

Children's right to identity in Timor-Leste

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Creation of identity

- It has been reported that 'at the time of independence in 2002, official registration was almost non-existent and the whole system needed to be built. A new legal regime for civil registration was implemented in 2004'.¹ However, birth registration coverage in Timor-Leste has not much improved since 2002 and 'a 2018 baseline assessment of birth registration identified a number of perceived bottlenecks such as the lack of a strategy, procedures, subnational capacity, equipment and communication between key actors, among others'.²
- In 2014, a committee on CRVS was established involving the Ministry of Finance (MoF), the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), the Ministry of Health (MoH), the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the MOSA (Ministry of State Administration).³
- As per the DHS 2026, birth registration of children under age five increased slightly from 55% in 2009–2010 to 60% in 2016 and remained stable at 61% in 2025–2026.⁴ However, the proportion of children with a birth certificate has not improved over time.⁵
- A Unique Identity Document (UID) System Strategic Plan 2021–2025 was adopted and launched by the government in 2025: 'Dalan ba Digital,' a €3 million initiative funded by the European Union and implemented by the UN Development Program (UNDP), aims to 'support the creation of a unique digital ID for citizens' over the next three years.⁶ In 2025, the country had not yet implemented an identity management system or unique ID numbers at birth.⁷
- In 2025, 'in a commendable move to increase access to birth registration, including through issuance of birth certificates from the civil authority, UNICEF handed over ICT (information and communication technology) equipment to the MoJ. (...) The handover is part of a package of comprehensive reforms to promote birth registration with certificates, consisting of mobile birth registration, strengthening of the demographic management information system, training of relevant officers and local authorities who provide birth registration service, as well as policy reform'.⁸ In 2024, mobile birth registration units had been launched in five municipalities.⁹
- A new Child Code is being drafted.¹⁰ Article 9 provides for the right to identity and Article 10 provides for the right to birth registration.

Potential considerations:

- *How is the State planning to effectively ensure the universal birth registration through implementation of the 2026 Civil Registration Code?*
- *How will the State raise public awareness of the importance of birth registration after birth?*

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Modification of identity

Alternative care:

- Despite the new Law No. 3/2023 on child protection, which focuses on family-based care, in 2025, the number of children in residential care (256 children out of 100,000) was very high. Timor-Leste is the second country in East Asia for child institutionalisation.¹¹ It seems that there is a lack of family support that leads to unnecessary family separations. 42% of the population in Timor-Leste currently lives below the national poverty line¹² and the risk of family separation for economic reasons is high.

Adoption:

- In 2026, Members of Parliament voted to pass Draft Law No. 9/VI(2a), which regulates adoption procedures and amends the Civil Code (Law No. 10/2011): 'The new law prioritizes the best interests of the child, ensuring that adoption serves as a dignified solution for children's futures rather than a source of irregularity'.¹³

Child marriage:

- 'The minimum age for marriage is 16 for both boys and girls as prescribed by Article 1490 of the Civil Code (No.10/2011), with Article 1500 requiring the authorisation of a parent, guardian or civil registrar for the marriage of a child under 17 years'.¹⁴ According to the most recent available data, in 2016, 3% women were married before the age of 15 (17,200) and 15% before the age of 18 (80,900).¹⁵

Potential considerations:

- *Will the new law on adoption safeguard the child's right to identity in adoption? Is all information regarding their origins preserved?*
- *How is the State planning to promote deinstitutionalisation, establish mechanisms to prevent unnecessary family separation and strengthen family-based care?*
- *How is the State addressing the need to enforce prohibitions on child labour, trafficking and child marriage, to avoid the possible undue change of identity linked to these abuses?*

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Falsification of identity

Trafficking:

- 'Three types of Trafficking in Persons (TIP) are prevalent in Timor-Leste: outward trafficking (70%), inward trafficking from other countries (20%) and internal trafficking (10%)'. The country adopted a National Action Plan to Prevent and Counter Trafficking in Persons 2026–2030.¹⁷
- No information is currently available on potential irregular practices in adoption.

Potential consideration:

- *How is the State planning to improve actions to prevent trafficking and falsification of identity?*



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Preservation of identity and access to origins

- In terms of data protection, Timor-Leste does not generally have a specific law/policy solely for data protection, including for children.
- Timor-Leste is member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) since October 2025 and adhered to ASEAN's Framework on Personal Data Protection.¹⁸

Potential considerations:

- *How will the State accelerate digitalisation of civil status records, necessary to implement a national civil status file, which would better safeguard the preservation of birth certificates?*
- *What procedures will the State put in place to ensure the preservation of all elements of a child's original identity in adoption?*

