



How to register the birth of your child

Addressing YOUR questions about birth registration

The Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration is in the process of replacing the Births, Marriages and Deaths Registration Act of 1963 with a new law that will be more appropriate to the needs of Namibia and more feasible to implement in practice. The Ministry will be engaging in public consultation around the law reform proposals, and hopes that this process will also raise the level of public awareness of the importance of registering all vital life events.

As part of this process, during the following months, the Ministry will be answering some of your questions about birth registration. This column will appear in *The Namibian*. You can also access the column on the MHA and LAC websites (www.mha.gov.na and www.lac.org.na). The answers are based on the 1963 law which is currently in force.

What is a birth certificate?

A birth certificate is a vital record of personal information that documents your name, birth date, and place of birth. It also shows the names and identifying details of your biological parents or adoptive parents, if this information is known.

Why do I need a birth certificate?

The Namibian Constitution says that children have a right to a name and a nationality. A birth certificate is usually the first step to secure this right. The law says that every parent has a duty to register the birth of his or her child, as soon as possible following the birth. The new law may set a specific time when parents should register the birth of their children.

There are many other reasons why you need a birth certificate:

1. To access some health services
2. To access social welfare grants
3. To enrol at school
4. To get an ID card or a passport
5. To get married
6. To vote

I am not married, and the father of my child does not want to give his details to register the birth of our child. What can I do?

Under the current law, either parent can register the birth of a child born outside marriage. A mother who is registering the birth of a child outside marriage DOES NOT need to get permission from the father. A mother who is registering the birth of her child does not have to identify the father. If no one acknowledges paternity, no one will be named as the child's father on the birth certificate and the child will be registered under the mother's surname. Information about the father can be added at a later date, and the child can be given the father's surname at this point if the mother consents. There is no cost for this addition. If the father is deceased, his name cannot be added after the initial registration.

What if I do not have a birth certificate or an ID document for myself? Can I register my child?

If you do not have a birth certificate and you were born in Namibia you should apply for a birth certificate through the late registration of birth process. If you have a birth certificate but no ID card, you should apply for an ID card at the nearest Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration office. Then you can register the birth of your child.

Send your suggestions for law reform or questions about how to register the birth of a child to 081 600 0098. We will select a few of the most common questions to respond to in this column, as space permits. If your question is not addressed in the column, you can contact your nearest Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration Office for assistance.

UNICEF and the Legal Assistance Centre are supporting the Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration in this initiative

