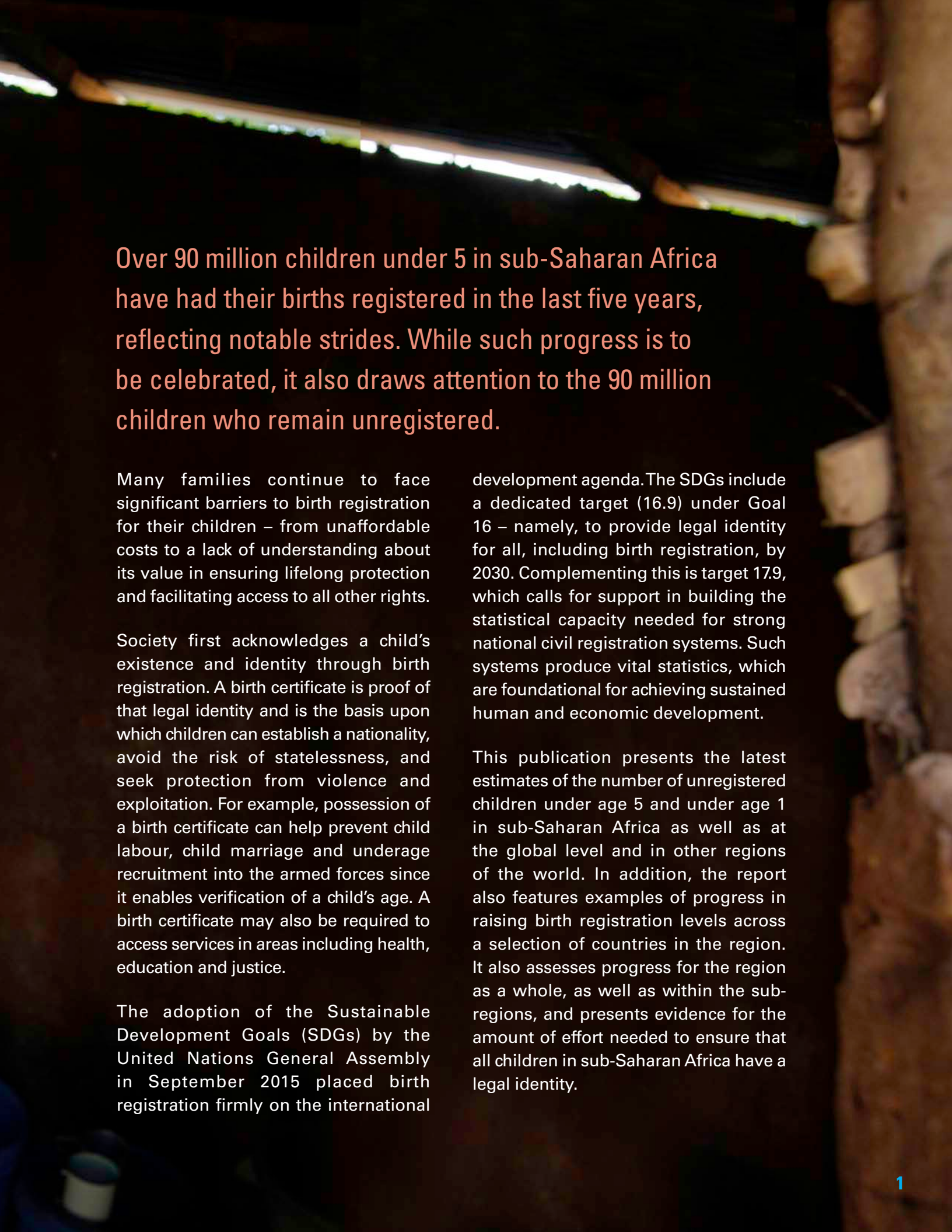
Nome do Pai: Ismael de Brito

Assinatura do Pai: _____

Assinatura da Mãe: _____

Assinatura do Oficial: _____

Local e Data: Maputo, 15 de Maio de 2014



Over 90 million children under 5 in sub-Saharan Africa have had their births registered in the last five years, reflecting notable strides. While such progress is to be celebrated, it also draws attention to the 90 million children who remain unregistered.

Many families continue to face significant barriers to birth registration for their children – from unaffordable costs to a lack of understanding about its value in ensuring lifelong protection and facilitating access to all other rights.

Society first acknowledges a child's existence and identity through birth registration. A birth certificate is proof of that legal identity and is the basis upon which children can establish a nationality, avoid the risk of statelessness, and seek protection from violence and exploitation. For example, possession of a birth certificate can help prevent child labour, child marriage and underage recruitment into the armed forces since it enables verification of a child's age. A birth certificate may also be required to access services in areas including health, education and justice.

The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015 placed birth registration firmly on the international

development agenda. The SDGs include a dedicated target (16.9) under Goal 16 – namely, to provide legal identity for all, including birth registration, by 2030. Complementing this is target 17.9, which calls for support in building the statistical capacity needed for strong national civil registration systems. Such systems produce vital statistics, which are foundational for achieving sustained human and economic development.

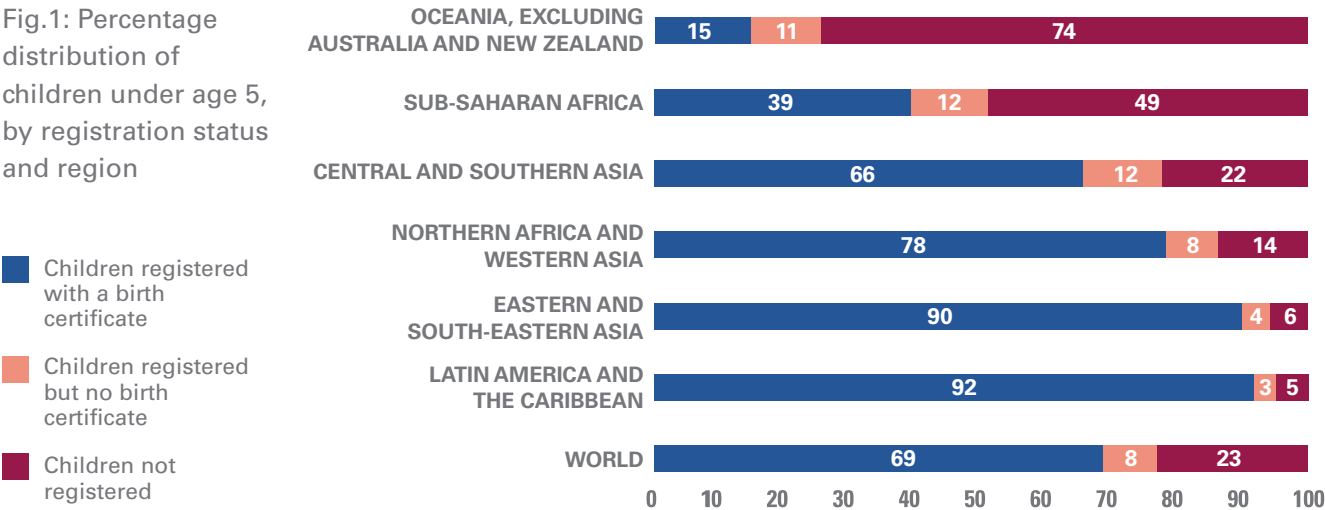
This publication presents the latest estimates of the number of unregistered children under age 5 and under age 1 in sub-Saharan Africa as well as at the global level and in other regions of the world. In addition, the report also features examples of progress in raising birth registration levels across a selection of countries in the region. It also assesses progress for the region as a whole, as well as within the sub-regions, and presents evidence for the amount of effort needed to ensure that all children in sub-Saharan Africa have a legal identity.

