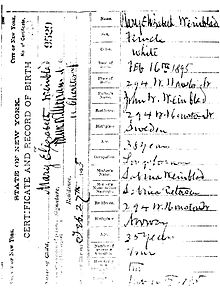
Birth certificate

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Winblad-MariaElizabeth_birthcertificate.jpg)

[http://bits.wikimedia.org/static-1.20wmf6/skins/common/images/magnify-clip.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Winblad-MariaElizabeth_birthcertificate.jpg)

Mary Elizabeth Winblad (1895-1987) birth certificate

A **birth certificate** is a [vital record](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vital_record) that documents the birth of a child. The term "birth certificate" can refer to either the original document certifying the circumstances of the birth or to a certified copy of or representation of the ensuing registration of that birth. Depending on the jurisdiction, a record of birth might or might not contain verification of the event by such as a midwife or doctor.

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History and contemporary times

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Russian_Birth_Certificiate_of_Michael_Lucas.JPG)

A Soviet birth certificate from 1972.

The documentation of births is a practice widely held throughout human civilization, especially in China, Egypt, Greece, Rome, and Persia. The original purpose of vital statistics was for tax purposes and for the determination of available military manpower. Births were initially registered with churches, who maintained registers of births. This practice continued into the 19th century.[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birth_certificate#cite_note-handbook-0) The compulsory registration of births with governmental agencies is a practice that originated in the [United Kingdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom) in 1853.[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birth_certificate#cite_note-1)

Most countries have statutes and laws that regulate the registration of births. In all countries, it is the responsibility of the mother's [physician](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Physician), [midwife](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Midwife), hospital administrator, or the parents of the child to see that the birth is properly registered with the appropriate [government agency](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_agency).

The actual record of birth is stored with a government agency. That agency will issue certified copies or representations of the original birth record upon request, which can be used to apply for government benefits, such as [passports](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Passports). The certification is signed and/or sealed by the registrar or other custodian of birth records, who is commissioned by the government.

The right of every child to a name and nationality, and the responsibility of national governments to achieve this are contained in Articles 7 and 8 in the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Convention_on_the_Rights_of_the_Child): "The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality..." (CRC Article 7) and "States Parties undertake to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations..." (CRC Article 8).[[3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birth_certificate#cite_note-2)

"...it's a small paper but it actually establishes who you are and gives access to the rights and the privileges, and the obligations, of citizenship" - [Archbishop Desmond Tutu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archbishop_Desmond_Tutu), February 2005.[[4]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birth_certificate#cite_note-Plan_International_2005-3)

Despite 191 countries ratifying the Convention, the births of millions of children worldwide go unregistered. By their very nature, data concerning unregistered children are approximate; however, it was estimated in 2008 that 51 million babies – more than two fifths of those born worldwide – were not registered at birth.[[5]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birth_certificate#cite_note-4) This phenomenon disproportionately impacts indigenous populations and even in many developed countries, contributes to difficulties in fully accessing civic rights.[[6]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birth_certificate#cite_note-5)

Birth registration opens the door to rights to children and adults which many other human beings take for granted: to prove their age; to prove their nationality; to receive healthcare; to go to school; to take exams; to be adopted; to protection from under-age military service or conscription; to marry; open a bank account; to hold a driving licence; to obtain a passport; to inherit money or property; and to vote or stand for elected office.[[7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birth_certificate#cite_note-Plan_International_2009-6)

There are many reasons why births go unregistered, including social and cultural beliefs and attitudes; alternative documents and naming ceremonies; remote areas, poor infrastructure; economic barriers; lack of office staff, equipment and training; legal and political restrictions; fear of discrimination and persecution; war, conflict and unrest or simply the fact that there is no system in place.[[7]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birth_certificate#cite_note-Plan_International_2009-6)[[8]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birth_certificate#cite_note-7)[[9]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birth_certificate#cite_note-8)[[10]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birth_certificate#cite_note-9)[[11]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birth_certificate#cite_note-10)[[12]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birth_certificate#cite_note-11)

Retrospective registration may be necessary where there is a backlog of children whose births have gone unregistered. In Senegal, the government is facilitating retrospective registration through free local court hearings and the number of unregistered children has fallen considerably as a result. In Sierra Leone, the government gave the National Office of Births and Deaths special permission to issue birth certificates to children over seven. In Bolivia, there was a successful three-year amnesty for the free registration of young people aged between 12 and 18.[[13]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birth_certificate#cite_note-12)

Statelessness, or the lack of effective nationality, impacts the daily lives of some 11-12 million people around the world. Perhaps those who suffer most are stateless infants, children, and youth. Though born and raised in their parents’ country of habitual residence, they lack formal recognition of their existence.[[14]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birth_certificate#cite_note-13)

Birth certificates in England and Wales

In England and Wales, the description "birth certificate" is commonly used to describe a copy of the relevant entry in a register of births.

The national registration of births, marriages and deaths in [England and Wales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/England_and_Wales) started in 1837; but at first there was no penalty for failing to register a birth. In the system, all births are recorded in "registers", which have columns for various particulars of the birth, usually including the name of the child, sex, the names of the parents, the date of the birth, the location of the birth, and sometimes additional information such as the name of the attending physician, the race of the child, or the occupation of the parents. These birth registers are maintained by some government agency that will issue certified copies or representations of the entry upon request.

**Pre-1837 birth and baptism records**

Before the government's registration system was created, evidence of births and/or baptisms (and also marriages and death or burials) was dependent on the events being recorded in the records of the Church of England or in those of other various churches – not all of which maintained such records or all types of those records. Copies of such records are not issued by the General Register Office; but can be obtained from these churches, or from the local or national archive, which usually now keeps the records in original or copy form.

**Types of certified copies issued in England and Wales**

Each "full" birth certificate issued is actually a certified copy of an entry from the register of births, either that held by the local [Register office](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Register_office) or at the [General Register Office for England and Wales](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General_Register_Office_for_England_and_Wales), Southport; it does not certify the birth but the information given in the register entry thus being legally conclusive evidence of the event unless proved otherwise. The full certificate is a copy of the entry, showing the **child's surname, forename(s), date of birth, sex, place of birth, the parent(s) name(s)**, their address and occupations at the time of registration. Modern certified copies issued by the General Register Office will usually be photocopies of the page or relevant part of a page in the GRO's registers but will be written or typed copies if the original is poor or e.g. contains intrusions from adjacent records or annotations which do not form part of the prescribed record.

Full extracts will usually be required for most purposes involving establishment of a person's identity; any extract by itself is no longer generally accepted as evidence of identity and a specific warning that an extract is not issued as evidence of identity has been printed on such documents since the 1980s.

In addition, one can obtain a "short" birth certificate, which is an abstract of the original entry and only includes the surname, forename(s), date of birth, sex, registration district and sub-district in which the birth took place. No fee is chargeable for this when issued **at the time of registration** and these are commonly found among personal documents inherited from older relatives whose parents might have had no practical need for a full extract; short extracts issued after the original registration was made are subject to a prescribed fee. These extracts nowadays have little practical usability due to the reduced information shown, in the past often being used to avoid revealing the marital status of the parents or as a cheaper written statement of somebody's birth date and place when a recipient did not need the amount of corrobarative detail which is now often required due to e.g. occurrences of [identity theft](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Identity_theft).

The original registrations are required by law[[15]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birth_certificate#cite_note-14) to be issued in the form of certified copies to any person who identifies an index entry and pays the prescribed fee. They can be ordered by registered users from the [General Register Office Certificate Ordering Service](https://www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/certificates/default.asp) or by postal or telephone ordering from the General Register Office or by post or in person from local registrars.