

## **Current Status of Birth Registration Practice in Nepal**

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### **Abstract**

Birth registration is an essential element of civil registration and vital statistics which provide a legal identity and recognize the rights of an individual. In Nepal, birth registration has a long history starting from the Village Panchayat Act 1962 which was the first act with a provision for a birth certificate. Despite the over half-century experience of birth registration efforts, challenges to universal birth certificate coverage remain present, especially among the rural population. This research will investigate the current practices of birth registration in Nepal based on the findings of the National Population and Housing Census 2021. The analysis will show respective rates of birth certificate issuance across the regions, provinces, and development districts. Some areas show remarkable success in birth registration, while others struggle to reach significant coverage levels. The experience shows the critical role of government responsiveness to the development of birth registration which is especially important for rural areas and districts with significant rural populations. In this light, targeted efforts and outreach campaigns are necessary to eliminate barriers, thus guaranteeing equal access to birth registration for all children in Nepal.

**Keywords:** Birth Registration, Children, Legal Status, Practice, Rights, Vital Registration

### **Background of the study**

Civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems are primarily concerned with the lawful recording and thorough examination of pivotal occurrences within a society. These systems meticulously document a spectrum of significant life events, ensuring their official acknowledgement and validation. Among the crucial events recorded are births, deaths, marriages, divorces, fetal deaths, dissolutions, judicial separations, and adoptions. Through the formal process of registration, these events attain legal recognition and authenticity, thereby becoming integral components of the legal and administrative framework of a nation (Mulmi,2021). Birth registration, for instance, involves the official recording of a newborn's arrival with the pertinent government authority, thereby establishing the child's legal identity, nationality, and entitlements to various rights and services. Similarly, death registration involves the meticulous recording of pertinent details about a deceased individual, such as their identity and cause of death, serving multifaceted purposes including demographic analysis and public health planning. Marriage and divorce registration document the establishment and dissolution of marital unions, delineating the rights and obligations of spouses regarding matters such as inheritance and child custody. Fetal death registration, though not universally mandatory, furnishes invaluable data for understanding perinatal mortality trends and enhancing maternal and child health services. Likewise, dissolutions and judicial separations, as well as adoption registrations, formalize legal changes in familial structures, ensuring the recognition of individual rights and familial relationships. Altogether, CRVS systems are pivotal in maintaining precise records of vital events, facilitating their legal acknowledgment, and serving as foundational pillars for evidence-based policymaking and societal planning, thereby promoting individual rights, public health, and social development (WHO, 2013).

Birth marks the first vital milestone in every person's life. This event signifies the beginning of human existence. Birth registration is the cornerstone of the vital registration system, conferring legal status and affirming an individual's rights and recognition under the established rule and law. Therefore, it emerges as an element for every child, securing recognition and protection under the legal system. Birth registration forms the bedrock of legal status, enabling access to essential services and safeguarding against vulnerabilities.

For women and children, civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) are crucial. In order for women and children to realize their rights to proper health care, education, and basic social benefits, including housing and social protection, the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's, and Adolescents' Health 2016-2030 calls for the expansion of civil registration and vital statistics systems to increase access to services and entitlements. Total 15 out of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals include indicators that require high-quality CRVS data, making CRVS systems crucial to the 2030 development goals across the life cycle. For

countries, a fully operational CRVS system generates crucial data for socioeconomic planning and informed decision-making, allowing governments to track key demographic and health indicators such as infant, child, maternal, and adult mortality, as well as target resources and interventions by geography and population group (WHO, 2018).

Comprehensive, permanent, and continuous vital events registration and vital statistics systems provide a great number of significant benefits to the individual; to the nation; and the international community. Individuals can use copies of registration records as legal documents to prove their identity, place of birth, marriage, or death. Registration records also contain details about major occurrences, which are useful for administrative and statistical purposes.