WHERE WE STAND TODAY: UNDER-FIVE REGISTRATION AND CERTIFICATION

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA IS HOME TO OVER 110 MILLION CHILDREN UNDER 5 WITHOUT A BIRTH CERTIFICATE: THIS INCLUDES 90 MILLION UNREGISTERED CHILDREN AND 21 MILLION CHILDREN WHOSE BIRTHS ARE REPORTED AS REGISTERED BUT WHO LACK PROOF IN THE FORM OF A BIRTH CERTIFICATE

THE BIRTHS OF AROUND HALF OF SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA'S CHILDREN ARE NOT REGISTERED; 6 IN 10 CHILDREN LACK A BIRTH CERTIFICATE

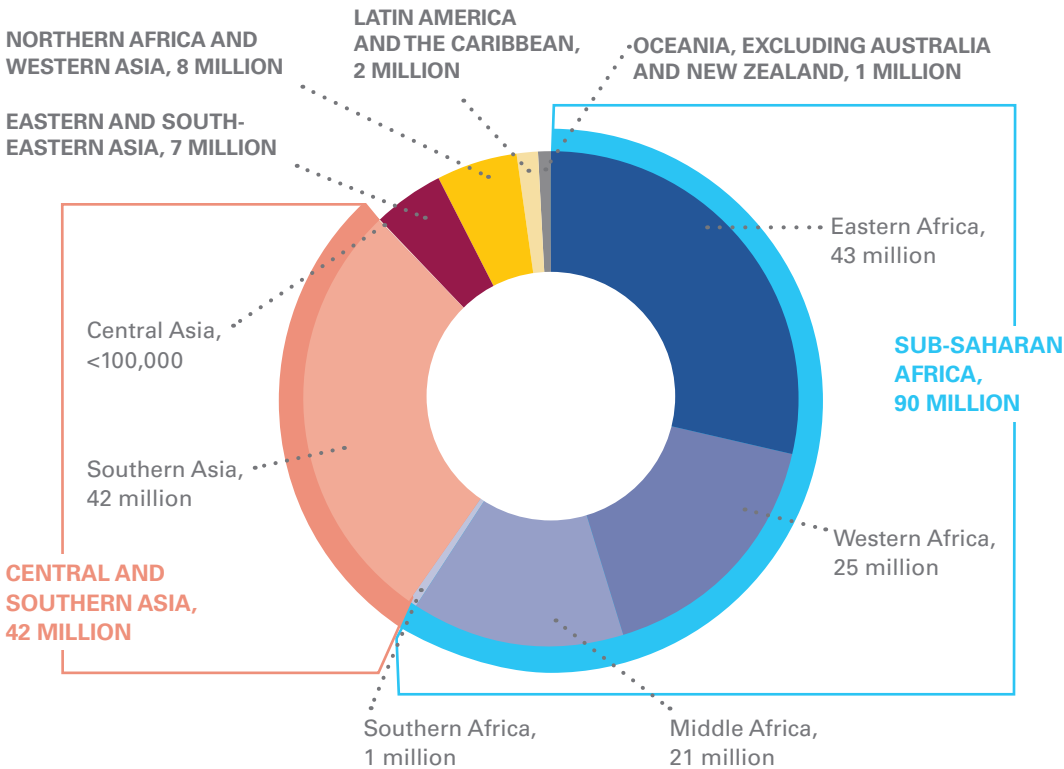
Fig.1: Percentage distribution of children under age 5, by registration status and region



Note: In the regions of Europe and Northern America and Australia and New Zealand, 100 per cent of children are estimated to be registered with a birth certificate on the basis of civil registration coverage.

