Providing legal identity for all, including birth registration (target 16.9)

This section addresses the situation and progress for persons with disabilities vis-à-vis target 16.9, which aims at providing legal identity to all by 2030, including birth registration. Article 18 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities specifies children with disabilities shall be registered immediately after birth and have the right to a name and a nationality.

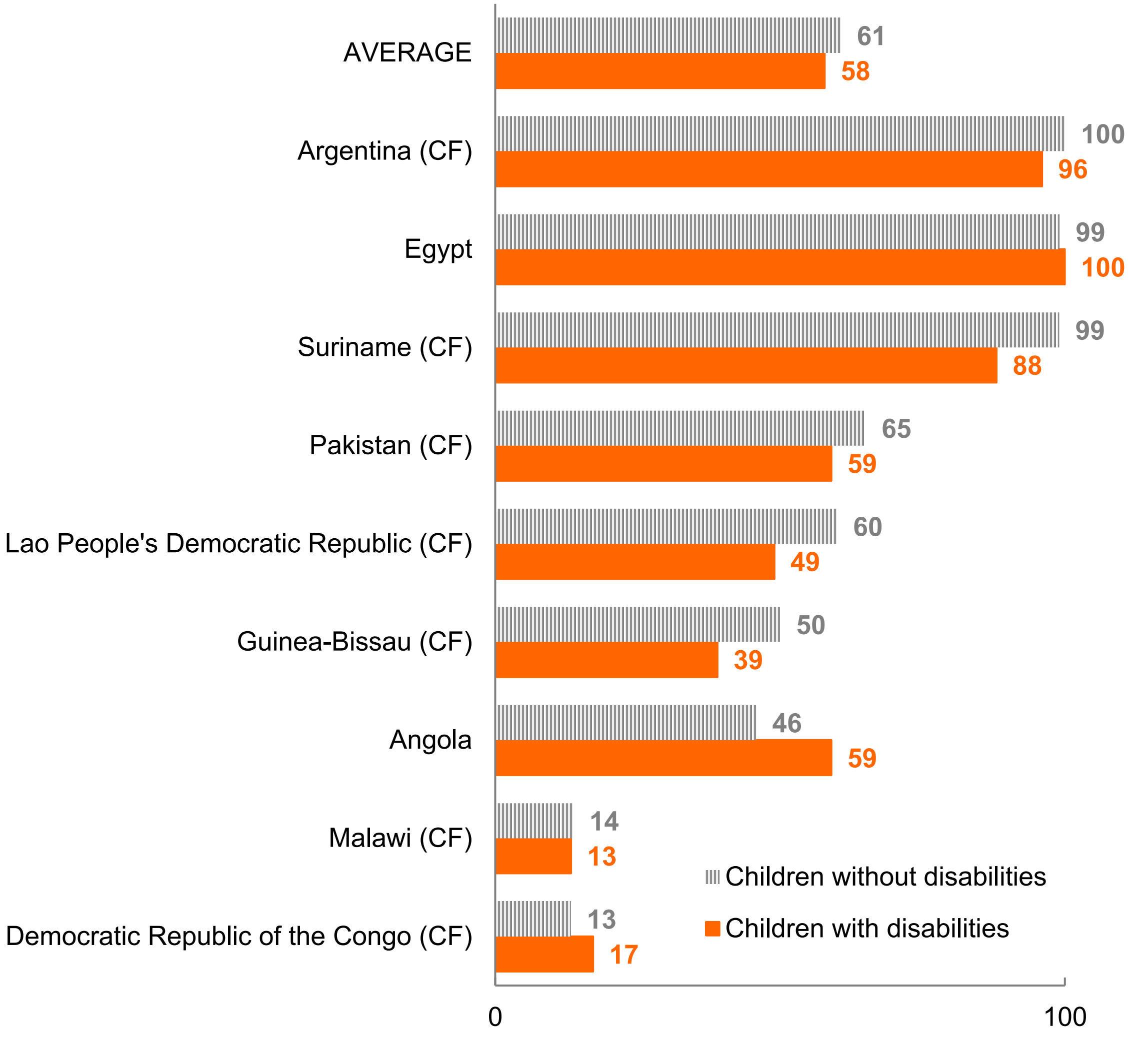
Birth registration, the official recording of a child's birth by the government, establishes the existence of the child under the law and provides the foundation for safeguarding many of the child's civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Due to stigma, families with children with disabilities sometimes fail to register them. This could have serious adverse implications for them in the realization of their rights and entitlements.