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Restoration of identity

- In 2024, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Justice to conduct mobile birth registration; this led to 7,563 children 0–5 years old (48% female) to be issued with a birth certificate in five municipalities with the lowest coverage. More than 15,000 children were registered and received birth certificates nationwide.¹⁹
- Timor-Leste is expanding efforts to improve access to legal identity through mobile birth registration services, with a recent campaign in the Ossu administrative post of Viqueque municipality registering more than 800 individuals. Conducted from 2 to 11 June 2026, the initiative provided birth registration services directly to remote communities and resulted in the registration of 815 people, including 309 children under the age of five. Led by the Ministry of Justice in partnership with UNICEF and supported by the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), the campaign aims to address persistent gaps in birth registration coverage. Building on the success of the campaign, the Ministry of Justice and UNICEF plan to expand mobile registration outreach to other underserved areas. The initiative also strengthened local capacity through training for community leaders and healthcare workers, helping raise awareness of the importance of birth registration and supporting broader efforts to ensure that every child is counted, protected, and included in national development processes.²⁰
- While the process to register births from health centres exist, it is not effectively implemented. More structured coordination and interoperability is required between the notary and health system to improve this. To date, as mentioned above, the DHS 2026 number reflect that birth registration rate only improved slightly and then stabilised over the past decade.²¹

Potential consideration:

- *Will the State pursue its efforts to restore their identities to older children who have not been registered at birth? What additional actions are foreseen to accelerate progress nationwide?*

Sources:

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- ² Government of Timor-Leste and UNICEF, *Situation Analysis of Children in Timor-Leste*, Dili, Timor-Leste, 2020, <https://www.unicef.org/timorleste/media/4421/file/SitAn%202020%20English%20full%20report.pdf>.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ National Institute of Statistics Timor-Leste (INETL, I.P.), Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Health, Timor-Leste Demographic and Health Survey 2025-2026. Key Indicators.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Nationality for All, Statelessness Encyclopedia Asia Pacific, <https://seap.nationalityforall.org/digitalId/regional-overview/southeast-asia/timor-leste/#citenote-2730-19>.
- ⁷ World Health Organisation / Data Portal, Supra 4; Get Every One in the Picture, Supra 1.
- ⁸ United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF hands over equipment to the Ministry of Justice to strengthen birth registration system in the country, 2025, <https://www.unicef.org/timorleste/press-releases/unicef-hands-over-equipment-ministry-justice-strengthen-birth-registration-system>.
- ⁹ Government of Timor-Leste, Government launches Mobile Birth Registry campaign in five municipalities, <https://timor-leste.gov.tl/?p=39956&lang=en>.
- ¹⁰ Ministry of Justice, Timor-Leste, Child's Code – Draft Bill, <https://www.mj.gov.tl/?q=node/572>.
- ¹¹ United Nations Global Market, Hiring National And International Institutions To Carry Out Study On Residential Care And Care Reform In Timor-Leste, 2025, <https://www.ungm.org/Public/Notice/265056>.
- ¹² United Nations, A Closer Look at Child Labour in Timor-Leste—Challenges and Progress Towards Ending the Practice, *UN Chronicle*, 2024, <https://www.un.org/en/un-chronicle/closer-look-child-labour-timor-leste—challenges-and-progress-towards-ending-practice>.
- ¹³ Vice-Ministry for Parliamentary Affairs, Timor-Leste, 2026, National Parliament approves Adoption Bill in final global vote, <https://vmap.gov.tl/en/2026/03/17/national-parliament-approves-landmark-adoption-law/>.
- ¹⁴ Government of Timor-Leste and UNICEF, Supra 2.
- ¹⁵ The Child Marriage Data Portal, Timor-Leste, <https://childmarriedata.org/country-profiles/timor-leste/>.
- ¹⁶ International Organisation for Migration, 10 facts about human trafficking in Timor-Leste, https://www.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzddl486/files/country/docs/timor-leste/10_facts_about_human_trafficking_in_timor-leste_iom_counter-trafficking_programme_2018.pdf.
- ¹⁷ UN Women – Asia and the Pacific, Timor-Leste Launches National Action Plan to Prevent and Counter Trafficking in Persons (2026-2030), and Commemorates World Day against Trafficking in Persons, 2025, <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/stories/press-release/2025/07/timor-leste-launches-national-action-plan-to-prevent-and-counter-trafficking>; Commission to Fight Trafficking in Persons, Timor-Leste and UN Women – Asia and the Pacific, National Action Plan to prevent and counter trafficking in persons 2026-2030, https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2025-08/tl-20250416976-english_nap-tip_tl_18aug2025.pdf.
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- ¹⁹ United Nations Children's Fund, Annual Report 2024, https://www.unicef.org/timorleste/media/7806/file/UNICEF%20Timor%20Leste%202024%20annual%20report_full%20version_English.pdf.pdf.
- ²⁰ Timor-Leste Advances Inclusive Birth Registration Through Community-Based Outreach, CRVS Insight Newsletter, July 2026; 'Birth registration: the first step to securing a child's future', UNICEF, 2026, <https://www.unicef.org/timorleste/stories/birth-registration-first-step-securing-childs-future>.
- ²¹ United Nations Children's Fund, Maria's Journey: Transforming Birth Registration Across Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Ensuring Every Child in Timor-Leste is Registered at Birth, 2024, <https://www.unicef.org/eap/blog/marias-journey-transforming-birth-registration-across-southeast-asia-and-pacific>. See: 'When a delivery occurs, whether in a hospital or elsewhere, the attending midwife fills out the birth registration form in duplicate. One copy remains with the family, while the other accompanies the midwife to the local health centre. Remarkably, by the time the child arrives at the health care center for their vaccinations six weeks after birth, the birth certificate is already printed and handed to the mother for healthy facility delivered children.'