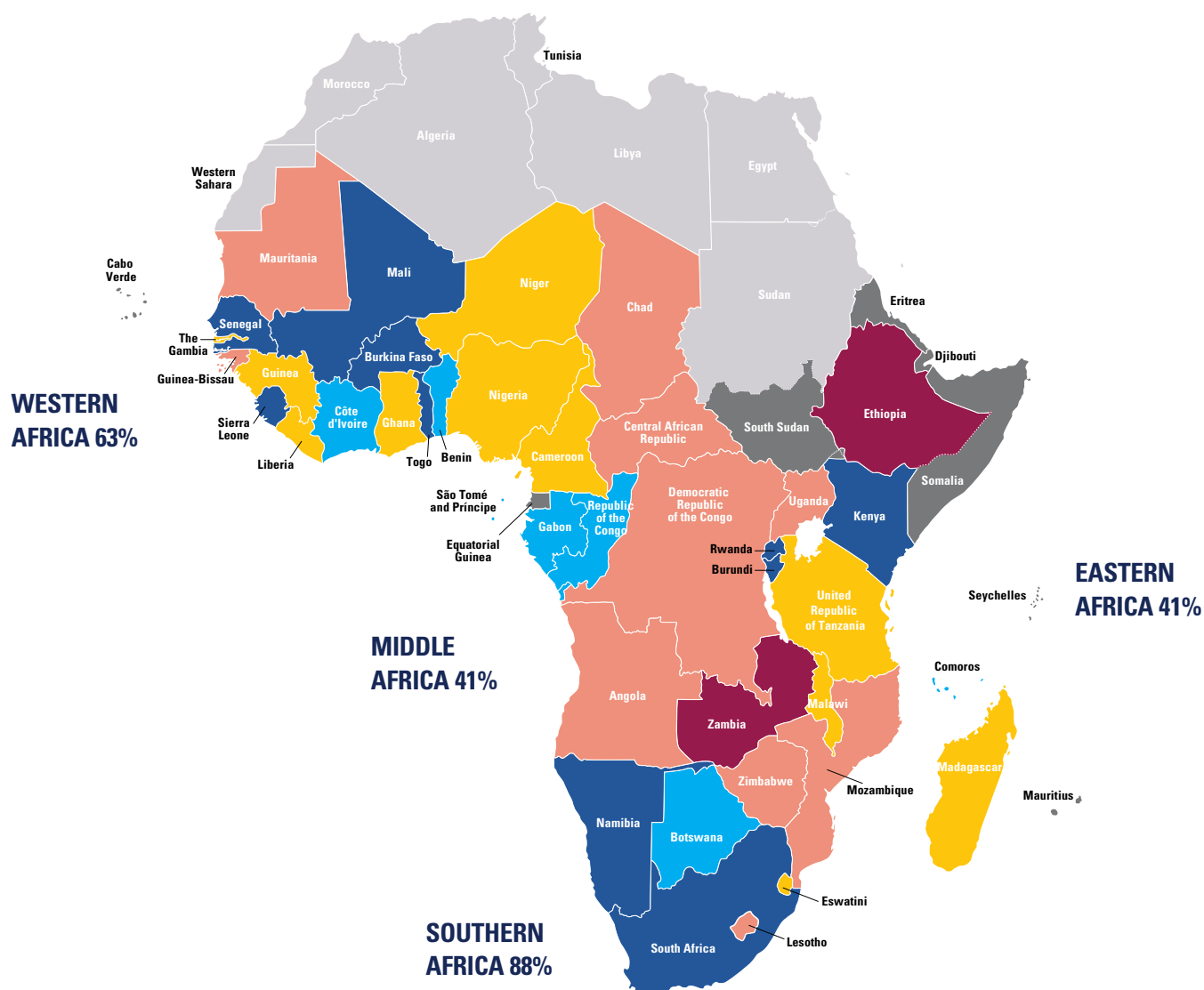
OF ALL UNREGISTERED CHILDREN WORLDWIDE, MORE THAN HALF (90 MILLION) LIVE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Fig. 2: Number of children under age 5 whose births are not registered, by region



COUNTRIES WITH THE LOWEST LEVELS OF BIRTH REGISTRATION ARE PRIMARILY IN MIDDLE AND EASTERN AFRICA

Fig. 3: Percentage of children under age 5 whose births are registered



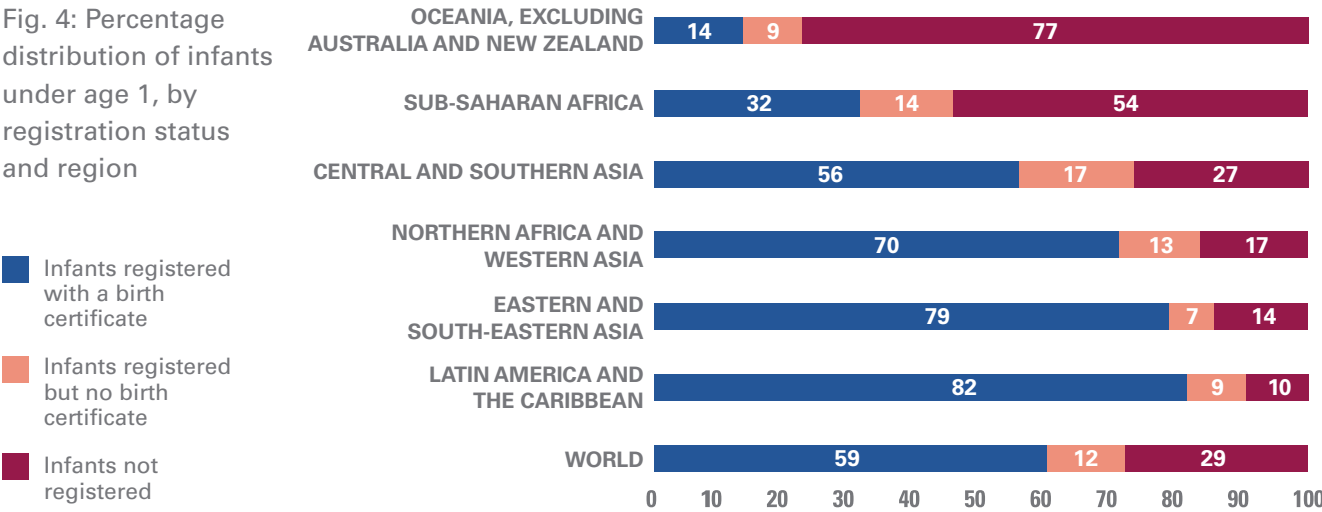
Note: Refer to the Technical Notes for map disclaimer and footnotes on country data.

WHERE WE STAND TODAY: UNDER-ONE REGISTRATION AND CERTIFICATION

TODAY, 26 MILLION INFANTS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA LACK A BIRTH CERTIFICATE: THIS INCLUDES 21 MILLION BABIES WHO ARE UNREGISTERED AND 5 MILLION WHOSE BIRTHS ARE REPORTED AS REGISTERED BUT WHO LACK PROOF IN THE FORM OF A BIRTH CERTIFICATE

OVER HALF OF INFANTS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA HAVE NOT BEEN REGISTERED; NEARLY 7 IN 10 INFANTS DO NOT POSSESS A BIRTH CERTIFICATE

