



A STATISTICAL  
PROFILE OF  
**BIRTH REGISTRATION**  
IN AFRICA

unicef   
for every child

© United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Division of Data, Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, November 2020

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This brochure was prepared by the Data and Analytics Section of UNICEF (Claudia Cappa and Nicole Petrowski), with inputs from the UNICEF Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa (Jean Francois Basse and Eri Mathers Suzuki), the UNICEF Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa, and the UNICEF Regional Office for West and Central Africa (Andrew Brooks, Cecilie Modvar and Cairn Verhulst). It was edited by Lois Jensen and designed by Era Porth.

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REGISTRATION CENTRE  
CENTRES secondaires)  
ADM (for secondary civil status registry)

ANCE / BIRTH CERTIFICATE  
HAMDOUN  
01/18/1988  
HAMADOU

Il s'agit d'un

de naissance, ou références  
de référence de la  
BANKARI  
le droit de  
BANKARI

**Santé pour tous**  
C A  
[Photo of a man]

REGISTRATION CENTRE  
CENTRES secondaires)  
ADM (for secondary civil status registry)



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# BIRTH REGISTRATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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**Society first acknowledges a child's existence and identity through birth registration.** The right to be recognized as a person before the law is a critical step in ensuring lifelong protection and can facilitate access to all other rights.

A birth certificate is proof of that legal identity, and is the basis upon which children can establish a nationality, avoid the risk of statelessness, and seek protection from violence and exploitation. For example, proof of age is needed to help prevent child labour, child marriage and underage recruitment into the armed forces. A birth certificate may also be required to access services, in areas including health, education and justice.

The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015 placed birth registration firmly on the international development agenda. It included a dedicated target (16.9) under Goal 16 – namely, to provide legal identity for all, including birth registration, by 2030. Complementing this is target 17.9, which calls for support in building the statistical capacity needed for strong national civil registration systems. Such systems produce vital statistics, which are foundational for achieving sustained human and economic development.

In accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals, UNICEF seeks to fulfil the promise of universal birth registration, ensuring a legal identity for every child by 2030.



MILESTONES IN  
ADVANCING  
**UNIVERSAL BIRTH  
REGISTRATION**  
IN AFRICA

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**AUGUST 2010:** The First Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, was attended by over 40 ministers from the continent and resulted in a declaration and plan of action.

**SEPTEMBER 2012:** The Second Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration was held in Durban, South Africa. It led to a strong resolution by ministers calling for reform of national civil registration and vital statistics systems across the continent. This commitment translated into a programme and policy document, *Africa Programme for Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics*. The conference brought health ministries on board and advanced interoperability between civil registration and the health sector.

**FEBRUARY 2015:** The Third Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration took place in Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire under the theme 'Promoting the use of civil registration and vital statistics in support of good governance in Africa'. The focus was on innovation and new technology.

**DECEMBER 2017:** The Fourth Conference of African

Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration hosted in Nouakchott, Mauritania was devoted to identifying ways forward in light of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 for Africa.

**SEPTEMBER 2018:** The United Nations Deputy Secretary-General initiated the establishment of the UN Legal Identity Expert Group to ensure holistic installation and development of civil registration, vital statistics and identity management systems. The UN Legal Identity Agenda 2020-2030 was officially launched in Rome in May 2019 in preparation for the UN High-Level Political Forum, with the theme 'Peaceful, just and inclusive societies – SDG 16 implementation and the path towards leaving no one behind'. The initial focus of the Legal Identity Agenda is Africa, with 13 pilot countries.

**OCTOBER 2019:** The Fifth Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration on the theme 'Innovative civil registration and vital statistics system: foundation for legal identity management' was held in Lusaka, Zambia. The importance of civil registration systems for the realization of a legal identity for all was reaffirmed and the UN Legal Identity Agenda was introduced.

OF THE 168 MILLION  
UNREGISTERED CHILDREN  
WORLDWIDE,  
MORE THAN HALF  
(AROUND 96 MILLION)  
LIVE IN AFRICA, NEARLY  
ALL OF THEM IN SUB-  
SAHARAN AFRICA

HALF OF ALL  
AFRICAN CHILDREN  
ARE UNREGISTERED,  
BUT LEVELS VARY WIDELY  
ACROSS REGIONS  
AND COUNTRIES

EASTERN AFRICA IS  
HOME TO THE  
LARGEST NUMBER  
OF UNREGISTERED  
CHILDREN IN AFRICA

MANY REGISTERED  
CHILDREN STILL  
LACK PROOF:  
118 MILLION CHILDREN  
IN AFRICA (AROUND  
6 IN 10) DO NOT HAVE A  
BIRTH CERTIFICATE

## 10 KEY FACTS ON BIRTH REGISTRATION IN AFRICA

OF ALL INFANTS IN  
AFRICA, SLIGHTLY  
MORE THAN HALF  
(SOME 22 MILLION) HAVE  
NOT BEEN REGISTERED

ABOUT  
27 MILLION INFANTS  
IN AFRICA DO NOT  
POSSESS A BIRTH  
CERTIFICATE

MORE NEEDS TO BE  
DONE TO FULFIL  
THE PROMISE OF  
UNIVERSAL BIRTH  
REGISTRATION  
BY 2030 IN AFRICA

THE  
POOREST CHILDREN  
CONTINUE TO LAG  
BEHIND IN MOST  
AFRICAN REGIONS

AMONG AFRICAN  
COUNTRIES WITH  
AVAILABLE DATA,  
PROGRESS IN 2 OUT OF 3  
OF THEM WILL  
NEED TO ACCELERATE  
TO ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL  
BIRTH REGISTRATION  
BY 2030

UNLESS PROGRESS  
IS ACCELERATED,  
THE TOTAL NUMBER  
OF UNREGISTERED  
CHILDREN IN AFRICA WILL  
CONTINUE TO RISE AND  
WILL EXCEED 100 MILLION  
BY 2030



