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BIRTH REGISTRATION IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN: CLOSING THE GAPS

2016 UPDATE



Every child's birth right

A name and nationality is every child's right, enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international treaties. Birth registration is the CONTINUOUS, PERMANENT and UNIVERSAL recording, within the civil registry, of the occurrence and characteristics of births in accordance with the legal requirements of a country.

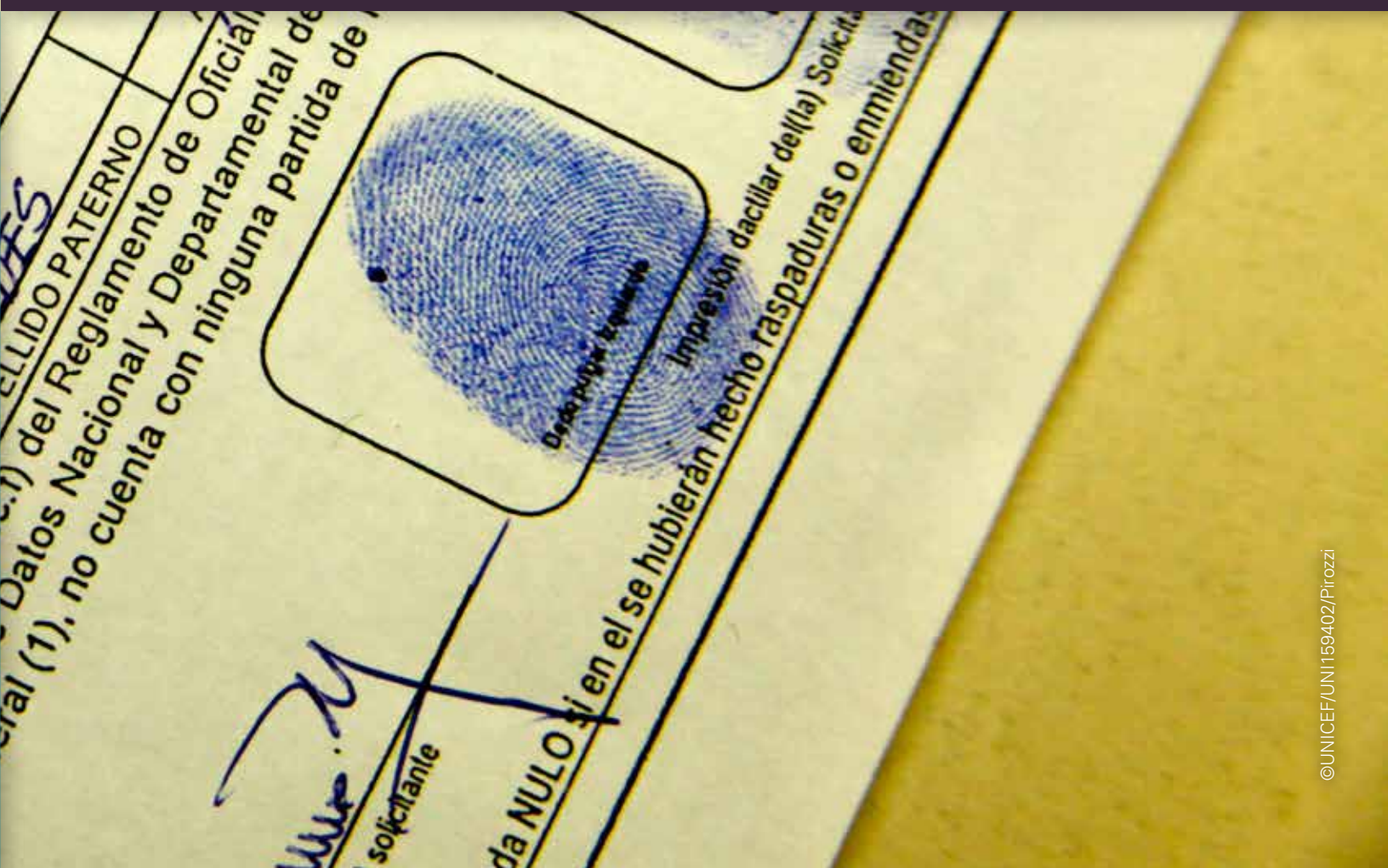
The lack of formal recognition by the State usually means that a child is unable to obtain a birth certificate. As a result, he or she may be denied health care or education. Later in life, the lack of official identification documents can mean that a child may enter into marriage or the labour market, or be conscripted into the armed forces, before the legal age. If accused of a crime, unregistered children may be prosecuted as adults, due to their inability to prove their age. In adulthood, birth certificates may be required to obtain social assistance or a job in the formal sector, to buy or prove the right to inherit property, to vote and to obtain a passport. Registering children at birth is the first step in securing their recognition before the law, safeguarding their rights, and ensuring that any violation of these rights does not go unnoticed.