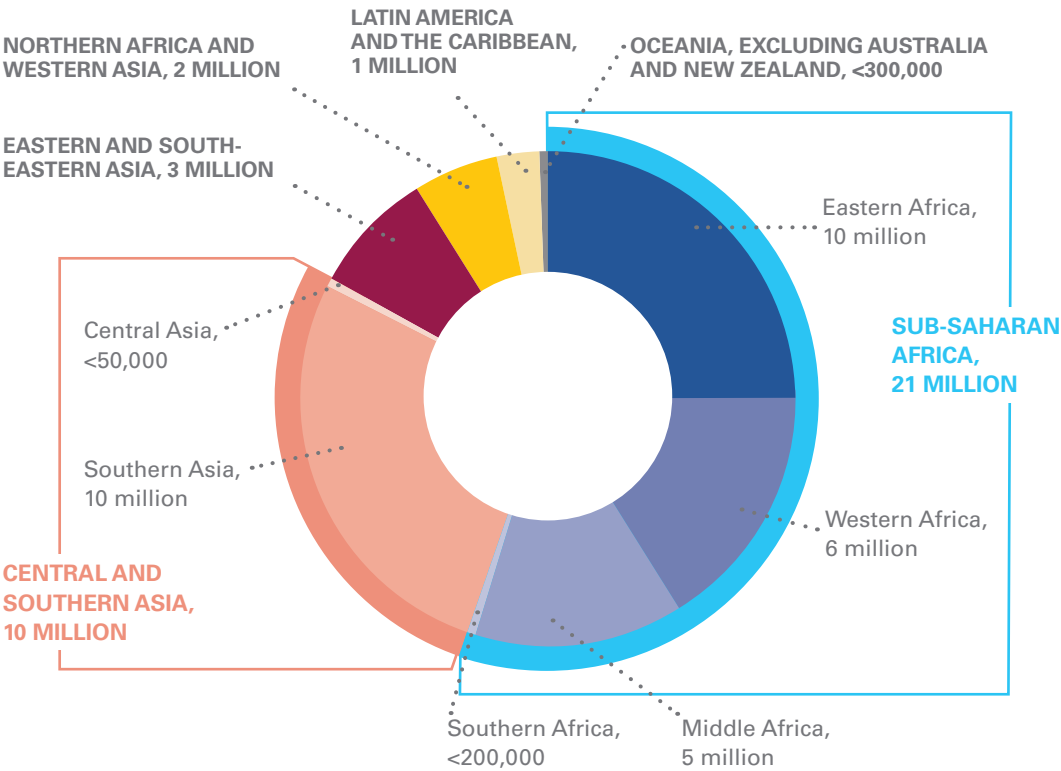
Fig. 4: Percentage distribution of infants under age 1, by registration status and region



Notes: In the regions of Europe and Northern America and Australia and New Zealand, 100 per cent of children are estimated to be registered with a birth certificate on the basis of civil registration coverage. The totals for some regions do not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

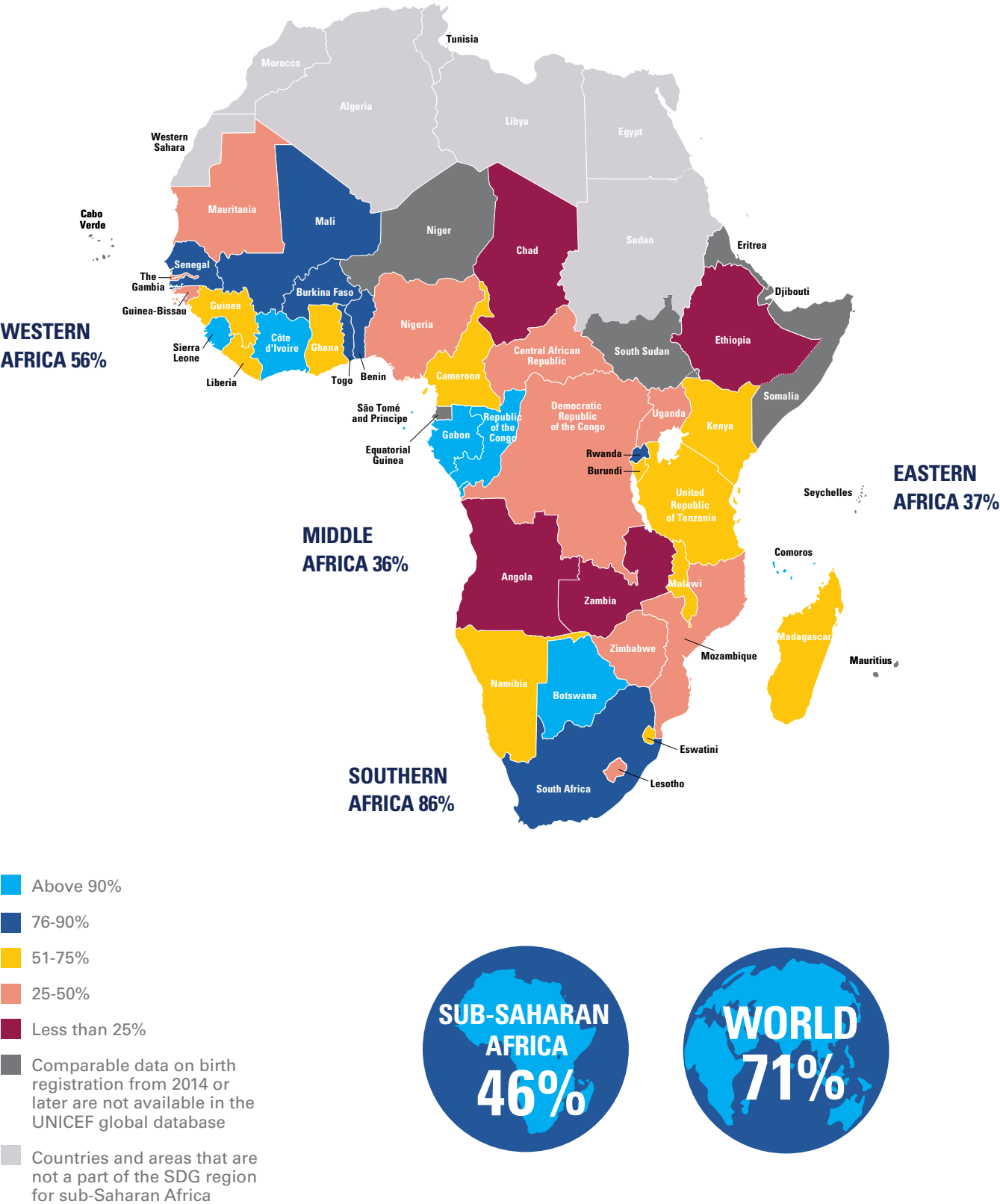
OF ALL UNREGISTERED INFANTS WORLDWIDE, MORE THAN HALF (21 MILLION) LIVE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Fig. 5: Number of infants under age 1 whose births are not registered, by region



COUNTRIES IN MIDDLE AFRICA HAVE THE LOWEST LEVELS OF BIRTH REGISTRATION AMONG INFANTS

Fig. 6: Percentage of infants under age 1 whose births are registered



Note: Refer to the Technical Notes for map disclaimer and footnotes on country data.