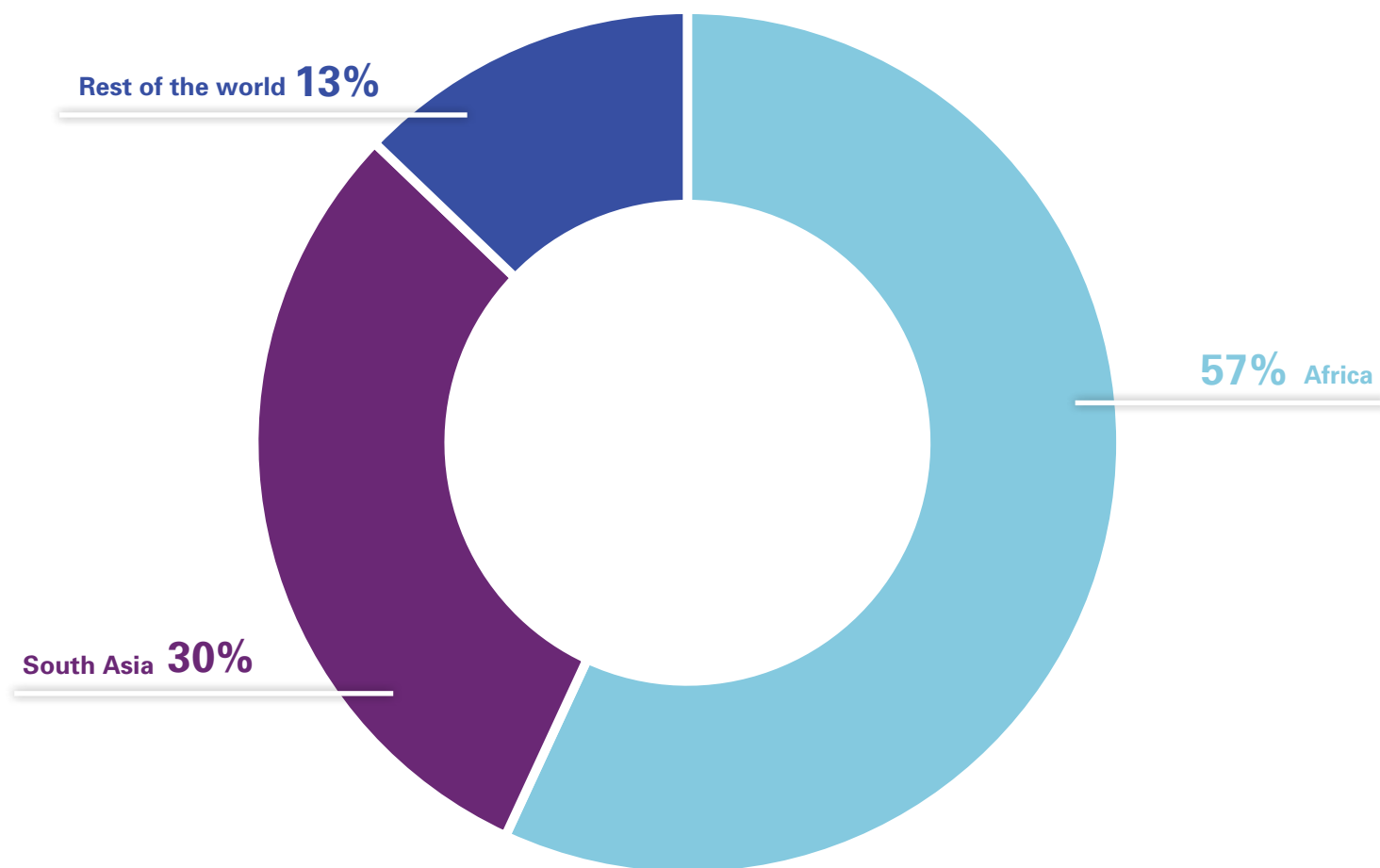




WHERE  
WE STAND  
**TODAY**

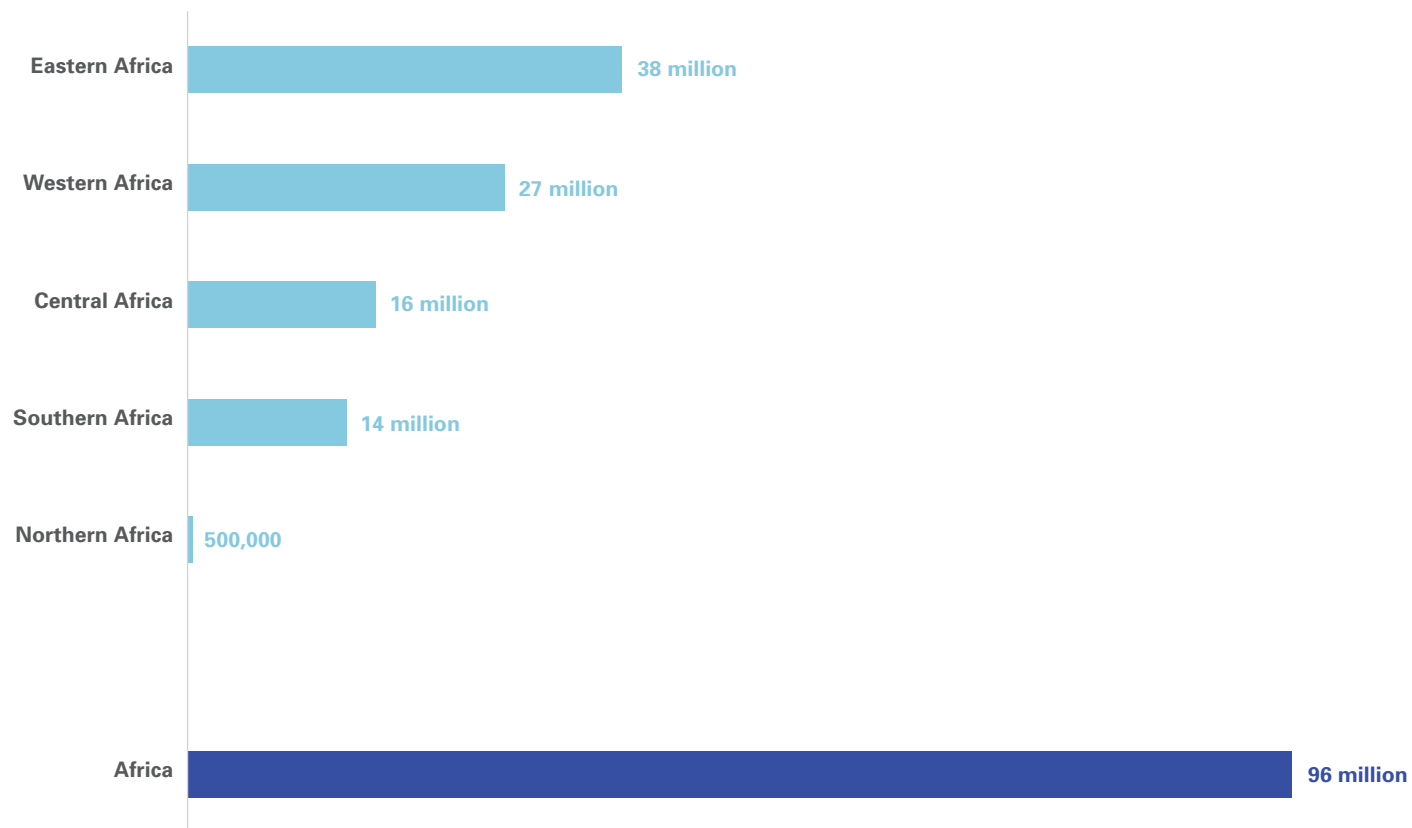
## OF THE 168 MILLION UNREGISTERED CHILDREN WORLDWIDE, MORE THAN HALF (AROUND 96 MILLION) LIVE IN AFRICA

