



# Securing every child's identity: NRC's efforts to strengthen birth registration in Cameroon

## Birth registration: Importance, barriers and opportunities

Birth registration establishes the existence of a child under law and provides the foundation for ensuring many of the child's rights such as social protection, education, housing, and other essential services. In contexts of conflict and displacement, birth registration is particularly crucial for protecting children from statelessness and legal invisibility. It can also help reduce risks of human trafficking, child labor, and child marriage.

In Cameroon, limited access to **civil registration and birth registration** remains a major barrier to the enjoyment of fundamental rights, particularly in **conflict-affected and hard-to-reach areas** where displacement and poverty intersect.<sup>1</sup>

Documents are frequently lost during displacement or inaccessible, while the civil registration system remains largely manual and paper-based, with records often poorly stored and vulnerable to damage or loss. Limited digitalisation further constrains access, leaving many children unregistered.

Although birth registration within the 90-day legal period is free, late registration requires court procedures and administrative fees, creating significant barriers for vulnerable and displacement-affected families.<sup>2</sup>

## OVERVIEW OF NRC ICLA PROGRAMME EFFORTS TO ENHANCE BIRTH REGISTRATION

NRC's Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance (ICLA) programme strengthens **legal protection** for refugees, IDPs and host communities by combining **individual legal assistance, community mobilisation and institutional capacity development**. Interventions are implemented across the Far North, Southwest, Northwest, East and Adamawa regions.<sup>3</sup>

In 2025, NRC provided legal protection services to over 29,000 displacement-affected individuals, including birth registration support to more than 12,500 individuals (55% women). NRC supported over 1,600 people (including 68% women) through counselling and assisted more than 6,000 people (including 51% women and girls) with

<sup>1</sup> NRC, [Legal and Civil Documentation Response in Cameroon](#) (NRC, 2024)

<sup>2</sup> Law No. 2024/016 of 23 December 2024

<sup>3</sup> NRC, [Birth Certificate: The Document That Changes the Future](#) (NRC, 2024)

legal assistance. This resulted in nearly 6,000 boys and girls obtaining birth certificates, enabling them to sit for national exams and obtain their high school diplomas.

### **Community mobilisation and awareness**

NRC regularly conducts outreach campaigns to raise awareness on the importance of birth registration and legal identity, tackle misinformation, and encourage timely registration. In 2025, NRC reached nearly 6,000 individuals (59% women) in remote and hard-to-reach areas with guidance on civil registration procedures, requirements, and costs.

### **Specialized legal assistance and mobile court sessions**

NRC provides legal protection services, including counselling and legal assistance to help individuals and families obtain birth certificates and ID cards. This includes support for late registration and navigation of administrative and judicial procedures, often complemented by financial and logistical assistance. ICLA services are delivered in close collaboration with State authorities, including the Bureau National de l'État Civil (BUNEC), civil status centres, municipal offices, and courts. To increase access in the Eastern region, particularly in remote areas with high numbers of unregistered children, NRC conducts mobile court sessions, covering procedural and court fees. These sessions bring services closer to communities, reduce travel costs, accelerate the issuance of declaratory judgments, and typically enable 500–1,000 children per session to obtain birth certificates.

### **Institutional engagement, capacity development and sustainability**

In partnership with BUNEC, NRC strengthens the civil registration system by building the capacity of national and local actors and supporting alignment with national reform processes. In 2025, NRC trained over 430 officials responsible for civil registration. NRC continues to serve as co-lead, alongside BUNEC, of the Regional Platform on Civil Documentation in the Far North and is an active member of the platforms in the East and Adamawa regions. Through its engagement with relevant authorities, NRC seeks to advance the digitalisation process as a means of sustainably improving access to birth registration for populations affected by crisis and displacement, while strengthening the capacity of local institutions, advocating for the reduction of financial and administrative barriers to birth registration, and promoting greater inclusion.

## **LOOKING AHEAD**

In 2025, the government of Cameroon launched the Cameroon Strategic Plan for the Modernization of the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System,<sup>4</sup> aiming at strengthening birth registration and improving access to legal identity for all, including displaced and vulnerable populations. NRC has intensified collaboration with government and civil society partners expanding institutional engagement. As part of this effort, NRC is piloting the digitalisation of a civil registration office in Logone-Birni (Far North) to improve efficiency, accessibility, sustainability and data security. This initiative aims to ensure that displacement-affected populations can secure legal identity, access essential services, and fully exercise their rights, while contributing to long-term system strengthening.

In Cameroon, NRC's ICLA Programme is supported and funded by:



<sup>4</sup> Cameroon Strategic Plan for the Modernization of the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System 2025–2029.