ASSESSING PROGRESS AND LOOKING AHEAD IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Over the last 15 years, sub-Saharan Africa has made slow, but steady, advances to improve the level of birth registration. Considering the population growth witnessed in the region casts improvements in birth registration in an especially positive light. The births of millions of children have been registered, reaching a growing share of the under-five population even as the total size of such population has rapidly grown.

Three policy-driven, evidence-based strategies — interoperability, decentralization and digitalization—have advanced birth registration by embedding it within essential public services, making the process routine and more accessible for families. Since 2010, these strategies have been supported across Conferences of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration, making them core strategies for the development of civil registration and vital statistics on the continent. Underpinning these strategies is the fundamental right of every child to an identity, as enshrined in Article 6 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

Among subregions, Western Africa has witnessed the strongest progress over a 15-year period. The region has its share of success stories. In **Côte d'Ivoire**, birth registration prevalence rose steadily from 65 per cent in 2012 to 96 per cent by 2021, although still only around half of children under 5 possess a birth certificate. This acceleration reflects a targeted initiative to integrate birth registration into maternal and newborn health-care services,

including immunization, thereby facilitating birth registration in public health facilities. A 2017 Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministries of Health, Justice and Interior and the enactment of a law in 2018 on civil registration are also contributing factors.

Sierra Leone registered a sharp increase in birth registration levels from just over 50 per cent in 2008 to nearly 80 per cent in 2010, reaching 90 per cent in 2019. The Ministry of Health played a pivotal role in these improvements by signing a Memorandum of Understanding in 2018 with the National Civil Registration Authority, which mandated health officials to register births occurring in public health facilities. Since then, the Ministry has expanded the number of facilities offering birth registration services from 1,123 in 2018 to 1,459 in 2020. Concurrently, the National Civil Registration Authority's decentralization strategy has significantly expanded its presence with 17 offices nationwide by 2024.

After a prolonged period of little change, signs of progress are appearing in Eastern Africa. In **Rwanda**, birth registration among children under 5 remained stable between 2000 and 2015, with around 60 per cent of children registered, and reached over 80 per cent in 2020. This significant rise is attributable to the decentralization of services to health facilities and cell offices and the implementation of a robust legal framework. The enactment of Law 32/2016 and its amendment in 2020 further decentralized birth registration

responsibilities to health facility staff and cell office secretaries. The introduction of the National Centralized and Integrated Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System allowed for electronic registration of vital events, including births. This has streamlined the process, with over 600 health facilities, 2,148 cells and 416 sector offices now offering real-time registration services.

Levels of birth registration in the **United Republic of Tanzania** rose from around 10 per cent in 1999 to 26 per cent in 2016; subsequently, the country more than doubled birth registration prevalence to over 60 per cent in 2022. The Government's Registration Insolvency Trusteeship Agency made civil registration processes more accessible and affordable through a decentralized 'one-stop' process. The country's Simplified Birth Registration System allows parents to register births, get their children immunized, and access nutrition services in a single visit to local health facilities and community ward executive offices. The system is now operating in all 26 regions of the country's mainland, increasing registration points from 97 in 2013 to 11,376 in 2024 and addressing logistical challenges.

Burundi has one of the highest levels of birth registration in the subregion (over 80 per cent as of 2017). Recent developments include the temporary removal of the requirement of provincial authorization and payment of fees in the case of late registration. Further, a joint ministerial decree and operational protocol between the Ministries of Interior and Health are further advancing efforts to improve birth registration by integrating civil registration systems with health facilities.

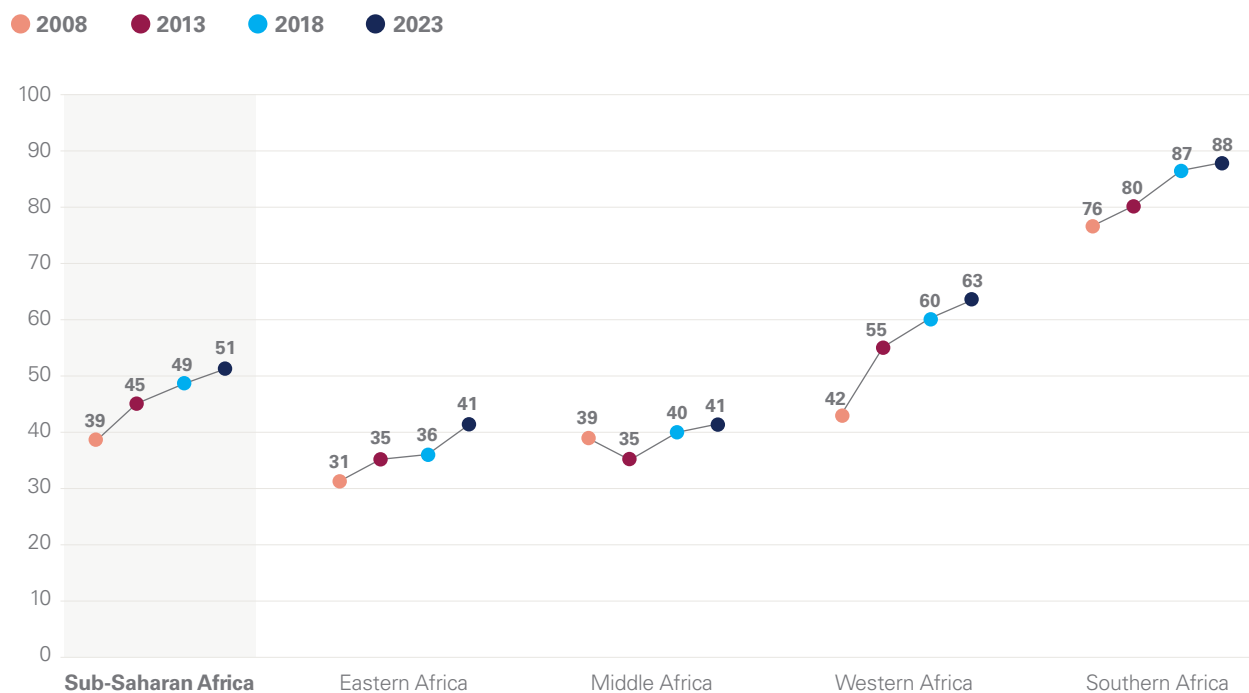
Southern Africa has had the highest level of birth registration among the subregions for at least 15 years. It has witnessed modest improvements over time, with some countries, such as Botswana, achieving universal birth registration in recent years.