FIG. 1 Percentage distribution of children under age 5 whose births are not registered



## EASTERN AFRICA IS HOME TO THE LARGEST NUMBER OF UNREGISTERED CHILDREN IN AFRICA

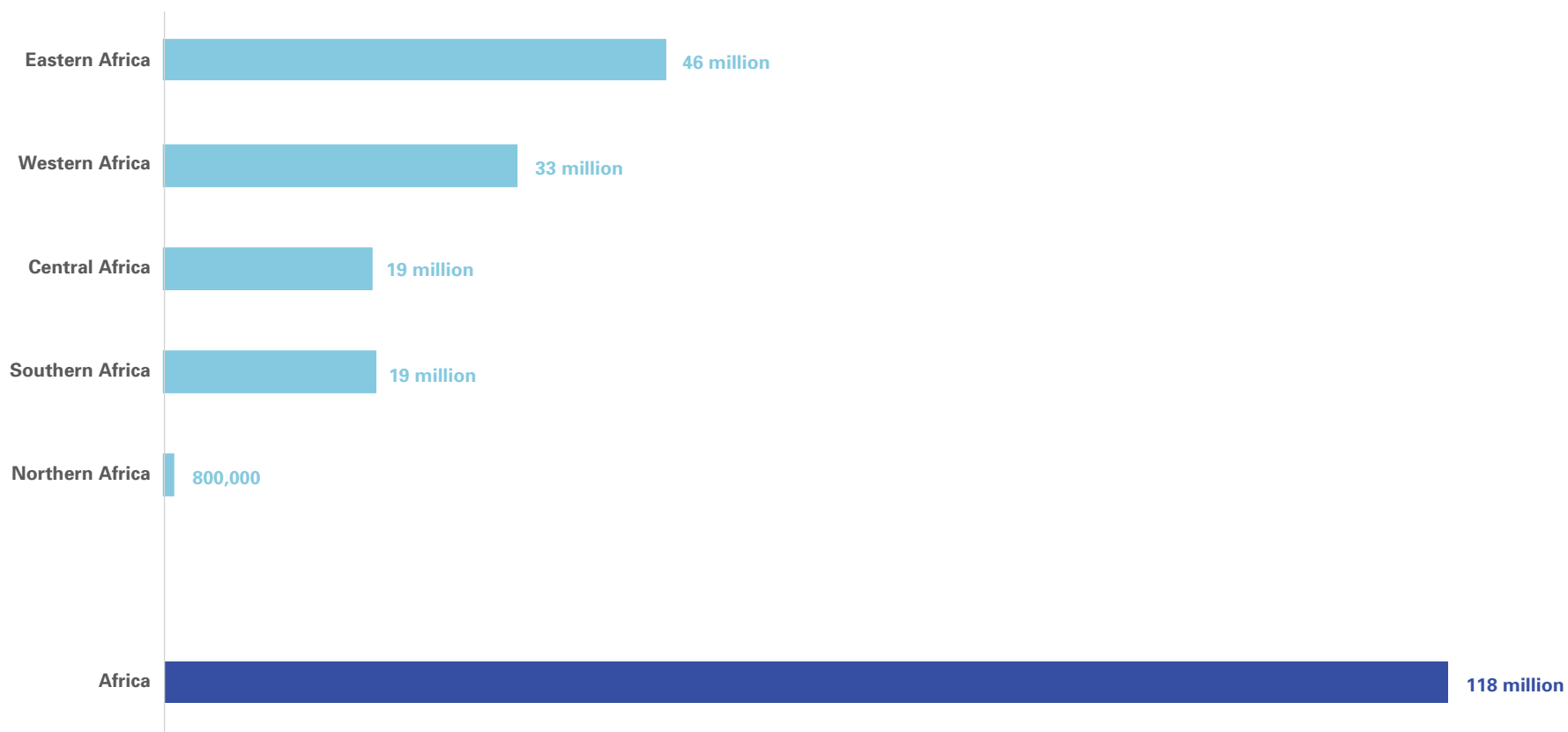
FIG. 2 Number of children under age 5 whose births are not registered, by African region



Notes: Figures have been rounded. Estimates are based on a subset of 50 countries in Africa covering 98 per cent of the population of children under age 5. Regional estimates represent data from countries covering at least 50 per cent of the regional population.

## MANY REGISTERED CHILDREN STILL LACK PROOF: 118 MILLION CHILDREN IN AFRICA (AROUND 6 IN 10) DO NOT HAVE A BIRTH CERTIFICATE