Until the last child is reached

Thanks to a range of initiatives over the past decades, many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean are getting close to reaching universal birth registration. Behind this success is the enhanced capacity of institutions in charge of civil registration to deliver services, the establishment of such services in public hospitals, the elimination of fees, public policies linking birth registration to access to social protection mechanisms, and massive information campaigns – initiatives supported by UNICEF in many countries. Still, the data on birth registration among excluded groups, in particular indigenous populations, tell a different story. The registration process in a number of countries lacks sensitivity to indigenous peoples' culture and tradition. The cross-border 'nature' of indigenous communities adds to these obstacles. Urban-rural differences also mask deeper underlying disparities, mainly related to poverty. In addition, excluded populations such as undocumented migrants are often unaware of their rights regarding birth registration or may be reluctant to register their children for fear of deportation to their country of origin.

Reaching the last 10 to 20 percent of children who are not yet registered will require a focus on those groups that in some way or another are excluded from access to public services. Above all, it will require increased political commitment to intensify efforts that address the root causes of under-registration.

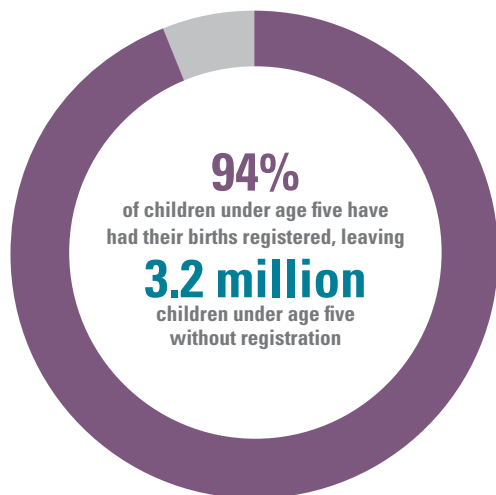
UNICEF in Latin America and the Caribbean is committed to continuing its support to governments throughout the region to ensure equity in birth registration access, along with bringing the rich and successful experiences of countries in the region to the benefit of other countries around the world.



Where we stand today

The births of around 3 million children under the age of five in Latin America and the Caribbean have never been recorded

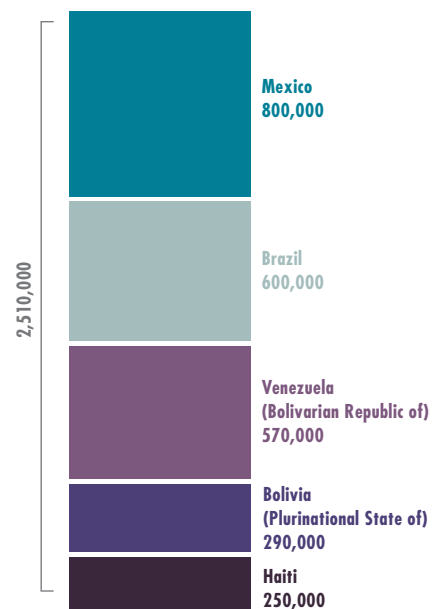
Percentage of children under age five whose births are registered and number of children under age five whose births are not registered



Note: Estimates are based on a subset of 24 countries with data between 2010 and 2015, covering 94 per cent of the regional population of children under age five.