The major goal of civil or vital registration has been to give each citizen a distinct legal identity. While this is an important activity for the government and a citizen's rights, the aggregated statistics that can be derived from these individual events are useful for evaluating trends over time and disparities among regions within a country. As a result, these crucial facts can be immensely beneficial in terms of planning and policymaking. Despite the importance of civil registration for citizens and governments, a large section of the global population is not covered by any registration system. These limits arise not just as a result of the social, economic, and geographic barriers, but also as a result of the complicated registration processes (Peters, B.G., 2016).

The information gathered through vital events registration is essential for social development planning, such as public health measures, maternal and child care, family planning, social security, education, housing, and economic development. At the local level, reliable data is required for appropriate planning of community needs, notably in the areas of health and education, as well as housing and the labor market (Mills et al., 2019). Civil registration provides accurate and comprehensive vital statistics that may be used to compare and evaluate variations between regions, divisions, and districts within a region, and countries on an international level.

All essential events, including births, deaths, and marriages, must be registered as part of the civil registration process. This ongoing and permanent registration benefits not just the individual but also their descendants by providing basic biographical information, family ties, and origin information. South Asian countries are dedicated to achieving complete civil registration. All governments have agreed to register births and deaths as part of the Sustainable Development Goals. Countries all around the area are attempting to end child marriage, and they recognize the importance of birth and marriage registration in achieving this aim (UNICEF, 2018).

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The history of vital registration in Nepal has been long. The "Village Panchayat Act, 1962" was Nepal's first attempt to require village panchayats to keep records of important events like births and deaths. The Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) conducted the first test of the vital registration system in 1964 by conducting a pilot project in three village panchayats of Kathmandu district. But this program did not continue. In 1972, the Family Planning, Maternal and Child Health (FPMCH) program also started a program to register vital events as a model in Banke and Nuwakot districts with the objective of evaluating the family planning program, but after 4 years i.e. in 1976, this program was adjourned by FPMCH, by showing the cause of its functional boundary.

The "Birth, Death and Other Personal Events (Registration) Act, 2033 (1976)" and its related rules, the "Birth, Death and Other Personal Events (Registration) Rule, 2033 (1977)," were already in place to collect, publish, and use vital event data. This act was sealed and published in Kartik 4, 2033 (20 October 1976) to make the legal provisions governing the registration and issue of certificates of birth, death, marriage, divorce, and migration of person inhabitant. It was an act made for the registration of the birth, death, marriage, divorce and migration (Kafle; R. and Nepal; B.2023).

The vital registration system was first launched in 10 districts of the country in 1977. It was then implemented nationwide in 1991 (Kafle; R. and Nepal; B.2023). In 2014, Nepal committed to the UNESCAP ministerial declaration for Asia and the Pacific, called "Get Everyone in the Picture". This aimed to ensure universal and responsive civil registration and vital statistics systems that support citizens' rights and good governance. The commitment has further streamlined the government efforts to augment the rolling out of the systems and establishment of a specialized agency - Department of Civil Registration established in November 2014 (Mulmi S.K, 2021).

Article 39 of Nepal's present Constitution mandates the registration of all births, as well as the identification of those who give birth (Nepal, G., 2072). Registration of vital events, particularly birth and marriage certificates, is one of the most crucial documents required to obtain a citizenship certificate in Nepal. The birth registration certificate is, in fact, a required document to be provided to the school administration when the kid is admitted to the school (FWLD, 2018).

Although it has been a long time since the vital registration system was implemented in Nepal, it has not yet been implemented effectively and all the data has been updated. The main reasons for the unsuccessful of the vital registration system in Nepal and the failure to update all the data are that the common people have not yet developed the idea that personal

events should be registered, the inability to make a separate institutional arrangement for registration, the general public's lack of information about the benefits of registering personal events, There is a lack of trained manpower for registration, there are financial and administrative problems in expanding its effectiveness, there are geographical difficulties for people to reach their offices for registration, there is no easy arrangement of transportation, there is fear of paying unnecessary fees in the general public and there is no regular presence in the office of the local registrar (Kafle; R. and Nepal; B.2023).