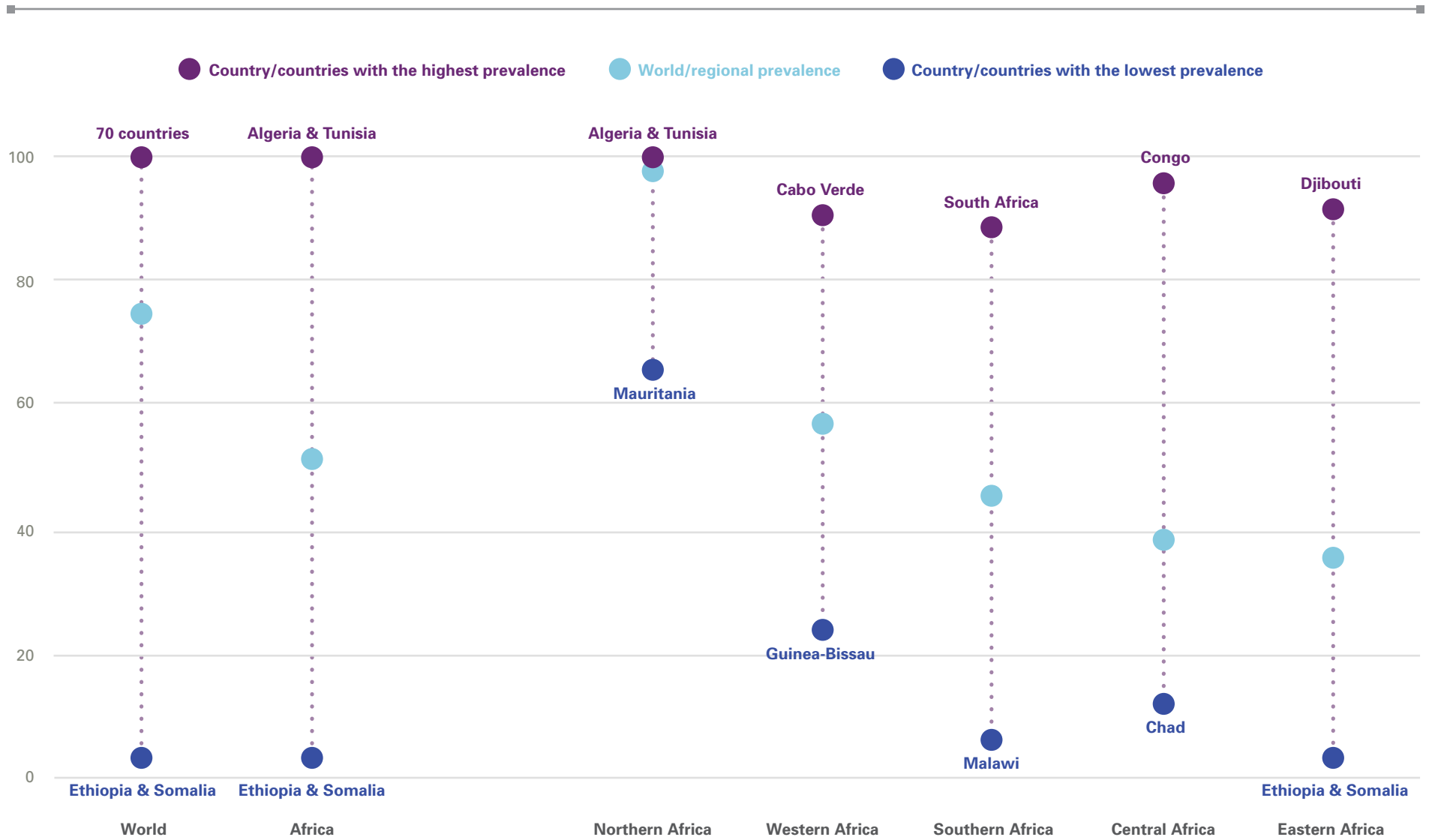
FIG. 3 Number of children under age 5 without a birth certificate, by African region



Notes: Figures have been rounded. Estimates are based on a subset of 45 countries in Africa covering 93 per cent of the population of children under age 5. Regional estimates represent data from countries covering at least 50 per cent of the regional population.