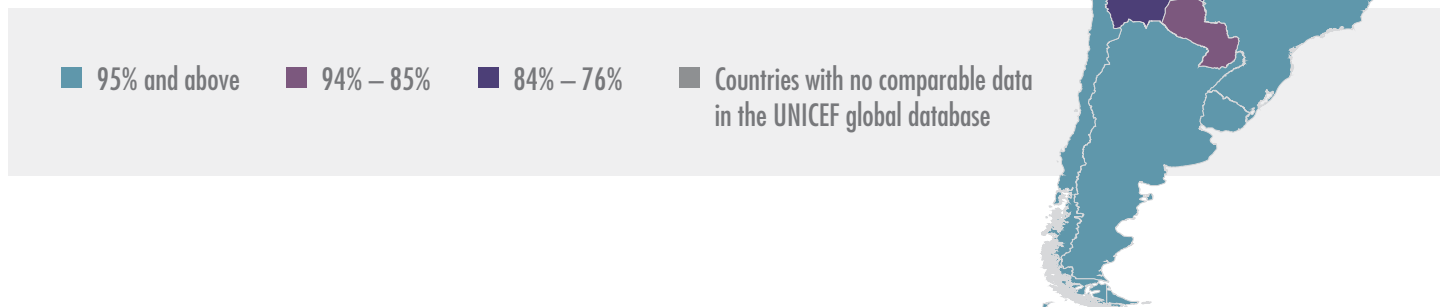
1 in 4 children who lack birth registration in the region live in Mexico

Number of children under age five whose births are not registered, in the five countries with the largest number of unregistered children in the region



The lowest birth registration level in the region is found in the Plurinational State of Bolivia

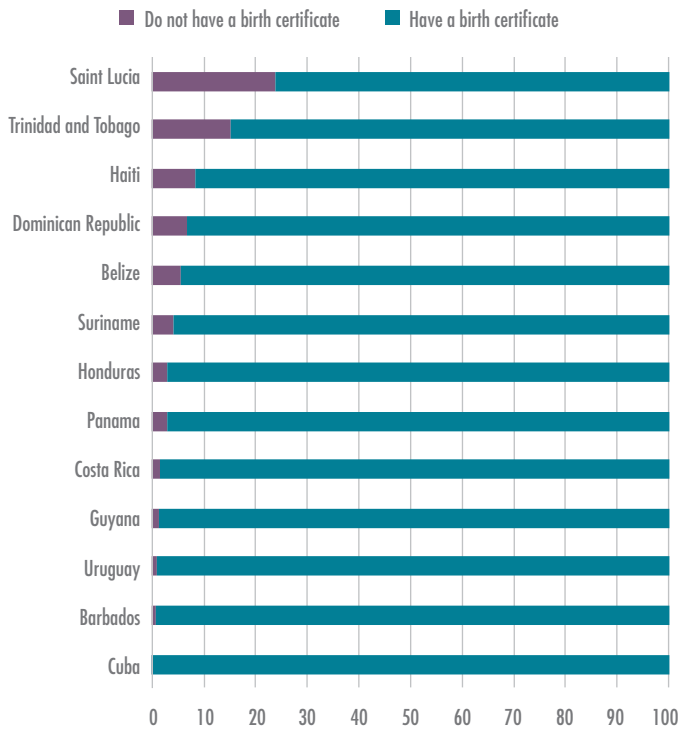
Percentage of children under age five whose births are registered



Notes: The map is stylized and not to scale. It does not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers. Data for Argentina and the Plurinational State of Bolivia refer to the percentage of children under age five with a birth certificate. Data for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Costa Rica refer to the percentage of births registered. Data for Chile refer to the percentage of children aged 0 to 7 years whose births are registered. Data for Paraguay refer to the percentage of children under 1 year of age with a birth certificate. Data for Peru refer to the percentage of children aged 6 to 59 months whose births are registered.

Most children whose births are recorded have proof of registration

Percentage distribution of children under age five whose births are registered, by whether or not they have a birth certificate



Note: Data for Costa Rica are from an older source as disaggregation by possession of a birth certificate is not available yet for the latest source.

