UNICEF

Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

TARGET 16.9

By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration

Target overview

SDG monitoring

SDG target 16.9 is tracked by the following indicator

- 16.9.1: Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority, by age.

Broader monitoring context

Birth registration is a first step towards safeguarding individual rights and providing every person with access to justice and social services. Thus, birth registration is not only a fundamental human right, but also key to ensuring the fulfillment of other rights.

Birth registration is also an essential part of a functioning civil registration system that produces vital statistics, which are essential for sound government planning and effective use of resources. In this way, Target 16.9 is linked to Targets 17.18 and 17.9, both of which concern statistical capacity building support to developing countries.

Most countries have mechanisms in place for registering births. However, coverage, the type of information obtained and the use of resulting data differ, based on a country's infrastructure, legal frameworks, administrative capacity, barriers to accessing services, availability of funds, accessibility to the population, and technology for data management. Levels of registration vary substantially across countries due to these and other factors, and the availability of data on birth registration is highly uneven across countries.

'Interoperability' with other services is a key strategy to improving birth registration. Making use of existing health service, education and social protection/welfare infrastructure enables greater access to hard-to-reach populations and the opportunity to reach the most vulnerable children who are also least likely to have their births registered. Linking these types of services with civil registration can ensure that people accessing them are also able to access birth registration.

UNICEF role in monitoring

In UNICEF's Strategic Plan 2018-2021, birth registration is included as an outcome indicator under Goal Area 3: Every child is protected from violence and exploitation. UNICEF is the global custodian for SDG indicator 16.9.1, and has been monitoring birth registration for many years. UNICEF supports countries to collect and report on these data through the MICS survey programme, which has played a leading role in strengthening birth registration data collection.

General information and resources

- UNICEF data: https://data.unicef.org/
- UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS): http://mics.unicef.org
- SDG indicators: https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/

For further information, please contact the Child Protection and Development focal point in the Data & Analytics Section at UNICEF HQ via: data@unicef.org

INDICATOR 16.9.1

Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority, by age

Description

Definition and key terms

Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority.

Numerator: Number of children under age of five whose births are reported as being registered with the relevant national civil authorities

Denominator: Total number of children under the age of five in the population

Key terms:

- Birth registration: Birth registration is defined as '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'.

- Birth certificate: A birth certificate is a vital record that documents the birth of a child. The term 'birth certificate' can refer either to the original document certifying the circumstances of the birth, or to a certified copy or representation of the registration of that birth, depending on the practices of the country issuing the certificate.

- Civil authority: Official authorized to register the occurrence of a vital event and to record the required details.

National data sources

Civil registration systems: Civil registration systems that are functioning effectively compile vital statistics that are used to compare the estimated total number of births in a country with the absolute number of registered births during a given period. These data normally refer to live births that were registered within a year or the legal time frame for registration applicable in the country.

Population-based surveys: In the absence of reliable administrative data, household surveys have become a key source of data to monitor levels and trends in birth registration. In most low- and middle-income countries, such surveys represent the sole source of this information. The standard indicator used in DHS and MICS to report on birth registration refers to the percentage of children under age 5 (0-59 months) with a birth certificate, regardless of whether or not it was seen by the interviewer, or whose birth was reported as registered with civil authorities at the time of survey. Depending on the country, surveys collecting these data may be conducted every 3-5 years, or possibly at more frequent intervals.

Censuses can also provide data on children who have acquired their right to a legal identity. However, censuses are conducted only every ten years and are therefore an inappropriate tool for routine monitoring.

Data collection innovation

Methodological work to test some additional questions on costs related to registration and reasons for not registering a child is currently ongoing.

Using the indicator

Interpretation

A name and nationality is every person's right, and obtaining this is typically accomplished through a formal process of registering a child's birth. Birth certificates are proof of registration and the first form of legal identity. Thus, the recommended target for birth registration is complete coverage (100%) given that anything below indicates some children are not registered. For example, in countries with high levels of birth registration, national prevalence levels can mask disparities within certain sub-populations (geographic, ethnic, religious, etc.).

Birth registration coverage can increase quickly if new initiatives or campaigns are implemented; for this reason, available data should be considered reflective of birth registration coverage at the time of the survey rather than the current situation.

When examining trends in birth registration, several important factors should be considered, including the number of data points available for each country, variations in the number of years between data points, and the magnitude of change. It is also important to consider the data collection method (i.e. the questionnaire design and implementation) which can affect findings across consecutive data collection rounds and thus comparability of the estimates.

From both a programmatic and policy perspective, identifying whether the proportion of children whose births are registered is lower in certain sub-populations is crucial to ensuring the most vulnerable children are not left behind.

Birth registration is also an essential component of CRVS (Civil Registration and Vital Statistics) and so levels of coverage are indicative of the functioning of the system.

Disaggregation

Standard background characteristics from household surveys include sex, single years of age, place of residence, geographic location, and household wealth. In addition to these standard levels of disaggregation, this indicator can be usefully disaggregated in some surveys by mother's level of education, ethnicity, religion, child functional difficulty and mother's functional difficulties. There is typically more potential to disaggregate survey data as opposed to statistics derived from administrative records.

Common pitfalls

Substantial differences can exist between CRVS coverage and birth registration levels as captured by household surveys. The differences are primarily because data from CRVS typically refer to the percentage of all births that have been registered (often within a specific timeframe) whereas household surveys often represent the percentage of children under age five whose births are registered. The latter (the level of registration among children under 5) is specified in the SDG indicator.

Data from household surveys like MICS or DHS sometimes refer only to children with a birth certificate. UNICEF methodically notes this difference when publishing country-level estimates for global monitoring.

One of the most common pitfalls with questionnaire design involves respondents' misunderstanding of the actual registration process. For example, respondents might be unaware of the specific authorities legally tasked with birth registration and might therefore misinterpret the act of notifying a church or village chief [of a birth] as formal registration. To address this ambiguity, household survey questionnaires are often customized to include reference to the specific national authority responsible for registration. Similarly, respondents might confuse a birth certificate with a health card or other document and thus inaccurately report children as registered. Despite attempts to resolve such issues, confusion about the process of birth registration might still exist and result in erroneous reporting.

Monitoring and reporting

National

National Statistical Offices (for the most part) and line ministries/other government agencies responsible for maintaining national vital registration systems

Global

Agencies: UNICEF

Process: UNICEF maintains the global database on birth registration that is used for SDG and other official reporting. UNICEF HQ updates the database annually through its collaboration with Country Offices, through the CRING process. Before the inclusion of any data point in the database, it is reviewed by sector specialists at UNICEF headquarters to check for consistency and overall data quality. This review is based on a set of objective criteria to ensure that only the most recent and reliable information is included in the databases. UNICEF HQ also updates the database on a rolling basis throughout the year by searching for additional sources of data that are vetted by the COs before they are included in the global database.

Timing: New country level data, together with global and regional averages, are released annually both as part of State of the World's Children and on UNICEF's dedicated website for statistics (data. unicef.org). The Secretary-General's report on the SDGs, which includes latest available country, regional and global estimates on 16.9.1, is typically released every year in May/June.

Discrepancies with national estimates: Nationally produced data are not adjusted or recalculated.

Key resources

Indicator information and cross-country comparable estimates:

- UNICEF Data: https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/birth-registration/
- SDG metadata: https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/files/Metadata-16-09-01.pdf

Tools and measurement guidance:

- MICS: Questionnaire for children under five: http://mics.unicef.org/tools
- DHS: Household questionnaire: http://mics.unicef.org/tools