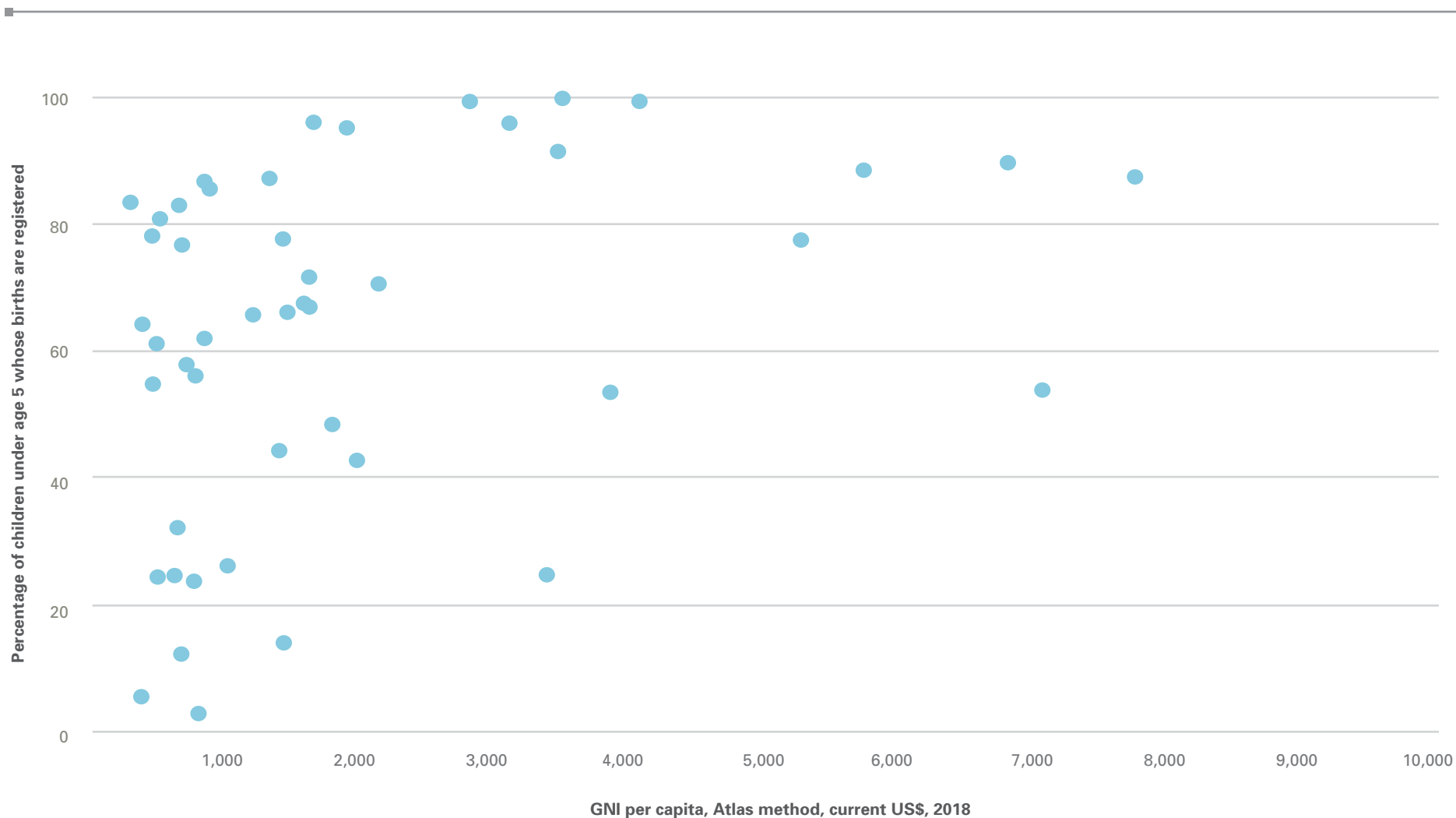
# HALF OF ALL AFRICAN CHILDREN ARE UNREGISTERED, BUT LEVELS VARY WIDELY

FIG. 4 Percentage of children under age 5 whose births are registered, by African region



## SOME AFRICAN COUNTRIES HAVE HIGH LEVELS OF BIRTH REGISTRATION EVEN WITH LOW PER CAPITA INCOME

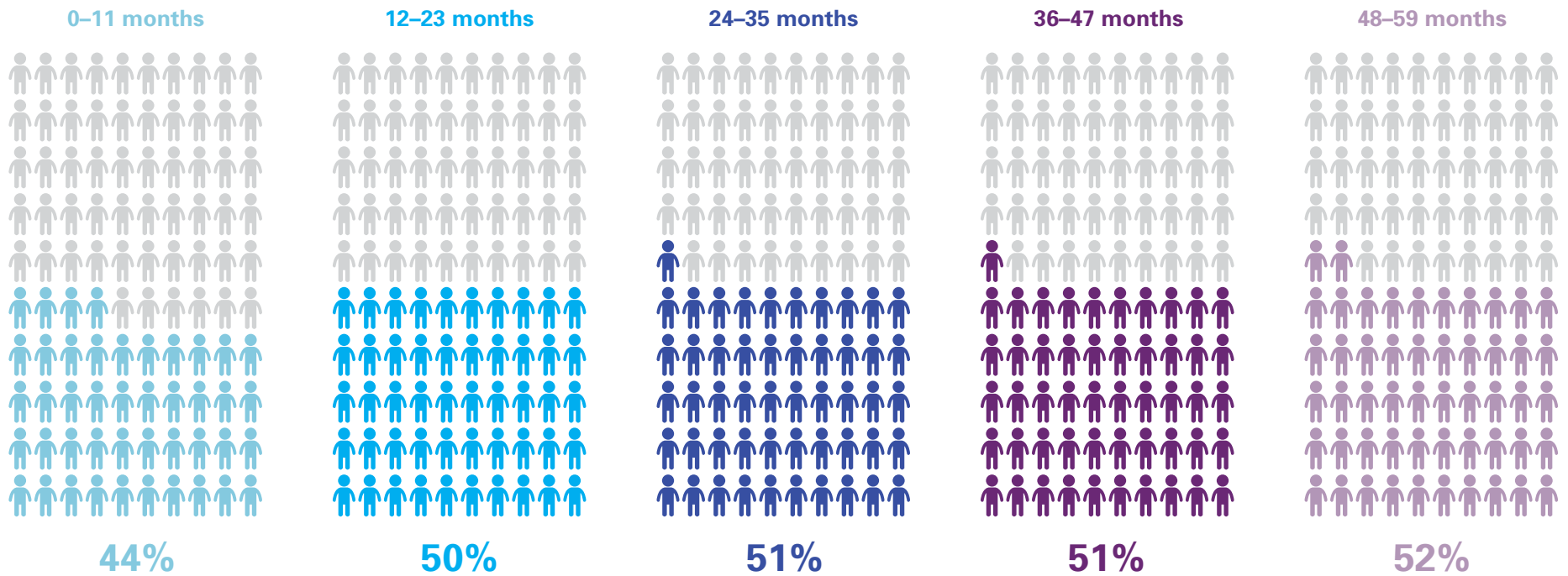
FIG. 5 Percentage of children under age 5 whose births are registered and 2018 gross national income (GNI) per capita in US\$ based on the Atlas method, in African countries with available data



Note: Each dot represents a country.

# MORE EFFORT IS NEEDED TO ENSURE TIMELY REGISTRATION OF BIRTHS IN AFRICA

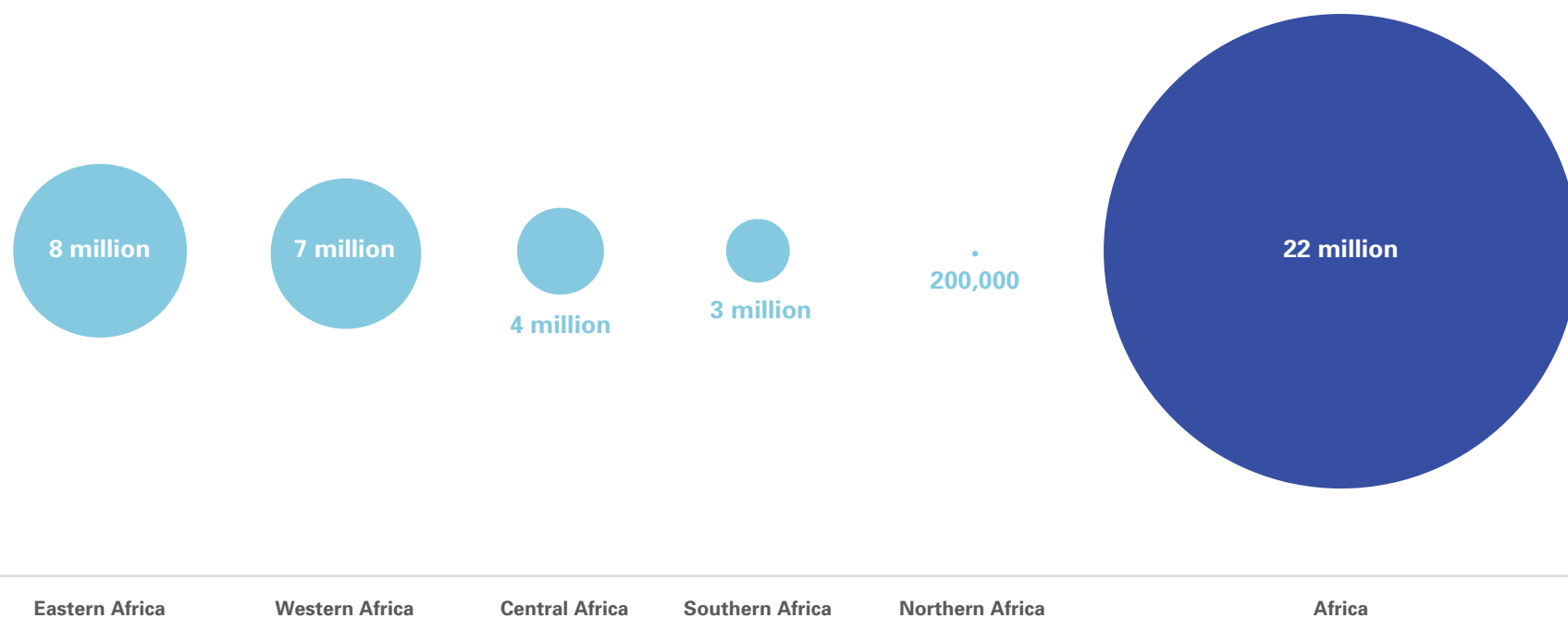
FIG. 6 Percentage of children under age 5 whose births are registered in Africa, by age in months