The lowest levels of birth registration are found among infants

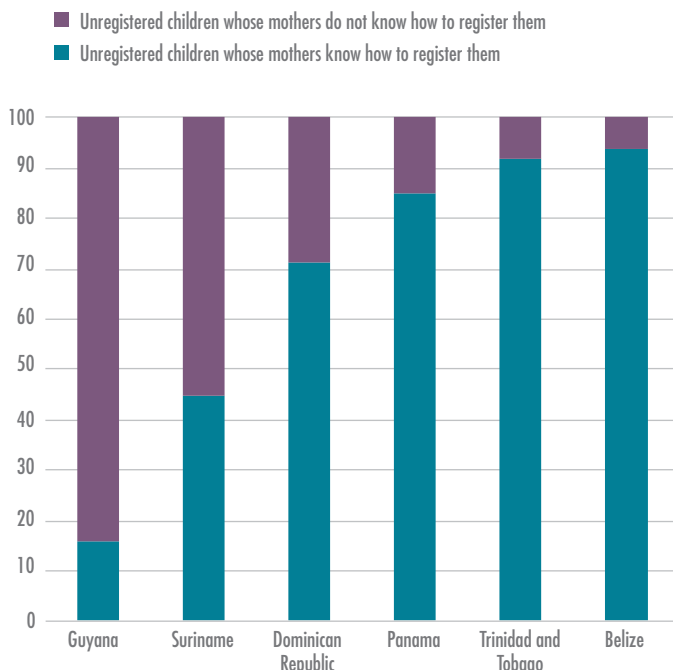
Percentage of children under age five whose births are registered, by age (in months) in countries with differences in birth registration levels by age



Note: Data for Argentina, Costa Rica, Cuba, Suriname and Uruguay were excluded from the chart since they show no difference in birth registration levels by age (only countries with a ratio of more than 1.0 between the oldest and youngest age groups are included).

In Guyana and Suriname, more than half of mothers lack knowledge of how to register a child's birth

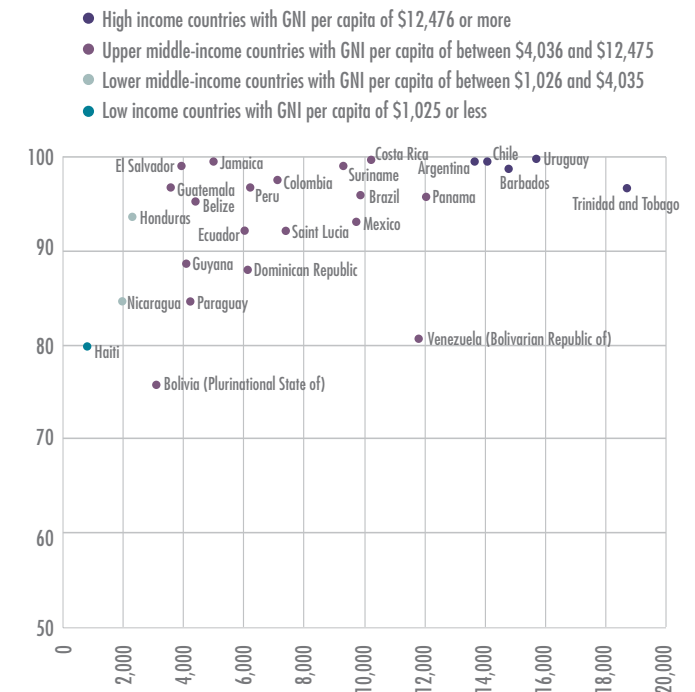
Percentage distribution of children under age five whose births are not registered, by a mother's (or caregiver's) knowledge of how to register a child, in countries with available data



Note: Data for Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago are based on 25-49 unweighted cases.

Many countries have achieved a high birth registration rate even with low per capita income

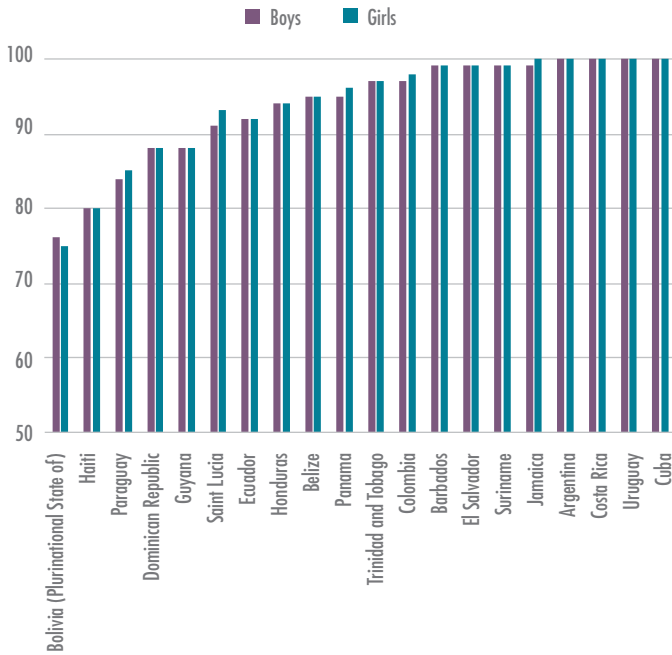
Percentage of children under age five whose births are registered and gross national income (GNI) per capita in US\$ (2015), in countries with available data