Current situation and progress so far

Birth registration for children with disabilities is typically ensured by general laws making birth registration compulsory for all. But due to stigma and negative stereotypes, families sometimes opt to hide family members with disabilities and do not register them at birth. Available data from nine countries shows that on average fewer children with disabilities, 58 per cent, were registered at birth than children without disabilities, 61 per cent (Figure 226). However, the gaps between children with and without disabilities vary across countries. Children with disabilities were less likely to be registered in six of these countries and more likely to be registered in three of these countries. Guinea-Bissau and Suriname showed the largest gaps between children with and without disabilities, 11 percentage points, with children with disabilities being less likely to be registered than others in both countries. Since hidden children with disabilities would not be counted in statistical surveys, it is possible that the gaps may be higher than shown in available data.

To address the lower birth registration among children with disabilities, some countries have enacted disability-specific laws to reaffirm the right of children with disabilities to be registered at birth;[571] others have conducted national surveys to understand the challenges that parents of infants with disabilities face in registering them at birth,[572] others have invested in online,[573] mobile registration programmes,[572] or registration by SMS.[574] Online, SMS and mobile registration can be particularly useful to increase the registration of children with disabilities in rural and remote areas, where parents may have challenges travelling to registration centres and may be more prone to register the birth of their infant within their communities or the comfort of their homes.

Figure 226. Percentage of children with disabilities who have been registered at birth, in 9 countries, in 2020 or latest year available.



Note: (CF) identifies data produced using the Child Functioning Module. Data from Angola cover children and youths under 18 years of age; data from Argentina, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malawi, Pakistan and Suriname cover children aged 2 to 5 years; and data from Egypt cover children aged 0 to 4 years.
Source: UNDESA (on the basis of data from DHS[6]) and UNICEF (2021).[46]

More progress will be needed to achieve target 16.9 for persons with disabilities by 2030. For example, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Malawi and Pakistan will have to increase the birth registration rate for persons with disabilities by 3 to 6 percentage points every year until 2030 in order to ensure that all children with disabilities are registered by 2030. To eliminate the gap between children with and without disabilities in birth registration rates, Guinea-Bissau, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Pakistan and Suriname will have to decrease the gap by 1 percentage point every year until 2030.

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

The disruptions caused by lockdowns and social restrictions resulted in declines in birth registration during COVID-19. Only a minority of countries were able to maintain service continuity for birth registrations during the COVID-19 restrictions.[575] Many civil registration offices either closed or remained open with social distancing measures in place. Few countries established business continuity plans or developed strategies to deal with the backlog when restrictions were lifted.

As infants with disabilities have been at higher risk to die from COVID-19 (see the chapter on Goal 3), parents of infants with disabilities may have been particularly reticent to risk COVID-19 exposure when travelling to and attending civil registration offices to register their child. The pandemic is likely to have increased the gap in birth registration between children with and without disabilities.

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Summary of findings and the way forward

Birth registration makes children with disabilities visible and empowers them to access education, justice and health services. Birth certificates also protect children with disabilities against early marriage (see the chapter on Goal 5) and child labour (see the chapter on Goal 8). In some countries, a large percentage of children with disabilities remains unregistered and at higher rates than children without disabilities. Stigma is often the barrier.

Faster progress will be needed to achieve target 16.9 for persons with disabilities by 2030. Countries with birth registration for children with disabilities lower than 50 per cent as of 2023 will have to increase the birth registration rate for persons with disabilities by 7 or more percentage points every year until 2030 in order to ensure that all children with disabilities are registered by 2030. For some countries this means rates of progress will need to be at least twice the current rates of progress. Countries where children with disabilities are being left behind in registration may need targeted measures to address the gap.

The following targeted initiatives can promote the registration of children with disabilities:

1. Combat stigma and negative attitudes towards persons with disabilities. Use the media to portray positive images of persons with disabilities. Raise awareness among parents of infants with disabilities of the importance of registering their birth. Involve persons with disabilities in designing awareness campaigns.

2. Conduct studies to identify barriers to registering children with disabilities and target efforts to address those barriers.

3. Provide online, SMS and mobile birth registration. Remote and mobile birth registration will facilitate the process for all parents, and mobile registrations may especially help parents of children with disabilities in rural and remote areas.

4. Provide disability training for officers responsible for the birth registration process, both in civil registration offices and in health facilities, to combat negative attitudes towards disability.

5. Make contingency plans for maintaining birth registration in crisis situations and emergencies, like pandemics. To ensure the operational continuity of birth registrations of children with disabilities during crises and emergencies, make contingency plans to meet demand for registration during the crisis and to deal with possible backlogs after the crisis. Invest in online and SMS services for birth registration and have contingency plans to move fully remotely in case of emergency situations leading to lockdowns. Involve families of children with disabilities in designing these contingency plans.