## OF ALL INFANTS IN AFRICA, SLIGHTLY MORE THAN HALF (SOME 22 MILLION) HAVE NOT BEEN REGISTERED

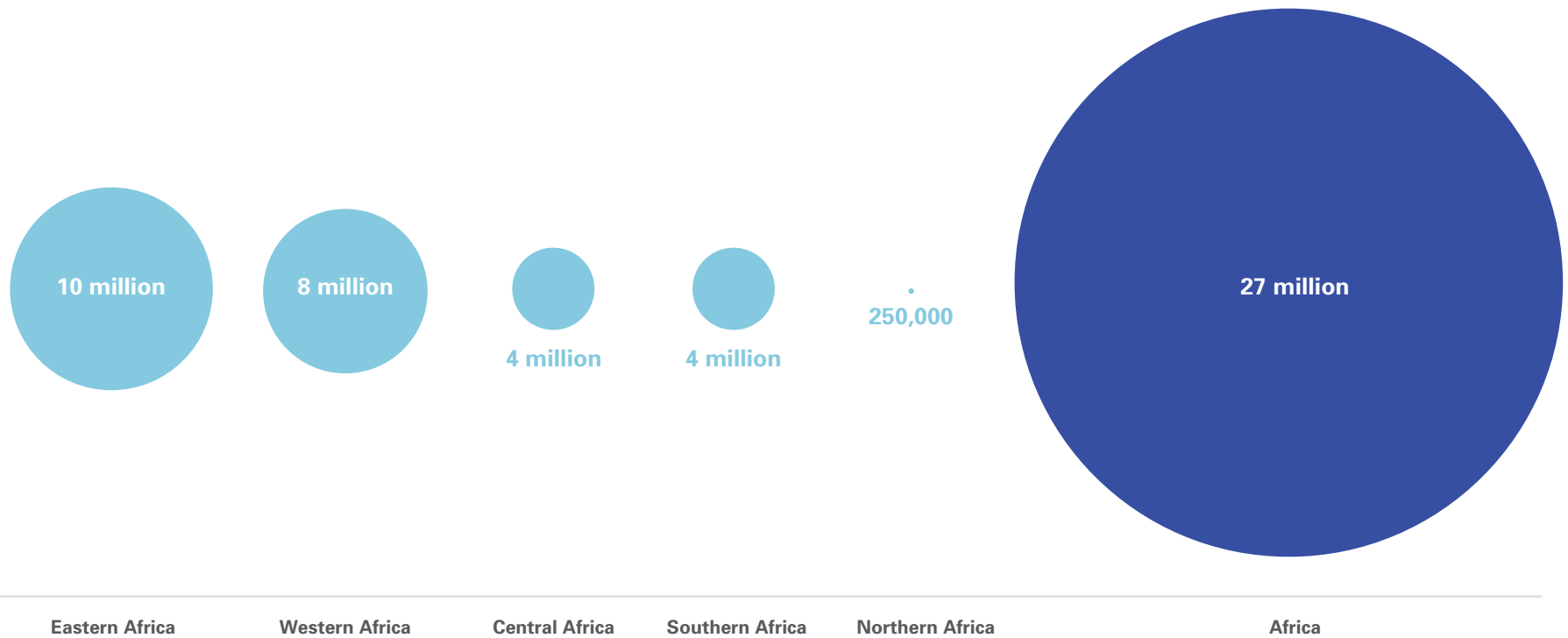
FIG. 7 Number of children under age 1 whose births are not registered, by African region



Notes: Figures have been rounded. Estimates are based on a subset of 47 countries in Africa covering 96 per cent of the population of children under age 1. Regional estimates represent data from countries covering at least 50 per cent of the regional population.