While there has been no evidence of progress for Middle Africa as a whole, some countries in the subregion are showing signs of recovery from previous declines. For example, **Chad's** birth registration prevalence stood at just under 30 per cent in 2000 before falling to around 12 per cent in 2015; it subsequently rebounded to around 26 per cent in 2019. Reaching underserved and hard-to-reach populations has been a priority in strengthening civil registration in the country. The introduction of 'Tasdjil' (Arabic for 'registration'), a comprehensive digital civil registration solution launched in 2022, has been instrumental in this effort since it operates both online and offline, ensuring accessibility in remote areas with limited or no Internet connectivity. Its flexibility enables the deployment of mobile registration units and digital access points. As of 2024, 60 per cent of provincial and district hospitals have set up 'one-stop-centres' with Tasdjil for immediate birth registration and issuance of certificates.

The **Democratic Republic of the Congo** experienced a decline in birth registration from 38 per cent in 2000 to 25 per cent in 2014, but later saw a recovery, reaching 40 per cent in 2018. The recently introduced integration of birth registration with the immunization register within the District Health Information System has demonstrated promising results. This initiative is currently being tested in four provinces where health workers digitally capture newborn registration details into the information system's platform. The civil registration offices access this information to complete the registration process and issue birth certificates at health facilities. The country aims to capitalize on routine maternal and newborn health-care services to significantly boost birth registration coverage in the coming years.

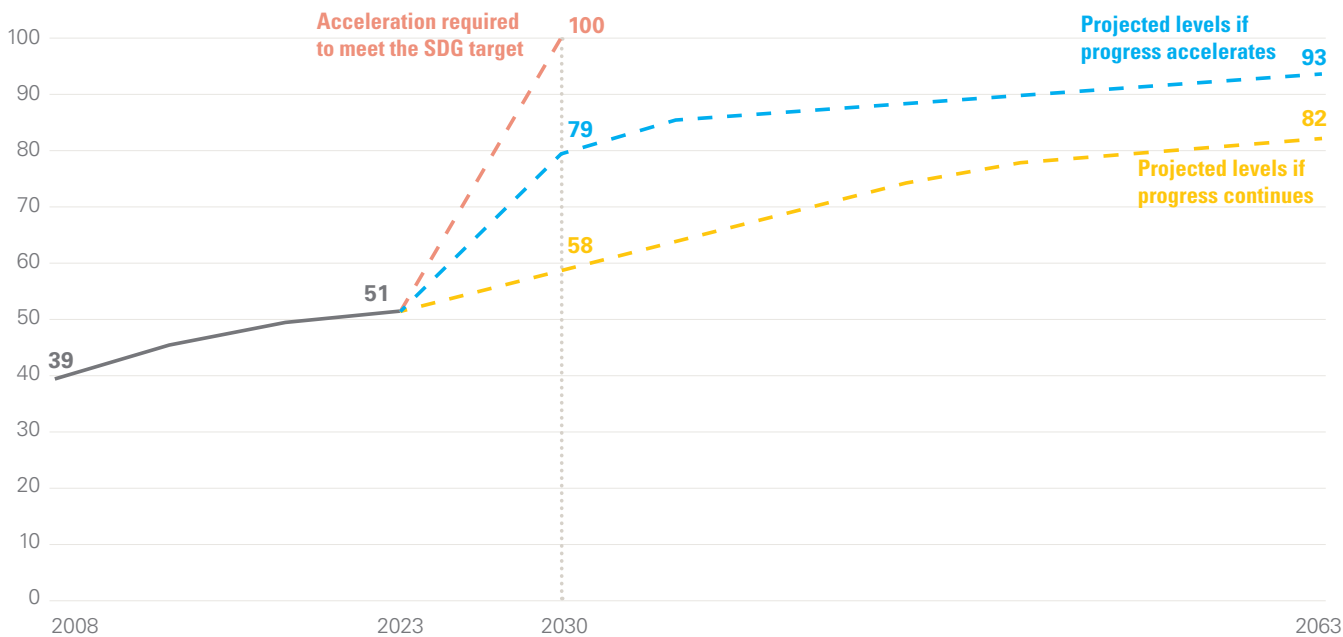
SINCE AROUND 2008, SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA HAS MADE STEADY PROGRESS IN RAISING BIRTH REGISTRATION LEVELS, WITH THE STRONGEST GAINS IN WESTERN AFRICA

Fig. 7: Percentage of children under age 5 in sub-Saharan Africa whose births are registered



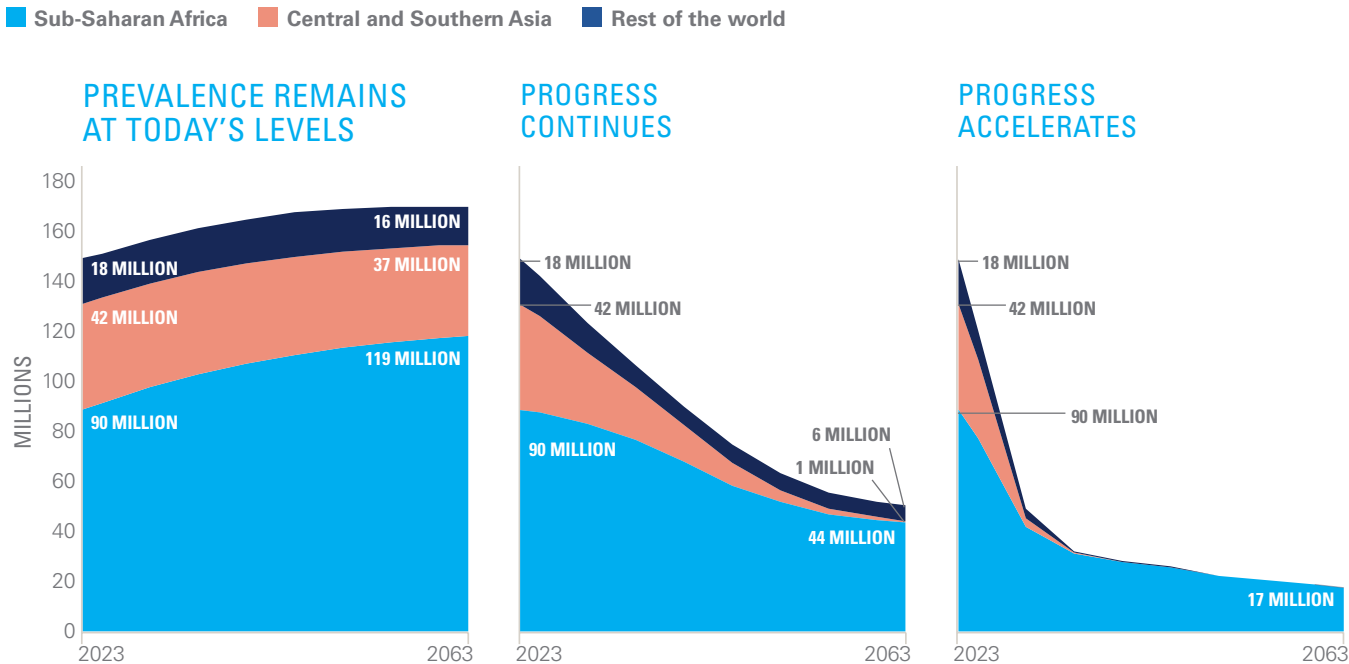
DESPITE RECENT ADVANCES IN SOME PARTS OF SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA, THE SDG TARGET REMAINS OUT OF REACH. EVEN WITH ACCELERATED PROGRESS, THE PROMISE OF UNIVERSAL BIRTH REGISTRATION COULD STILL FALL SHORT IN 2063