The children left behind

No differences are found in birth registration rates between boys and girls

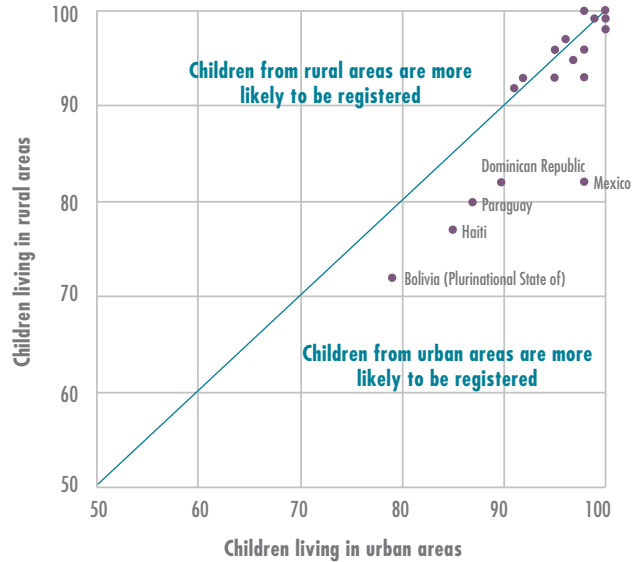
Percentage of children under age five whose births are registered, by sex



Notes: Data for Costa Rica and El Salvador are from older sources as disaggregation by sex is not available yet for the latest sources.

In countries with lower overall levels, birth registration is more common in urban than rural areas; where levels are higher, disparities due to place of residence diminish

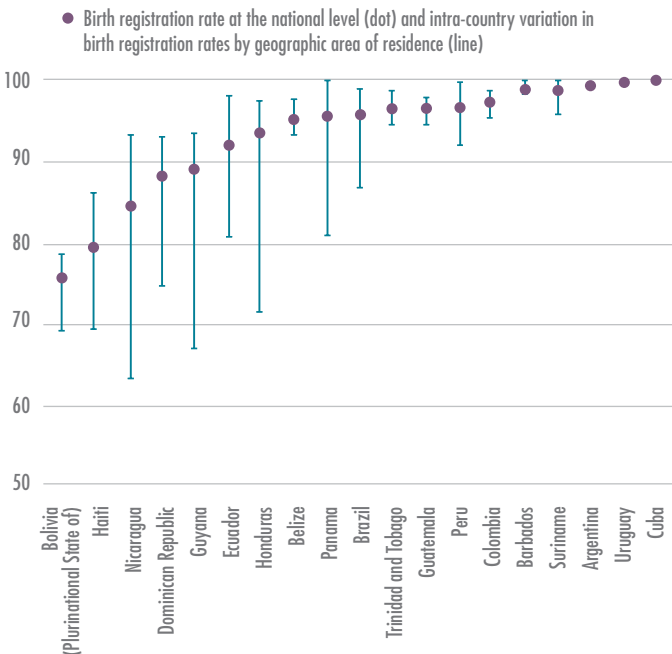
Percentage of children under age five whose births are registered, by place of residence



Notes: Each dot represents a country. Data for Mexico are from an older source as disaggregation by place of residence is not available yet for the latest source.