# ABOUT 27 MILLION INFANTS IN AFRICA DO NOT POSSESS A BIRTH CERTIFICATE

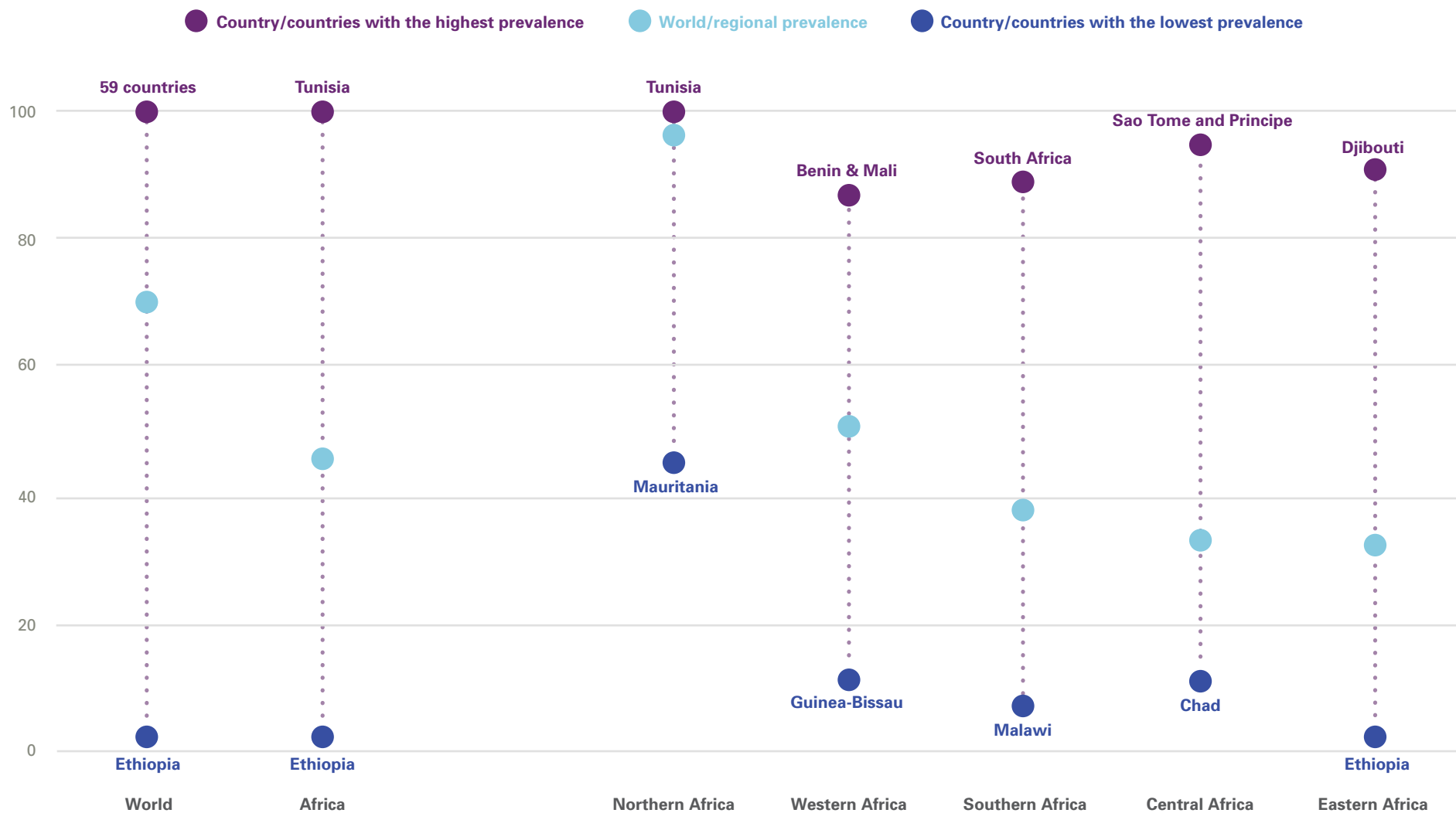
FIG. 8 Number of children under age 1 without a birth certificate, by African region



Notes: Figures have been rounded and do not add up to the total for Africa. Estimates are based on a subset of 44 countries in Africa covering 93 per cent of the population of children under age 1. Regional estimates represent data from countries covering at least 50 per cent of the regional population.

# EVEN WIDER VARIATIONS IN BIRTH REGISTRATION LEVELS AMONG INFANTS ARE FOUND ACROSS AFRICAN REGIONS

FIG. 9 Percentage of children under age 1 whose births are registered, by African region

