



# Right from the start: birth registration in Rhino Camp

## Background<sup>1</sup>

At the end of February 2024, Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement in the Arua District had 155,653 registered refugees.<sup>2</sup> Established in 1980, the settlement was expanded in the wake of the South Sudanese civil war to accommodate the sudden influx of refugees into Northern Uganda. Rhino Camp continues to receive asylum seekers mainly from South Sudan, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo), making it one of the largest settlements in Uganda.

Almost 60 per cent of the Rhino Camp population are minors,<sup>3</sup> with high birth rates contributing to the settlement having a significant young population. Children up to four years old comprise 12 per cent of the total population.<sup>4</sup> Many of these children and their parents faced challenges and delays in registering births and obtaining birth certificates.

Since 2018, the NRC ICLA<sup>5</sup> (legal aid) Programme has collaborated closely with the National Identification and Registration Authority (NIRA), the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) and other partners in Rhino Camp to ensure that all children born in the settlement have access to birth registration. This action is key to ensuring that no child is left without an official document.

### BOX: Birth registration for refugees in Uganda: importance, process and requirements

The importance of birth registration for refugees cannot be overstated. A birth certificate is crucial for identifying a child, as it proves the legal relationship between the parents and the child. It offers protection against exploitation, including trafficking, illegal adoption, child labour and child marriage. Moreover, a birth certificate can safeguard a child from illegal recruitment by armed groups or hazardous forms of work.

<sup>1</sup> The brief was researched and written by Consolate Ayikoru and Laura Cunial. Support for the layout was provided by Dixon Odur.

<sup>2</sup> Figure as of 29 February 2024, OPM Rhino Camp Settlement refugee population and UNHCR, Uganda Refugee Dashboard, Accessed 23 March 2024, <https://reporting.unhcr.org/uganda-population-dashboard>

<sup>3</sup> Figure as of 29 February 2024, OPM Rhino Camp Settlement refugee population.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance (ICLA).





Enforcement of minimum-age legislation in Uganda relies on an official record of a child's age. As such, it is a fundamental means of protecting the human rights of refugee children.<sup>6</sup> Although birth registration does not confer nationality, it may help prevent statelessness by “establish[ing] a legal record as to where a child was born and who his/her parents are.”<sup>7</sup>

Birth registration is compulsory in Uganda, with the National Identification and Registration Authority mandated to register all births and deaths in the country.<sup>8</sup> When a child is born at a health facility, including those located in Rhino Camp, parents should receive a birth notification. This formal record confirms the birth and provides essential information about the child and the parents. NIRA uses this information to register the birth and issue a birth certificate. The process is more complicated for home births, which require the sub-county chief or town clerks to record the birth, notify the NIRA registration officer and issue a birth notification record.

### The following documents are required to register the birth of refugee children:

1. A birth notification record,
2. The NIRA Form 3 ‘Notice of Birth of a Child’,
3. A photocopy of a valid Refugee Family Attestation Card or Refugee ID card and,
4. Any other information that might be required.<sup>9</sup>

The issuance of the birth certificate is free for refugees;<sup>10</sup> however, other costs may occur.<sup>11</sup>

### Doubling efforts to ensure birth registration in Rhino Camp

In October 2023, NIRA, OPM, NRC and other partners joined forces to issue birth certificates to undocumented refugee children under five years old. The exercise, led by the OPM Department of Refugees for Rhino Camp, covered the entire settlement with the aim of:

1. Ensuring that all children under five resident in Rhino camp and born in Uganda obtain a NIRA-issued birth certificate;
2. Increasing awareness among parents of the importance of birth registration and procedures/requirements for such registration; and
3. Supporting a sustainable and efficient birth registration system for Rhino Camp, which is owned and operated by the

<sup>6</sup> UN Human Rights Council (HRC), 2017, *Birth registration and the right of everyone to recognition everywhere as a person before the law: resolution adopted by the Human Rights Council, A/HRC/RES/34/1*

<sup>7</sup> UNHCR, 2017, *Good Practices Paper - Action 7: Ensuring birth registration for the prevention of statelessness*, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> NIRA, *Birth Registration Handbook*, p.2, available at <https://www.nira.go.ug/publications/the-birth-registration-handbook>

<sup>9</sup> NIRA, *How to register births and deaths*, available at <https://www.nira.go.ug/publications/how-to-register-births-and-deaths-2>

<sup>10</sup>For Ugandan nationals the fee for a birth certificate is UGX 5,000. The equivalent of USD 1.3 based on exchange rates in March 2024.

