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PRESS RELEASE

Over 50 per cent of African children lack legal identity; African Governments urged to waive birth registration fees, extend deadlines, and digitize processes.

The right to a legal existence is the first right for every human being on the planet. This legal existence triggers the right to health, education, protection from abuses and exploitation. The right to a legal identity is concretely embodied by a crucial document, the birth certificate, which establishes the child's name and affiliation.

The legal existence is not only at the core of all rights, it is also the ability for a nation and its Government to design and monitor all basic services. Despite the palpable importance of this crucial official recognition of existence, in Africa, over half of the children are denied this basic right, subsequently their ability to fully enjoy their human rights. Statistics show that the continent has made progress in improving birth registration in the last decades. However, with the fast growing population, worrying projections show that the number of children not registered at birth will continue to increase expectedly to exceed 100 million of children by 2030 if no immediate measures are taken to ensure every child has legal identity. These concerning perspectives threatens to reverse accumulated gains over the years and stall the realization of the ambitions of both the UN Sustainable Development Goals¹ (SDG) and the African Union² to reach universal registration respectively in 2030 and 2063.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had glaring negative effects on birth registration services with the situation made worse due to lockdowns, reductions of civil registration services and diminished use of services. In an attempt to address the challenges of COVID-19 on birth registration, the African Union and UNICEF launched the **No name campaign** in June 2020, not only to alleviate a further deterioration of the birth

¹ Goal 16 (16.9): provide legal identity for all, including birth registration, by 2030

² African Union agenda 2063, African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

registration coverage, but to turn the COVID-19 pandemic into an opportunity to accelerate registration at birth through practices and measures that proved efficient.

Watch UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, Angelique Kidjo pledge her support for the No Name Campaign call for action "For Every Child a Legal Identity, For Every Child Access to Justice". **Click [here](#)**.

In addition to the proven solutions of digitization, decentralization and interoperability that are the 3 pillars of the No Name Campaign, and in face of a backlog caused by the pandemic, the African Union and UNICEF urge countries to take additional action by simplifying procedures, removing fees and extending deadlines for late registration, that are bottlenecks and barriers to birth registration.

Most African Union Member States are engaged in the No Name Campaign and are making birth registration a national priority. Their commitment is embodied in the 19th November 2020 **[Declaration](#)** that derived from the High level Dialogue on birth registration "to accelerate policy and legal reforms that ensure universal Birth Registration without leaving no one behind by addressing costs and other system bottlenecks and barriers to birth registration."

Many countries in Africa have already adopted one or all the good practices, previous or during the COVID-19 crisis, demonstrating that COVID-19 can be a chance to move on better. Among the many examples: Interoperability with health and immunization is instrumental also to advance decentralization of services, illustrated by countries like Cote d'Ivoire, where birth registration is currently linked with over 90 per cent of the country's immunization services and 64 per cent of all new-born were registered in 2020.

In Cameroon, in pilot health centres in the far North and Centre regions, the creation of Civil Status offices has significantly boosted registration of births within the timeframe provided by the law. In Mali, as a result of improved interoperability of health and civil registry systems, 38,114 births were registered by Community Health Workers in 2020 compared to 15,615 in 2019. In Tanzania, even though COVID-19 challenged access to services for the first two months, with decentralized and integrated services at health facilities that offer one-stop services for both registration and certification spontaneously, the target number for registration and certification for 2020 was met.

These examples show that scaling up birth registration through interoperability, decentralization and digitization are game changers to accelerate and reach universal birth registration, even in emergency situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic. However, to convert this situation into an opportunity to finally put an end to the indignity of invisibility for children in Africa, additional measures are needed. Member States are therefore called to **waive the fees** that frequently apply to birth

registration, representing one of the major bottlenecks for access among vulnerable population groups, **extend or lift deadlines** for late registration, **simplify procedures** for registration and establish waivers for missing documents. So far, only a few countries guarantee birth registration free of charge.

For further information, please contact:

Doreen Apollos, Directorate of Information and Communication | African Union Commission | E-mail: ApollosD@africa-union.org | www.au.int | Addis Ababa | Ethiopia

Sandra Bisin, UNICEF Director of communication for Central and Western Africa: +221 77 819 2300, sbisin@unicef.org

Directorate of Information and Communication | African Union Commission,
E-mail: DIC@african-union.org | **Website:** www.au.africa | Addis Ababa | Ethiopia
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