National birth registration prevalence may hide important geographic disparities

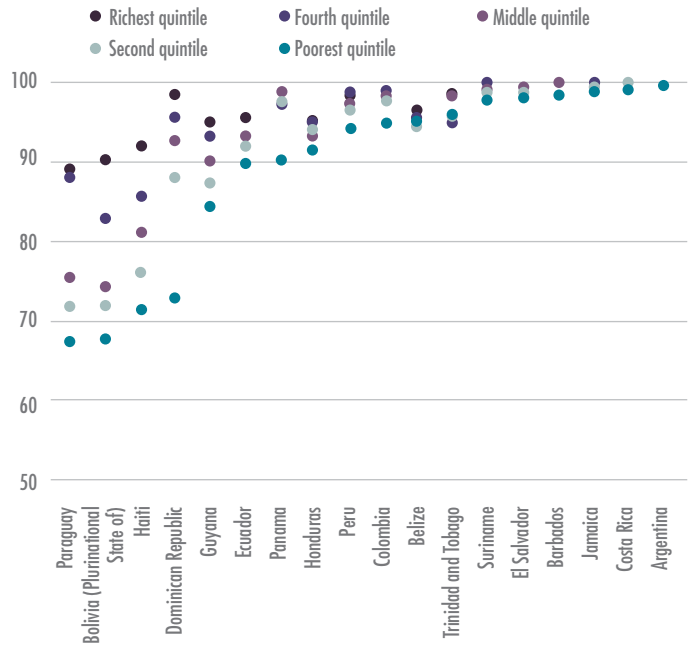
Percentage of children under age five whose births are registered and the geographic area with the highest and lowest levels of birth registration



Notes: Some countries could not be included since subnational disaggregation is not available yet for the latest sources. For Argentina, Cuba and Uruguay, the line with the geographic areas is not visible because the levels are around 100 per cent.

Disparities by a family's wealth are only evident in countries with lower birth registration levels

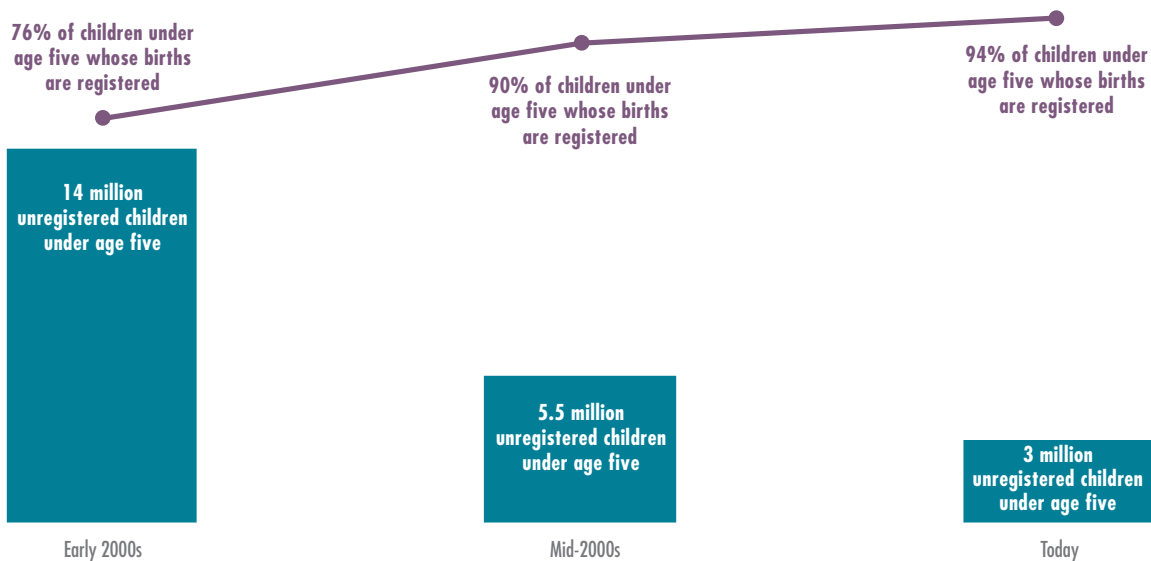
Percentage of children under age five whose births are registered, by wealth quintiles



Notes: Data for Costa Rica, El Salvador, Mexico and Paraguay are from older sources as disaggregation by wealth is not available yet for the latest sources.

