

Children's right to identity in the United Republic of Tanzania

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1 Creation of identity

Birth registration:

- Tanzania continues to have low birth registration rates, currently estimated at 68% for children under the age of five and at 57% for children under the age of one.¹ However, this still marks a significant improvement from only 13% in 2012. In partnership with Global Affairs Canada, UNICEF supported the Government in the nationwide rollout of the Simplified Birth Registration System, extending coverage to all 26 mainland regions. In 2023 alone, over 1.1 million children were registered and issued with birth certificates, bringing the cumulative total to more than 9 million since 2013.²

For promising developments, see below Part 4: Restoration of identity.

Citizenship and statelessness:

- Tanzanian citizenship is governed by the *Tanzania Citizenship Act* (revised in 2002). There are three types of citizenship, namely: citizenship by birth; citizenship by descent; and citizenship by naturalisation.³ A child can acquire Tanzanian citizenship based on several grounds. First, a child born in the territory of Tanzania automatically acquires citizenship, except where neither of his parents is or was a citizen of the United Republic of Tanzania, and in the case of children of foreign diplomatic officials or those considered enemies, as specified in Ss. 5(1), (2)(a) and 2(b) of the Act. Secondly, a child born outside Tanzania may acquire citizenship if either of the child's parents is a Tanzanian citizen, as per Section 6.⁴ In addition, the Act provides for the naturalisation of a child of a Tanzanian parent upon request by the parent or guardian (S. 10(1)). Further, the Act allows for the naturalisation of any child in exceptional circumstances, as outlined in S. 10(2).⁵
- Nonetheless, the *Tanzania Citizenship Act* does not contain a safeguard to provide Tanzanian nationality to all children born on the territory who would otherwise be stateless.⁶ In addition, the application fee for citizenship is notably high. This financial barrier renders the process of obtaining citizenship unaffordable, particularly for vulnerable groups such as street children.⁷
- One group of children potentially affected by statelessness include the children of Rwandan refugees whose parents were naturalised in 1983 but who, due to lack of awareness of the legal procedures, did not naturalise when they turned 18. These populations are at risk of statelessness due to prolonged loss of connection with their country of origin. Other populations at risk include foundlings, the Kamba, the Makonde and the Comorian.⁸

Potential considerations:

- What mechanisms are foreseen to further promote universal birth registration (in addition to the ongoing promising initiatives undertaken and described in Part 4)?*
- What efforts are being undertaken to ensure that children do not remain without a nationality on Tanzanian territory?*

2 Modification of identity

Adoption:

- Under Section 16 of the Births and Deaths Registration Act, when an adoption order is granted by the High Court in relation to an infant under the Adoption of Children Decree, the court must direct the Registrar of Births and Deaths to mark the child's birth entry with the word "Adopted." This marking reflects the legal status of the child as adopted.⁹ This is also the case in intercountry adoptions, where the entry in the Tanzanian birth register will be marked with the relevant country's name.¹⁰
- Tanzania is not yet a Contracting State of the Convention of 29 May 1993 on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption.¹¹

Child marriage and early unions:

- Child marriage remains a significant issue in Tanzania, with 29% of girls married or entering a union before the age of 18, and 5% marrying before the age of 15. For boys, 4% marry before the age of 18. The prevalence of child marriage varies across regions, with the highest rates found in Shinyanga (59%), Tabora (58%), Mara (55%), and Dodoma (51%). In contrast, the lowest rates are found in Iringa (8%) and Dar es Salaam (19%). In some rural areas, especially those bordering Kenya, girls may marry as young as 11.¹²
- In 2016, the High Court of Tanzania ruled that marriage under the age of 18 was unconstitutional. The ruling challenged the Law of Marriage Act, which had allowed boys to marry at 18 and girls at 14 with court consent or 15 with parental consent. The Supreme Court of Appeal upheld this ruling in 2019 and directed the government to amend the law to raise the minimum legal age of marriage to 18. On 4 June 2023, the High Court of Tanzania issued a ruling on expediting the amendment of the law within six months from the date of this judgement. However, customary marriages remain exempt from this law, continuing to pose challenges to the implementation of this legal framework.¹³ It is worth highlighting, however, that since 1 May 2017, only individuals with valid birth certificates are permitted to legally marry.¹⁴
- Child marriage in Tanzania is primarily driven by gender inequality, where girls are often seen as inferior to boys. Several factors contribute to the high rates of child marriage, including: poverty, family honour, adolescent pregnancy, harmful cultural practices, education system, female genital mutilation, displacement and climate change.¹⁵
- The Tanzanian government has taken several steps to address child marriage. The National Plan of Action to End Violence Against Women and Children (2017-2018 and 2021-2022) aimed to reduce child marriage to 10% by 2022. During its implementation, 16,343 Women and Children Protection Committees have been established nationwide. Additionally, the government introduced the National Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting Strategy and the Cross-Border Anti-FGM/C Action Plan (2019-2022) to prevent FGM practices.¹⁶ The Education Act Cap. 353 R.E. 2002 has been amended to strictly prohibit anyone from marrying a primary or secondary school student. A severe punishment of up to 30 years imprisonment may be imposed on anyone who violates this provision of the law (Section 60A).



