



# I AM HERE AND I EXIST

## Birth certificate : The document that changes the future

Having a birth certificate is a fundamental right for every human being. In Cameroon, an estimated **76,000 children in final year of primary school lack this important document**, while more than 3 million children in the country are still in need. And the situation is worse in crisis-affected regions, where the birth certificates of most internally displaced persons got missing during displacement or destroyed because of violence. In 2021\*, 30% of under five children in Cameroon did not have birth certificates, and the National Civil Status Office (BUNEC) counted 1,600,000 school children without birth certificates, with the Far North region being the most affected with about 400,000 children. Moreover, according to BUNEC, the East region alone recorded around 190,000 children enrolled in primary school without birth certificates in 2023\*.

Yet, **every child born in Cameroon has the right to a free birth certificate within 90 days of birth**. This is often not the case. In most cases parents for whatever reason miss this deadline and often have to resort to a costly process where they have to obtain a declaratory judgment before the birth certificate is established. This is costly for displacement-affected people whose livelihood has also been affected by the crisis.

People keep facing enormous challenges trying to access civil documentation due to the gaps in the civil status system. The situation is aggravated in the crisis-affected regions, especially in the Far North, Northwest and Southwest where some civil status centers are non-functional owing to destruction by armed groups, while some are closed as civil status registrars and other personnel fled the area. Nevertheless, the demand for civil documentation remains high, especially among refugees and IDPs. Displacement-affected populations also have reduced income, lack information on the procedures for accessing civil documentation and worried about traveling over long distances to obtain documentation. Furthermore, gender disparities persist, with girls being less often registered than boys, and unmarried mothers facing stigma at the agencies.

The lack of civil documentation also affects displaced people's access to essential services and enjoyment of other social, economic and political rights including rights to education, healthcare, freedom of movement, access to financial services as well as the right to vote.

(1) - Cameroon Tribune, Tuesday 12 July 2022 P. 5

(2) - The guardian post - 31 August 2023

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**Government to strengthen the civil registration system** to improve access to civil documentation for everybody;

**Government should strengthen collaboration between health centers and civil registration centers** in terms of support for birth declarations, including adoption of measures to reinforce compliance with the obligation to declare births by public and private health centers

**Government should ensure that all civil status centers are well equipped** to provide timely and quality services especially in crisis situations, in line with the African Charter on Statistics and the Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa (SHaSA)

**Municipal councilors should play an active role in promoting timely birth registration within their respective municipalities**, by raising awareness and supporting the public in declaring births and monitoring birth registration operations in secondary civil status centers

## Contact:

**Ndzinwa Julius Bantar**

Information, Counseling and Legal Assistance (ICLA) Program Development Manager

E-mail: [Julius.bantar@nrc.no](mailto:Julius.bantar@nrc.no) ; +(237) 657 29 21 85 | 677 85 88 34



Funded by  
European Union  
Humanitarian Aid



german  
humanitarian  
assistance  
DEUTSCHE HUMANITÄRE HILFE



Sweden  
Sverige



SOLUTIONS to Inclusive Durables



Funded by  
the European Union



german  
cooperation  
DEUTSCHE ZUSAMMENARBEIT



Norwegian Ministry  
of Foreign Affairs



The global fund for education in emergencies



NORWEGIAN  
REFUGEE COUNCIL

## Cameroon Country Office

Rosa Parks Avenue

BP: 35596, Yaoundé - Cameroon - Telephone: +237 690 027 942

Kousséri : 699 316 533 • Maroua : 696 793 969 • Buea : 656 654 997 • Bamenda : 696 432 949

• Batouri : 694 953 472

| Website : [www.nrc.no](http://www.nrc.no)

| Facebook : NRC - Norwegian Refugee Council - | Twitter: [NRC\\_Norway](https://twitter.com/NRC_Norway) / [NRC\\_CWA](https://twitter.com/NRC_CWA)