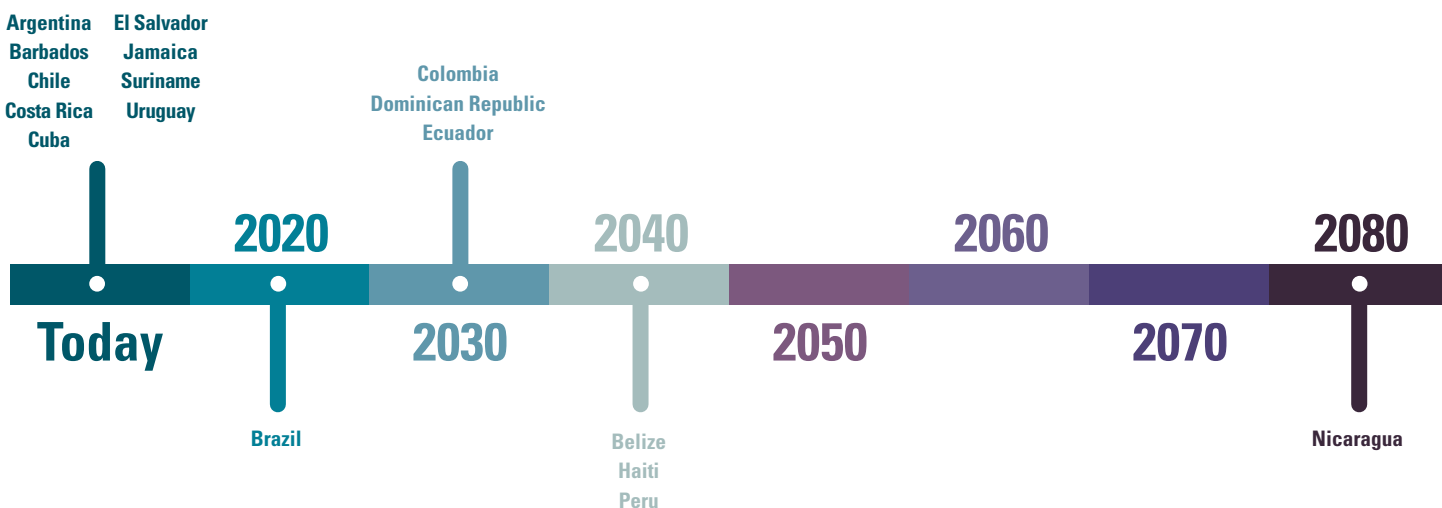
Progress and prospects

Levels of birth registration in Latin America and the Caribbean have steadily been rising since the early 2000s, resulting in fewer unregistered children in the region



Note: Estimates are based on a subset of 11 countries with available trend data, covering more than 50 per cent of the regional population of children under age five.

If observed trends continue, countries in the region will reach universal coverage of birth registration at different times



Notes: This list does not include countries with no available trend data in UNICEF global databases and does not include countries that have recorded no significant change in birth registration levels over time. Countries listed for 'today' have current birth registration levels of either 99 or 100 per cent. The information presented in the timeline reflects the year by which a country is projected to reach universal coverage of birth registration if observed trends continue rather than the exact year in which this will be achieved. Projections are calculated on the basis of annual rates of change observed over time, in order to estimate what the prevalence would be in the future if these rates of change persist. They are meant to be illustrative, showing scenarios which could reasonably be expected based on available evidence to date. It is possible for the rates of change to move faster or slower than these projected scenarios.

Notes: Data for Argentina and the Plurinational State of Bolivia refer to the percentage of children under age five with a birth certificate. Data for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Costa Rica refer to the percentage of births registered. Data for Chile refer to the percentage of children aged 0 to 7 years whose births are registered. Data for Paraguay refer to the percentage of children under 1 year of age with a birth certificate. Data for Peru refer to the percentage of children aged 6 to 59 months whose births are registered.

Sources: UNICEF global databases, 2016, based on Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and other national household surveys, censuses and vital registration systems, 2006-2015. Population data are from: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects: The 2015 revision*, CD-ROM edition, United Nations, New York, 2015. Data on GNI per capita are from the World Bank, 2015 (available at: <<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.CD>>).

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Division of Data, Research and Policy
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For information on the data contained in
this brochure:

UNICEF
Data and Analytics Section
Division of Data, Research and Policy
3 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY
10017, USA
Tel: +1 (212) 326-7000
Email: data@unicef.org
data.unicef.org

For information on programmatic work in
birth registration in the region:

UNICEF
Regional Office for Latin America and the
Caribbean
PO Box 0843-03045
Panama City, Panama
Tel: (+507) 301 7400
uniceflac.org