Fig. 8: Percentage of children under age 5 in sub-Saharan Africa whose births are registered, observed and projected



THE TOTAL NUMBER OF UNREGISTERED CHILDREN IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA COULD SURPASS 100 MILLION AFTER 2030 IF PREVALENCE LEVELS REMAIN AS THEY ARE TODAY. WITH ACCELERATED PROGRESS, THE NUMBER OF UNREGISTERED CHILDREN COULD DROP TO 17 MILLION IN 2063

Fig. 9: Number of children under age 5 whose births are not registered, observed and projected







Birth registration is an essential prerequisite for legal identity and the fulfilment of children's rights. By registering children at birth and providing a birth certificate – a passport to lifelong protection – their exposure to rights violations are minimized and their access to essential services are enabled.

Despite notable improvements, the need for accelerated action remains urgent in a majority of countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Progress can be accelerated, and coverage expanded, through sustained investments in proven, high-impact strategies. Partnering with the health sector enables timely registration at maternity wards and immunization clinics, while decentralizing services makes registration more accessible by bringing it closer to communities. Streamlining processes into a 'one-step, one-visit' system allows registration and certification to happen simultaneously, reducing obstacles for families. Safe and cost-effective digitalization efforts have also enhanced accessibility and improved service delivery, and legal reviews and policy reforms continue to align national laws with international standards, further strengthening civil registration systems.

To achieve progress, it is crucial to secure engagement and buy-in at all levels, from governments to local communities. Governments must recognize that birth registration is a smart investment, both from a human rights and a development perspective. The costs of taking action

are significantly lower than the costs of inaction. Prioritizing CRVS strengthens its role as the cornerstone of the identity ecosystem, enabling the full realization of benefits from investments in health, national identification systems and advancements in digital public infrastructure. Communities, on the other hand, must understand why and how universal registration benefits them, recognizing it as a fundamental right that they should actively demand.

As we enter the final years of the Sustainable Development Goals and Decade of Action, achieving universal birth registration will require a concerted, discrimination-free approach. Efforts must be grounded in collective action by partners engaged in strategic global and regional initiatives, with targeted investments to enhance the efficiency of routine systems and to make them more responsive to the needs of all children – particularly those affected by humanitarian crises, migration, health emergencies and statelessness. Only through sustained commitment can we make universal birth registration a reality for every child.

TECHNICAL NOTES

INDICATORS ON BIRTH REGISTRATION

Two types of indicators – burden and prevalence – are used in this publication. Burden refers to the absolute number of children under age 5 and under age 1 alive today whose births have not been registered; prevalence refers to the proportion of children under age 5 and under age 1 whose births have been registered. While prevalence is an indication of the likelihood that a child will have his or her birth registered, the burden indicates the magnitude of the problem – that is, the number of children unreached by registration services. Both burden and prevalence are also presented for the subset of children with and without a birth certificate.

This publication presents estimates on both birth registration and birth certification since all children who possess birth certificates are registered, but the opposite is not necessarily true. In other words, children may have their births officially recorded with civil registrars in the country but not have a birth certificate. This can happen for a multitude of reasons, ranging from prohibitive costs to loss or damage of the birth certificate document. Therefore, information on both indicators taken together presents a more complete picture of the global status of birth registration among children and illustrates the gap that exists for some children who are registered but do not have proof in the form of a certificate.

For statistical purposes, universal birth registration is defined as a prevalence of 99.5 per cent or higher.

DATA SOURCES

Data are drawn from the UNICEF global databases, 2024, based on Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys and Demographic and Health Surveys, vital statistics from civil registration systems, censuses and other nationally representative surveys that use a comparable methodology. For detailed source information by country, please see <data.unicef.org>. The UNICEF global database is consistent with the global SDG database for indicator 16.9.1, which

includes national-level data that have been verified and approved by national statistical authorities and other government agencies responsible for official statistics.

For some countries, information on the estimated coverage of birth registration within national civil registration systems was obtained from the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), as of April 2023. This was the case for 26 countries in Europe and Northern America and for five additional high-income countries from other regions. For all these countries, an assumption was made that all children have birth certificates on the basis of the estimated coverage of birth registration obtained from UNSD. Several sources are used by UNSD to obtain coverage of birth registration from more than 230 countries and areas. The primary source is the ‘Quality of Vital Statistics Obtained from Civil Registration’ page on the United Nations Demographic

Yearbook Vital Statistics Questionnaire completed by national statistical offices. For more information, see: <unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/crvs/>.

Demographic data are from the United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects 2024*, Online Edition.

SDG REGIONAL CLASSIFICATION

Regional estimates are presented according to the regional classification used for SDG global reporting. These regional groupings are based on geographic regions defined under the Standard Country or Area Codes for Statistical Use (known as M49) of the United Nations Statistics Division. Details can be found at: <unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49/>. The full M49 classification also includes 47 territories, overseas areas and islands.