### **Current Scenario of Birth Registration Practice**

The incomplete birth registration is not only a problem in Nepal. Around 14 percent of children under five years of age are unregistered all over the world (UNICEF; 2023). It has been identified that several factors contribute to the differences in birth registration coverage between nations. The factors influencing birth registration at the individual, household, and community levels have been the subject of a few studies. Individuals (mothers or parents) who are more affluent, educated, have greater media exposure, are more mobile, have an institutional delivery, and are exposed to the media are more likely to register the birth of their kid. In certain nations, a mother's interaction with the healthcare system and/or medical professionals has also been demonstrated to be a contributing factor. A higher degree of birth registration can also be attained at the micro and macro levels by having a suitable legal framework and supporting infrastructure (Sharma; S.K. and others; 2023). Large differences can be found in the coverage of birth registration among regions. Western Europe and North America have the highest levels of birth registration, with fully 100 per cent of children under 5 of aged registered. Eastern Europe and Central Asia come in second at 99%, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean at 95%. Eastern and Southern Africa have the lowest rates of birth registration (41%). In sub-Saharan Africa, only just over half (51 per cent) of children are registered by their fifth birthday, while the level in West and Central Africa is slightly higher, at 59 per cent (UNICEF, 2023).

An paper titled "Birth registration in Nepal: An assessment of progress based on two national surveys based on Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys undertaken in 2014 and 2019" was published in 2023 by Sharma, S.K., and colleagues. 12,007 children under the age of five who were living with their mothers at the time of the surveys were included in the two surveys. 11,821 moms and 186 caregivers for the children (in the case of those without mothers) made up the survey's sample. Binary logistic regression and bivariate analysis are used to evaluate the differences in the proportion of births registered among the different kid categories. In this paper researcher claims that Birth registration increased considerably, from 58% (95% CI: 57–59%) in 2014 to 77% (95% CI: 76–78%) in 2019. Several of the disparities between and among the various population subgroups that were evident in the 2014 survey had been considerably reduced or eliminated by 2019. The disparities in

registration between boys and girls attenuated over time. Although birth registration increased for all children (ages 0–59 months old), infants still had comparatively lower levels of registration in Nepal (Sharma; S.K. and others; 2023).

### **Statement of Problem**

Research on birth registration is vital for understanding the extent and patterns of registration practices. While global research on this topic exists, Nepal has conducted several studies, yet the analysis of data from the National Population and Housing Census 2021 regarding birth registration remains insufficient. Specifically, there is a notable gap in the thorough examination of registration levels and variations based on key factors such as place of residence, province, ecological zone, and district within Nepal. This research aims to address this gap by focusing on analyzing the Census 2021 data comprehensively. The significance of this study lies in its potential to provide insights into the current state of birth registration practices across different geographical, administrative, and demographic divisions within Nepal. By examining registration levels and variations at various levels of granularity, such as province, ecological zone, and district, the research seeks to identify disparities, trends, and areas of improvement in birth registration coverage.

### **Objectives of study**

The major objectives of this paper are as follows;

To find out the current level of birth registration practice in Nepal.

To analyze the birth registration practice in Nepal by different background variables.

### **Methods**

The research's design is explanatory research and used secondary data from the National Population and Housing Census of 2021. Study population was 30,07,648 of under 5 years of aged child. The data collection method used the De jure method on birth registration details from the census of children under 5 years old of Nepal. The data were collected from November 11, to November 25, 2021, and used 8,545 supervisors, and 35,657 enumerators for the data collection process.

The main objective of this study is to examine the levels and variations in birth registration. Analysis will focus on the distribution of residence, provinces, geography and districts to gain insights into the patterns of birth registration, across demographics and areas. This analysis aims to provide an understanding of birth registration practice.

### **Birth Registration Practice in Nepal**

The National population and housing census 2021 of Nepal collected the information of birth registration data of under five years of children. Of the total 30,07,648 children of age five years and below, 74 percent are found to have registered their birth and 26 percent are still unregistered. Among the registered children, male children are 5.8 percentage points more than female. Similarly, the registration status is 81.9 percent in Mountain, 73.1 percent in Hill and 73.7 percent in Tarai region. By province, the highest percentages of children are registered in Karnali province i.e. 87.3 percent while the lowest is in Bagmati province which is 67 percent (NSO, 2023).