<sup>11</sup> For instance, transportation cost.





Government with limited support from humanitarian agencies and is replicable in other settlements.

In November 2023, OPM organised and facilitated a one day training for 41 data collectors, including Community Development Workers and members of Child Protection Committees and Village Health Teams. Held at YORO Basecamp, the training covered the importance of registering vital events, principles and procedures for birth registration and guidance on how to fill in the NIRA Form 3, 'Notice of Birth of a Child'.<sup>12</sup> The training was essential for empowering the Village Health Teams who play an important role in notifying NIRA of births within the settlement. OPM, NIRA and NRC facilitated the training sessions, with OPM providing all required stationery.

Once the training was completed, the Danish Refugee Council, Save the Children International, the Center for Economic Social and Cultural Rights Africa and NRC conducted community mobilisation and supervised the data collectors' fieldwork. This was key to ensuring that the settlement community was aware of the exercise and the importance of registering children.

Data collectors were assigned to various villages across the seven zones of the settlement, conducting door-to-door visits to identify undocumented children and complete the required NIRA form for their registration, ensuring that no child remained unregistered.

Challenges in data collection arose due to the large geographic area of the settlement and the fact that many children were living in different locations from those listed in the OPM ProGresv4 platform, necessitating community support to track them down. Additionally, some parents lacked the required supporting documentation such as the Refugee Family Attestation. The data collection took an entire month.

The sub-county chiefs for Uriama, Odupi, Omugo and Rigbo attested the validity of the completed NIRA forms by stamping them. Once this step was completed, NIRA used the validated birth notification forms to issue birth certificates. These certificates were delivered to the OPM Department of Refugees in February 2024. As of March 2024, NRC is ensuring the distribution of birth certificates facilitated by the refugee community structures under the supervision of OPM.

NRC covered the cost of NIRA data clerk staffs and the 41 data collectors involved in the exercise. The budget was UGX 4,950,000.<sup>13</sup> Other costs were covered by OPM and other partners.

### **Achievements – ensuring that no children are left undocumented**

A total of 2,440 birth certificates were issued during the exercise. The majority of children

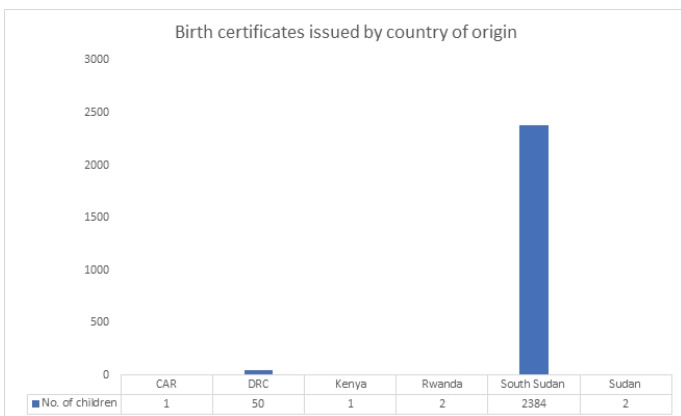
<sup>12</sup> NIRA Form 3 available at <https://www.nira.go.ug/media/2021/05/FORM3-NOTICE-OF-BIRTH-OF-A-CHILD-2.pdf>  
<sup>13</sup> The equivalent of USD 1275 based on exchange rates in March 2024.





were from South Sudan (2384 children), followed by the DR Congo (50 children), Rwanda (2 children), Sudan (2 children), the Central African Republic (1 child) and Kenya (1 child) as illustrated in the graph below. These figures reflect the current population of displaced individuals in the West Nile region.<sup>14</sup>

The exercise was scheduled to address the backlog of birth registration cases as NRC is reducing the ICLA presence in Rhino Camp. As of April 2024, NRC will only offer legal aid services to newly arrived refugees. The approach was also important to pilot a scalable model for birth registration owned and driven by the Ugandan Government with minimal support from humanitarian agencies.



<sup>14</sup>Figure as of 29 February 2024, UNHCR Uganda- Population Dashboard, Accessed 7 March 2024, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/107064>

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