- In 2017, the Ministry of Health conducted a National Survey on the Drivers and Consequences of Child Marriage. 420 Police Gender and Children Desks have been set up, and a Child Helpline was piloted in six regions to support victims of violence, including child marriage.¹⁷

Migration:

- Tanzania has hosted large numbers of refugees for decades due to recurring conflict in neighbouring Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) with many families fleeing during the 1990s and onwards. Today, more than 230,000 refugees and asylum-seekers from Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Of these, 58% are children under 18, 20% are under 5, and over 2,500 are unaccompanied or separated children.¹⁸
- Tanzania naturalized 162,000+ Burundian refugees living in refugee settlements (who fled in 1972) in 2014–2015 but some of the children were not naturalized.
- However, a recent accelerated repatriation campaign is putting children at immediate risk.¹⁹ In addition, the refugee population has tremendously changed following the ‘accelerated’ repatriation of Burundian refugees from the former Nduta Burundian refugee camp (which closed in April 2026) and Nyarugusu (Burundian). Some of the children who left these camps at different times to different districts/regions in Tanzania to engage in diverse child labour practices are likely not able to trace and join their parents/relatives in Burundi who have already repatriated.

Potential considerations:

- *Is Tanzania considering ratifying the 1993 Adoption Convention?*
- *What is being undertaken to safeguard adoption records and facilitate adoptees’ access to their origins?*
- *What further efforts and initiatives are being foreseen to ensure that the practice of child marriage is not practised and to review the legislation accordingly?*
- *Are there any intentions to review those aspects of the repatriation programme that may jeopardise children’s protection?*



Falsification of identity

Trafficking:

- Trafficking in persons, both within and outside Tanzania, is a significant issue, particularly affecting young individuals, both male and female, who are lured with promises of education or better opportunities but end up being exploited as forced domestic workers or subjected to the sex trade. According to a report by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), internal trafficking from rural to urban areas is a serious concern in Tanzania, with boys and girls often trafficked and forced into domestic servitude, sexual exploitation, or both. Additionally, Tanzanians are at risk of being trafficked to other African nations, as well as to the Middle East, Europe, and Asia. Victims of these trafficking operations face severe forms of exploitation, including forced labour, sexual exploitation, and domestic servitude.²⁰
- The Tanzanian government has increased its efforts to prevent trafficking, with the Anti-Trafficking Secretariat (ATS) continuing to lead national efforts. The Anti-Trafficking Committee (ATC), comprising senior officials, maintained oversight of ATS but faced challenges due to limited personnel and funding.²¹ The government continued implementing its 2021–2024 Anti-Trafficking National Action Plan (NAP) and organised awareness campaigns with stakeholders to address trafficking risks. A national 24-hour hotline, funded by the government and operated by an NGO, received over 30 calls identifying victims, but the government did not provide detailed data on these cases.²²

- The Government of Tanzania has made notable progress in addressing human trafficking, though it has not yet fully met the minimum standards required for the elimination of trafficking. As a result, Tanzania remains on Tier 2 of the U.S. Department of State’s Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report. The government’s efforts over the reporting period showed a marked improvement compared to previous years. Key initiatives included the full operationalisation of specialised anti-trafficking units both on the mainland and in Zanzibar. These units were tasked with referring all identified trafficking victims to services, thereby strengthening the government’s ability to respond to trafficking cases. Additionally, there was an increase in anti-trafficking training for law enforcement officials and social welfare officers, which helped raise awareness and build capacity to combat trafficking.²³

Potential consideration:

- *What additional efforts are being foreseen to ensure that child trafficking is addressed and that children’s family relations in these situations are given due attention in any actions?*



Restoration of identity

- Three major reforms were introduced under the revised Birth and Death Registration Act (2023). First, registration services were decentralised through the establishment of local-level registration offices, significantly increasing public access. Second, fees for first-time birth registrations were eliminated, and the issuance of certificates was streamlined and improved. Third, health facility staff were formally designated as registration assistants, responsible for reporting vital events to civil registrars and ensuring integration of data into the CRVS system.²⁴
- In March 2019, the decentralized birth registration system was launched in the Singida and Mtwara regions. The launch follows the rollout of the system in 11 other regions in Tanzania, which resulted in an overall increase of certification of under-fives in these regions from less than 10 per cent to more than 80 per cent. In Tanzania mainland, the system has helped in improving the certification rate from less than 13 per cent to more than 35 per cent in just over 5 and a half years.²⁵
- Tanzania has implemented a one-stop, one-visit process through which mothers can leave the health facility with their child’s birth certificate. In addition, immunization contacts provide an opportunity to identify and register births that would otherwise be missed, thereby extending registration services to community births and hard-to-reach populations. Indeed, Tanzania has operated a model of delegation of authority, through which health workers act as registrars under delegated authority and provide registration and certification services.²⁶
- The implementation of the Simplified Birth Registration System enabled parents and guardians to register births through a single visit to local health facilities and community ward executive offices. The system operates in all 184 district councils across the 26 regions of Mainland Tanzania, increasing registration points from 97 in 2013 to 11,376 in 2024 and providing birth registration services to over 10.3 million children, equivalent to 68%. According to the Tanzania Demographic and Health Survey (TDHS), the registration rate for children aged 0–4 increased from 10% in 2013 to 68% in 2024. The average distance to a registration centre has decreased significantly from 80–140 km to 5–6 km, while the number of trained registration officers has increased from 97 to 22,752.²⁷

Potential consideration:

- *Tanzania has taken considerable and wide-ranging measures to ensure progress towards universal birth registration. Nonetheless, its rates remain low. What actions and initiatives are being implemented or foreseen to further move forward on this in the coming years?*



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