



## Strengthening Social Unity through Birth Registrations in Côte d'Ivoire



Peacebuilding  
United Nations Peacebuilding Fund

**A PBF-funded project registers 350,000 children in country, where lack of a national identity has sparked violent conflicts in the past.**

The new father had to travel six hours from his work as a gas station attendant back to the capital Abidjan to register Marie-Lyse, his new-born daughter. The trip and the wait at the district town hall will be worth it, because Marie-Lyse will later be able to take state exams, finish her schooling, get a job and become a regular voting citizen of Côte d'Ivoire. She will be a fully accepted Ivorian.

That's important for peace, too. In a country where many lack a clear national identity, the absence of social cohesion contributed to more than a decade of on-and-off violent conflict. Tackling the very first act that establishes one's national identity, registering one's birth, is critical to preventing renewed violence over the long term.

Distances and lack of awareness traditionally hampered the birth registration rate. As civil war forced people to flee their home towns, the rate fell even further. Some didn't get a chance to register their children. Others lost their birth certificates. In 2000, 72% of children were reported to the registry office, while in 2012 only 65% of children were reported. The situation is worse in remote districts. An estimated 2.8 million children weren't registered.

Left unaddressed, they would be bound to live in legal limbo, with no access to advanced schooling, good jobs, health care or social services. On that scale, it also undermines state authority, the absence of which can contribute to the likelihood of violent conflict.

That's why the UN Peacebuilding Fund provided \$2 million to UNICEF, UNFPA and UNHCR to address the problem. Working with the Ivorian Government, they

are using the funding to raise awareness among the population and urge them to register their new-born children. They are also helping those who failed to register earlier. While registering a child is relatively easy during the first three months after birth, it is much harder later, when it involves the courts.

They have provided 120 motorbikes, 50 computer setups and 10,000 sets of records to support 120 civil registration centers. So far, they have reached more than 30,000 people in 201 villages. Overall, the project is nearing its goal of registering 350,000 children by the end of the current phase. ***"I wanted my girl to be able to go to school, but she was born 10 days before the war,"*** Simon Konan Kouassé told UNHCR. Upon their return to Goya, their village in western Côte d'Ivoire, his then three-year-old daughter Agath couldn't attend school because she didn't have a birth certificate and he turned to UNHCR for help.

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Ex-combatants line up to turn in their weapons, receive demobilization cards and begin reintegration.  
Photo: UN Photo/Basile Zoma

## ABOUT THE PBF IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE

The Fund has been active in Côte d'Ivoire since 2008. So far, it has invested \$33.5 million, supporting the peace process through different phases: disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of combatants after the initial peace agreement; restoration of state authority after the 2010 elections to speed up recovery from the war and the electoral crisis; and a three-year grant in 2014 focusing on the 2015 elections. The latest grant also helps foster women's role in the electoral process.

The PBF closely works with other UN entities in Côte d'Ivoire: UNHCR, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNDP, UN Women, FAO, UNESCO and the Department for Peacekeeping.

## ABOUT THE UN PEACEBUILDING FUND

The Peacebuilding Fund has financed more than 400 projects in over 25 countries. Its funding provides United Nations and non-UN organizations with the tools to help sustain peace and prevent violent conflict. The PBF is risk-tolerant and innovative, can act quickly and works on behalf of the Secretary-General. Its funding often provides the impetus for others to follow suit.

With the PBF's funding, UNICEF also piloted a programme that allowed birth registrations by SMS, which led to an increase of birth registration rates. Once the country concludes its current civil registration reforms, UNICEF hopes to restart that programme. Provided it matches the success of the pilot programme, Côte d'Ivoire will move closer to having an inclusive community that is less likely to see renewed violence.