METHODS AND COVERAGE FOR GLOBAL AND REGIONAL ESTIMATES OF CURRENT LEVELS

The global estimate of children under age 5 whose births are registered is based on nationally representative and internationally comparable data collected between 2014 and 2023 for a subset of 173 countries, representing 98 per cent of the global population of children under age 5. The latest available data for around 80 per cent of these countries are from the last five years. For 10 countries, the latest data pre-date 2014 but were included on an exceptional basis given that levels of registration among children under age 5 were 99 per cent or higher at the time of data collection; an assumption was made that such countries had achieved universal registration that persisted in the intervening years. Population coverage is above 90 per cent for all SDG regions.

The global estimate of children under age 1 whose births are registered is based on nationally representative and internationally comparable data collected between 2014 and 2023 for a subset of 162 countries, representing 90 per cent of the global population of children under age 1. Population coverage is above 70 per cent for all SDG regions.

The table on the following page presents population coverage at global and regional levels for the prevalence of birth registration among children under age 5 and under age 1.

Global and regional aggregates were produced for the prevalence of birth registration among children under age 5, the prevalence of birth registration among children under age 1, the prevalence of birth certification among children under age 5, and the prevalence of birth certification among children under age 1. While most countries with data on birth registration had available estimates for all four of these indicators, some countries lacked data for one or more indicators. For coherence and ease of interpretation of results across these four indicators, some adjustments were

made at the regional and global levels to account for missing data. The most complete data availability exists for birth registration among children under age 5 (SDG indicator 16.9.1), with gaps in the other three indicators. The estimates for birth registration among children under age 5 were based on the full set of countries with data in the reference period on that indicator. Based on observed levels among countries with complete data, ratios were

calculated for the proportional level of registration (of children under age 1) and certification (of children under age 5 and under 1), compared to the level of registration of children under age 5. These ratios informed the regional and global aggregates for the remaining three indicators, allowing for comparability across the four main indicators while still maintaining full use of the available data for birth registration among children under age 5.

SDG region	Population coverage	
	Birth registration among children under age 5	Birth registration among children under age 1
Europe and Northern America	100%	100%
Latin America and the Caribbean	98%	90%
Central and Southern Asia	100%	97%
Central Asia	100%	100%
Southern Asia	100%	97%
Eastern and South-Eastern Asia	99%	77%
Northern Africa and Western Asia	93%	74%
Sub-Saharan Africa	97%	94%
Eastern Africa	92%	92%
Middle Africa	99%	97%
Southern Africa	100%	100%
Western Africa	100%	93%
Australia and New Zealand	100%	100%
Oceania, excluding Australia and New Zealand	96%	89%
World	98%	90%

METHODS FOR TREND ANALYSIS

A subset of 41 countries that have at least two comparable data points within a period of about two decades were included in the trend analysis for sub-Saharan Africa. This subset of countries represents 97 per cent of the population of children under age 5 in sub-Saharan Africa. Population coverage was above 90 per cent for all sub-regions in sub-Saharan Africa for which the trend analysis was conducted.

Since data availability varies substantially by country, depending on data sources and national data collection schedules, population-weighted aggregates of available country trend data were produced for the following time periods: 2005-2009, 2010-2014 and 2015-2019. A final point in the trendline corresponded to the latest available estimate per country. For each period, aggregates were produced as population-weighted averages of national estimates based on either: (a) a single available data point within the period, or (b) a simple average of available data points within the period, if more than one were available. In cases of missing data within a given period, values were imputed as the midpoint between preceding and following data points. Before and after the span of a country's data availability, there was no assumption of change: If no prior estimates existed for the early periods of the timeline, levels were assumed to be flat; after the latest available estimate for each country, levels were assumed to continue as flat.

METHODS FOR PROJECTION ANALYSIS

Projections in the levels of birth registration were calculated according to several scenarios. These scenarios illustrate what levels of birth registration could possibly be in the coming years, building upon observed trajectories and how they might continue or accelerate. Three scenarios are depicted in this publication: (a) a continuation of observed progress among countries that have seen an increase (that is, countries with a positive average

annual rate of change), (b) an acceleration of progress based on countries with flat or declining levels matching the average level of progress of countries with a positive rate of change, and countries with any increase in birth registration accelerating to the pace observed in 'exemplar' countries, defined as those in the top 10 percentile for increases in birth registration prevalence and (c) an acceleration of progress required to achieve the SDG target of universal birth registration by 2030. Scenario (c) represents the most ambitious, followed by (b) and then (a). Scenarios (a) and (b) account for slowing effects in light of available evidence, which suggests that progress slows as levels of birth registration approach 100 per cent and that additional gains and improvement become more difficult to achieve in this 'last mile'.

MAP DISCLAIMER

Maps are stylized and not to scale. They do not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers. The final boundary between the Sudan and South Sudan has not yet been determined.

FOOTNOTES ON COUNTRY DATA INCLUDED IN MAPS

Maps reflect the latest available data point for each country between 2014 and 2023.

Data for Namibia refer to children with a birth certificate.

In the latest survey for Benin, two sampled clusters could not be visited during fieldwork due to security concerns. In the latest survey for Burkina Faso, data for two regions (Est and Sahel) were not representative of the entire region as many clusters could not be visited due to the security context. In the latest survey for Kenya, Mandera County could not be visited during fieldwork due to security concerns. In the latest survey for Nigeria, over 100 enumeration areas could not be visited during fieldwork due to accessibility issues, including a

significant number in Borno state. As a result, the reported levels of birth registration at the national level and in some states may be overestimated, since those areas of the country for which data collection could not take place are likely to have lower levels of birth registration.

GENERAL NOTES

Confidence intervals are not shown in this publication. Caution is therefore warranted in interpreting the results since apparent differences may not be significant. All messages were developed in light of the confidence intervals, so where a difference is mentioned in the text, it has been confirmed as statistically significant.

The estimates of current levels of birth registration in this publication replace those previously published by UNICEF, including those in *The State of the World's Children 2024: Statistical Compendium*. Differences are a result of updated population estimates used to derive the weighted aggregates as well as subsequent data updates for a handful of countries. In addition, the trend and projection methods have been revised and therefore, the estimates in this publication should not be directly compared with those previously published by UNICEF.



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UNICEF Data and Analytics Section
Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring
3 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017, USA
Telephone: +1 212 326 7000
Email: data@unicef.org

All reasonable precautions have been taken by UNICEF to verify the information contained in this publication. For any data updates subsequent to release, please visit data.unicef.org.

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UNICEF

Data and Analytics Section
Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring
3 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017, USA

Email: data@unicef.org

Website: data.unicef.org