### **Birth Registration Differentials by Place of Residence in Nepal**

The data from National Statistics Offices (NSOs) concerning Nepal's birth registration practices during 2021 expose fascinating patterns for instance; rural dwellers seem to register more than urban who are below five years of age. Tables in this data indicate that there is a significant group of young ones who are not yet covered by registration events, as evidenced by the difference observed between total children below 5 years old and total registered ones below 5 years old in urban as well as rural areas.

**Table 1**

**Birth Registration Practice by Place of Residence, 2021**

Place of Residence	TC	TRC	Percentage	TMRC	Percentage	TFRC	Percentage
Urban	1909735	1398660	73.24	745080	53.27	653580	46.73
Rural	1097913	828055	75.42	432937	52.28	395118	47.72
Total	3007648	2226715	74.04	1178017	52.90	1048698	47.10

Source: National Statistics Office; 2024

*TC=Total Number of Children Under 5 years of age, TRC= Total Number of Registered Children Under 5 years of age, TMRC = Total Number of Male Registered Children Under 5 years of age and TFRC = Total Number of Female Registered Children Under 5 years of age*

When considered according to place of residence, there is a slightly higher percentage of birth registration in rural compared with urban areas. This implies that despite the existence of barriers to accessing registration services, especially in remote rural areas, more efforts are being made to have most births accounted for in official records.

In both urban and rural areas males children tend to be registered consistently more than females. 53.27 percentages of boys in urban areas are registered, but only 46.73 percentage of girls while in rural settings this number decreases to 52.28 percentages for boys vs. 47.72 percentage girls.

A lot of worry is raised by this difference in registration between boys and girls for paying attention on whether there might be gender biases hindering girl child birth registration procedures. Concisely, this means that decision makers and other interested parties should eliminate this gap so that each child irrespective of sex or place can have the same opportunity in birth registration.

In general, despite current advances in Nepal's birth registration practices, there remain certain areas that could be improved as regarded equalizing access by each child to a registration service and fighting against differences between boys'-and girls'-births occurring that impact on registration rates. Ongoing programs aimed at enhancing systems for registering births or spreading relevant information must be taken so that every offspring starts their life with identity document by law.

#### **Birth Registration Differentials by Geographic Region in Nepal**

In 2021, birth registration practices in different geographic regions of Nepal can be understood from information available through the National Statistics Office. It is clear that the registration rates differ with each region and there are gender disparities in all regions i.e., the Mountain, Hill and Terai.

**Table 2**  
**Birth Registration Practice by Geographic Region, 2021**

Geographic Region	TC	TRC	%	TMRC	%	TFRC	%
Mountain	189935	155521	81.88	81098	52.15	74423	47.85
Hill	1074600	785985	73.14	415129	52.82	370856	47.18
Terai	1743113	1285209	73.73	681790	53.05	603419	46.95
Total	3007648	2226715	74.04	1178017	52.90	1048698	47.10

Source: National Statistics Office; 2024

*TC=Total Number of Children Under 5 years of age, TRC= Total Number of Registered Children Under 5 years of age, TMRC = Total Number of Male Registered Children Under 5 years of age and TFRC = Total Number of Female Registered Children Under 5 years of age*

According to above table data, at the Mountain region there are 81.88 births are registered, this region has the highest rate of registration than other. It is followed by the Terai region (73.73%) and the Hill region (73.14%). This indicates that comparatively birth registration is more pronounced in the Mountain, as well as in Terai than in Hill region of Nepal. However,



despite these differences, overall, the registration rate across all regions is around 74.04 per cent, indicating that there's room for improvement in ensuring that every child is registered at birth.

A consistent pattern that stands out in all three regions is the fact that more boys are registered than girls. This means that more boys tend to be registered compared to their female counterparts. In the mountain region, the enrolment rate stands at 52.15 per cent for boys as against 47.85 per cent in the case of girls. In the hill region, there are 52.82 per cent male children registered versus 47.18 per cent female children, while in the Terai region it is 53.05 per cent of male children compared with 46.95 per cent for female children are respectively registered

These divergences in the sex rates of birth registrations underscore possible constraints or prejudices in the registering procedure that may overly touch on minor girls, for distribution which imposes additional burden on the girl children than boys. Equalizing these divergences becomes essential in order for any child, irrespective of area and gender, to be duly registered.

In conclusion, there are diverse birth registration practices in different parts of Nepal, but all in all, registration rates are fair with chances of improvement. The emphasis needs to be on enhancing registration systems and redressing gender imbalances so as to enable each child becomes registered immediately they are born, hence guaranteeing them a right of belongingness since infancy, as advocated by UN.

### **Birth Registration Differentials by Province in Nepal**

It is through the data provided by the National Statistics Office that we get to understand how many parents in Nepal registered their children in 2021. After examining the following table, one can observe there exist differences in number of children registered by sex and region.

**Table 3**  
**Birth Registration Practice by Province, 2021**

Province	TC	TRC	%	TMRC	%	TFRC	%
Koshi	472625	334852	70.85	174611	52.15	160241	47.85
Madhesh	799897	612588	76.58	325604	53.15	286984	46.85
Bagmati	488792	327536	67.01	174754	53.35	152782	46.65
Gandaki	208170	140119	67.31	75013	53.54	65106	46.46
Lumbini	541059	389428	71.98	204843	52.60	184585	47.40
Karnali	204638	178614	87.28	93160	52.16	85454	47.84

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Sudur Paschim	292467	243578	83.28	130032	53.38	113546	46.62
Total	3007648	2226715	74.04	1178017	52.90	1048698	47.10

Source: National Statistics Office; 2024

*TC=Total Number of Children Under 5 years of age, TRC= Total Number of Registered Children Under 5 years of age, TMRC = Total Number of Male Registered Children Under 5 years of age and TFRC = Total Number of Female Registered Children Under 5 years of age*

We can see a variation in rates of registered births across different provinces; values ranging from 66.01% to 87.28% are indicated. The 87.28% for Karnali province which is known the lack behind area of Nepal indicates that birth registration is relatively well done here. On the other hand, Bagmati province which is known as the advanced area of Nepal has the least rate at 67.01% implying that there may be areas needing improvement in child birth services provision within the area. It seems the surprised result in the available data.

It is evident from the analysis of the gender distribution of registered children that there is a similar trend observed in different parts of the country. Generally, more boys than girls are registered in most provinces. Nonetheless, these disparities are minor suggesting equity in birth registration across regions. Noticeably, Karnali Province bears a remarkably huge registration score compared to other provinces implying that we have effective birth registration initiatives in place. Alternatively, Bagmati province's bottom registration rate will require intervention aimed at enhancing birth registration practices in order to "securitize" article every child's authentic identity.

At final, this means that we should focus all our efforts on improving these practices rather than paying too much attention to regional variations in birth registration systems within Nepal. Customers should never have to submit documents multiple times before they are registered. In order to secure their rights and provide them with basic services and opportunities, it is important to address gender imbalances, as well as ensure that birth registration is accessible to all children in each province as this will help optimize opportunities for them.

## Birth Registration Differentials by Districts in Nepal

Table 4

Birth Registration Practice by Districts, 2021

Top Five Highest Districts	TC	TRC	%	TMRC	%	TFRC	%
Achham	30595	28886	94.41	14943	51.73	13943	48.27
Kalikot	20040	18910	94.36	9901	52.36	9009	47.64

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Bajura	17939	16387	91.35	8469	51.68	7918	48.32
Mugu	8547	7802	91.28	3982	51.04	3820	48.96
Doti	27097	24569	90.67	13089	53.27	11480	46.73
<b>Top Five Lowest Districts</b>	<b>TC</b>	<b>TRC</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>TMRC</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>TFRC</b>	<b>%</b>
Nuwakot	23196	14310	61.69	7622	53.26	6688	46.74
Solukhumbu	10093	6287	62.29	3297	52.44	2990	47.56
Lalitpur	37470	23406	62.47	12565	53.68	10841	46.32
Kaski	45998	29017	63.08	15771	54.35	13246	45.65
Rupandehi	113262	72359	63.89	38489	53.19	33870	46.81
Total	3007648	2226715	74.04	1178017	52.90	1048698	47.10

Source: National Statistics Office; 2024

*TC=Total Number of Children Under 5 years of age, TRC= Total Number of Registered Children Under 5 years of age, TMRC = Total Number of Male Registered Children Under 5 years of age and TFRC = Total Number of Female Registered Children Under 5 years of age*

The National statistics office collects data from all districts of Nepal at NPHC 2021, which shows how different they are according registration of births in 2021. The top five highest and lowest performing districts in registering of births are highlighted in the table together with the gender differences.

Upon examining the top five highest performing districts it is seen an impressively high registration rate that ranges from 90.67 percent up to 94.41 percent is unbelievable given what Achham has achieved by having 94.41 percent registrations rates which makes this area district number one when compared with the other four regions considered together in terms of total numbers under 5 who were registered as noted earlier last week. However, the five districts with the lowest performance display markedly reduced registration rates which are between 61.69% and 63.89%. Nuwakot district presents the least rate of registration with only 61.69%. Registration is very scarce in these areas and this could be because people may not easily access registration services or know why their children should be considered as legal citizens. When analyzing the gender breakdown within these districts, balanced registration rates are seen between male and female children. Although there are slight variations in some districts, the overall registration gender disparities are minor. It can be inferred from this that irrespective of how many people register as a whole, there are attempts to guarantee fair birth record provisions for kids of either gender in all locations.

In conclusion, although some districts in Nepal have demonstrated impressive accomplishments in birth registration, others struggle greatly to ensure extensive coverage of

registration. And so, targeted interventions, together with awareness campaigns, are essential in addressing level-based barriers towards this process; thus ensuring that every child in the country gets a chance of being registered as a bonafide citizen at the time he/she is born thus safeguarding their rights as well as access to vital services in life.

## **Discussion**

The multidimensional character of this issue is underscored by the discussion of birth registration practices in Nepal which covers legal, social, and geographical aspects. However, there are still inequalities that exist even as states continue to put strategies that ensure there is registration of birth. Lower rates of registration are observed in towns than in rural places where there are special problems like lack of accessibility to registration offices, unawareness, or problems in transportation. Different provinces and districts are differently affected by these ways of acting as seen in the rate of enrollment. Dealing with this requires combined efforts to enhance systems of children being given names, improve social facilities and knowledge, and develop relations linking government departments with those representing people's interests in the community.

## **Conclusion**

Nepal's birth registration is a crucial but complex problem that requires continuous intervention and attention from the government. Government policies play a critical role in shaping birth registration practices, especially in rural areas and districts with high rural populations. Notably, provinces such as Karnali exhibit higher registration rates, underscoring the effectiveness of targeted policies and initiatives in bolstering registration efforts.

In the future, the government should prioritize birth registration as a cornerstone of the civil registration and vital statistics systems. It is imperative that we remove all system barriers hence making neither registration services to be available to all children no matter neither where they are geographically placed nor their social economic status. Nepal's universal birth registration commitment shall be ensured. This will also mean protecting the rights and health of its very youngest people while conducting all-encompassing strategies for realizing the objective which, by the way, will have a substantial positive impact on them. Other factors considered necessary include implementation at the grassroots level-i.e., villages extending to Karnali, because authorities have reach these localities with social security services hence making birth registration extremely important there in its structure: Hence rural areas like Karnali does receive enough support from social security institutions; this is why birth registration matters most here. Having said that, tailored policies must be adopted to cater for specific regional requirements in as far as birth registration is concerned otherwise if a

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government wants to encourage more registration efforts and improve the scope of birth registration it should insist on mandatory birth registration for social security services/accessing such facilities.

When Nepal enacts birth registration policies effectively, it can reach a universal coverage goal whereby all children get recognized officially from the time of birth onwards. This way, the state gets an opportunity to make its population healthier than it has ever been while developing it as well by just doing something together.

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