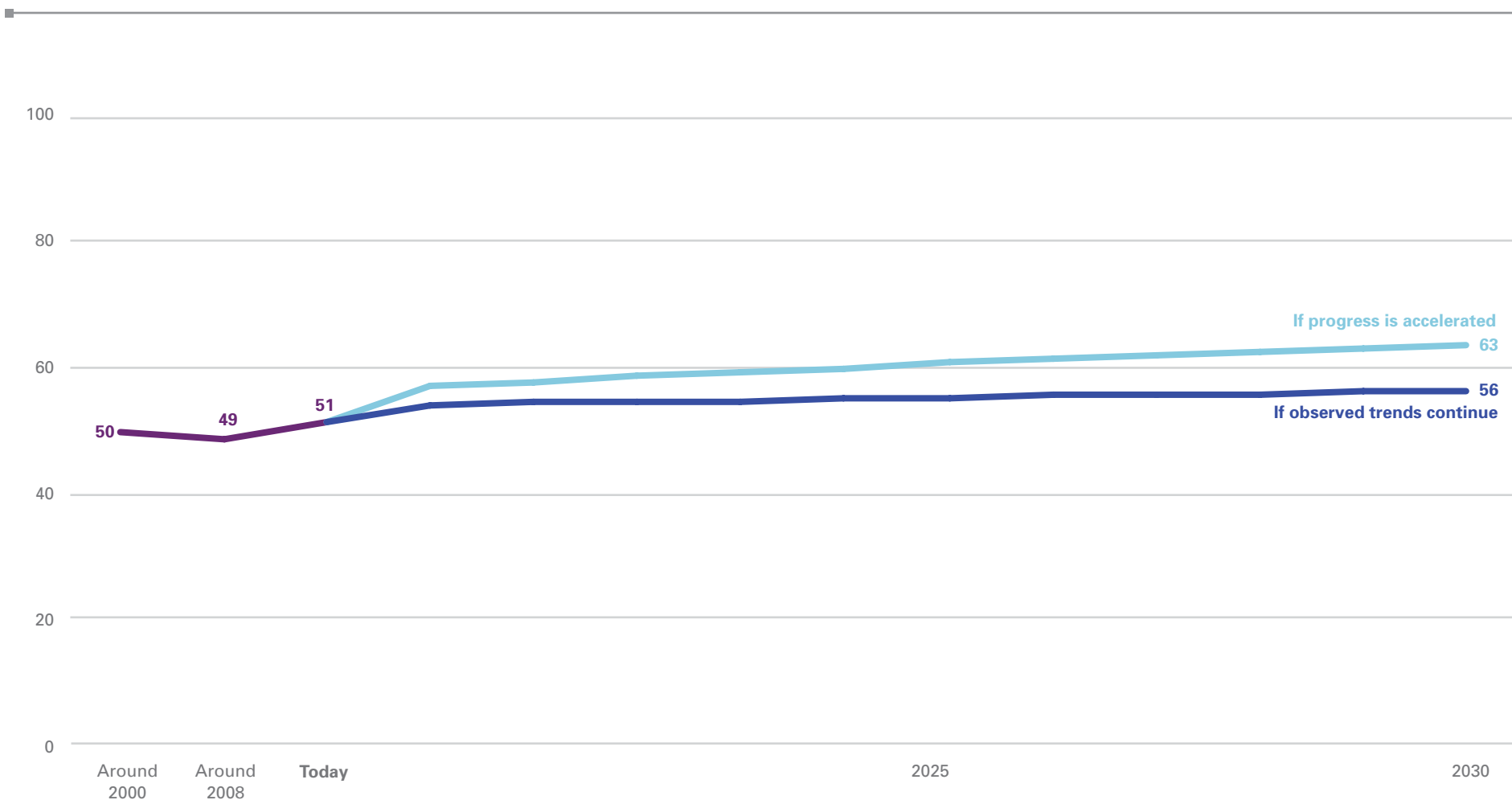




ASSESSING  
PROGRESS  
AND  
LOOKING AHEAD  
TO 2030

## MORE NEEDS TO BE DONE TO FULFIL THE PROMISE OF UNIVERSAL BIRTH REGISTRATION BY 2030 IN AFRICA

FIG. 10 Percentage of children under age 5 whose births are registered in Africa, observed and projected



Notes: The projection scenarios build on existing trends. The scenario depicting 'observed trends continue' shows expected values if each country were to continue on its observed (or assumed) path of progress. The 'progress is accelerated' scenario shows expected values if: (1) those countries that are projected to be on track to achieve universal birth registration by 2030 continue on their observed path of progress, (2) those countries that have a positive average annual rate of change catch up to countries in Africa that are on track, and (3) those countries that have either a negative average annual rate of change or have not made any progress catch up to countries in Africa that have made at least some progress but are not on track. This represents the more ambitious of the two scenarios. Both scenarios account for slowing effects that are to be expected as birth registration levels approach 100 per cent.

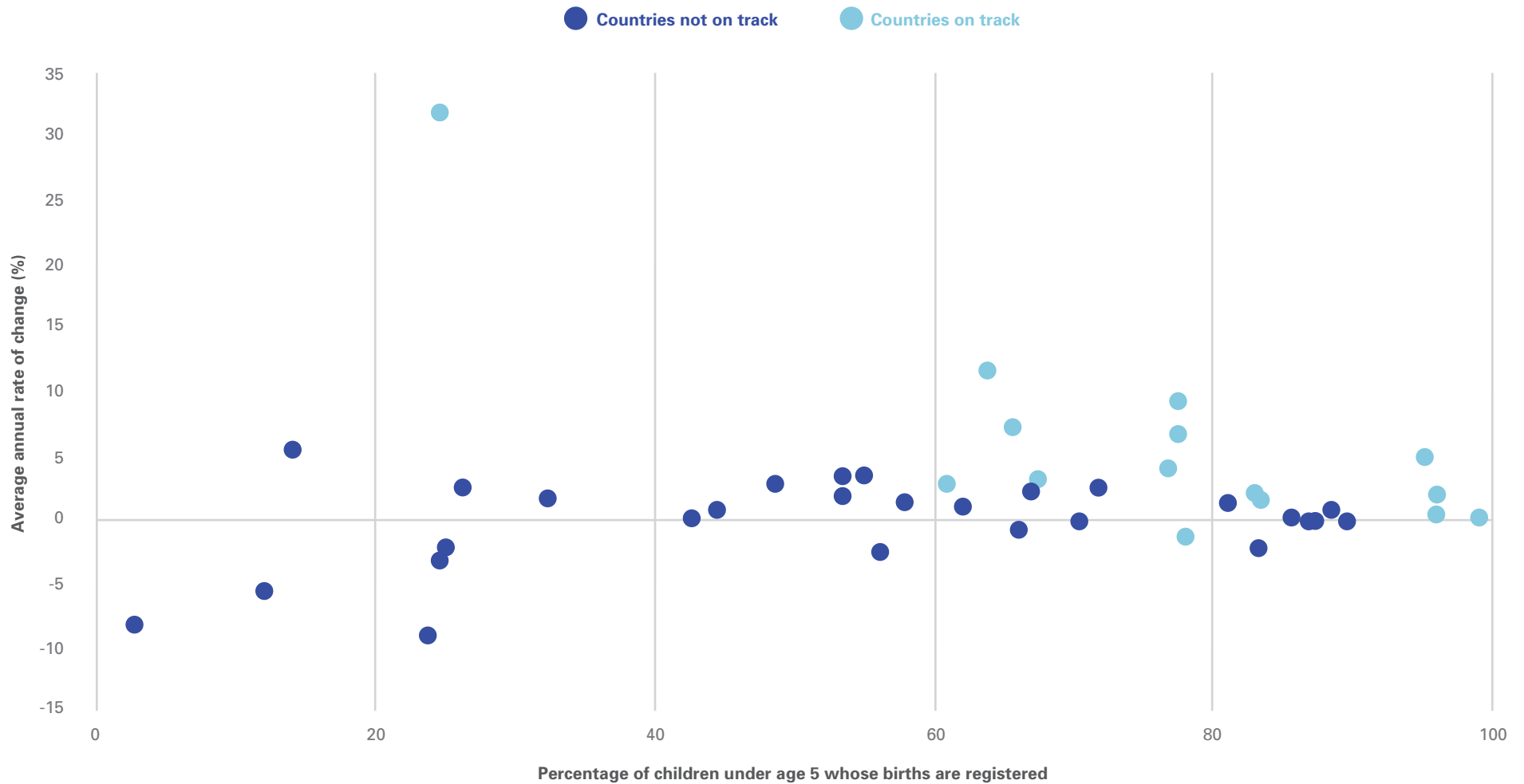
# THE POOREST CHILDREN CONTINUE TO LAG BEHIND IN MOST AFRICAN REGIONS

FIG. 11 Percentage of children under age 5 whose births are registered, by household wealth quintile and by African region



# AMONG AFRICAN COUNTRIES WITH AVAILABLE DATA, PROGRESS IN 2 OUT OF 3 OF THEM WILL NEED TO ACCELERATE TO ACHIEVE UNIVERSAL BIRTH REGISTRATION BY 2030

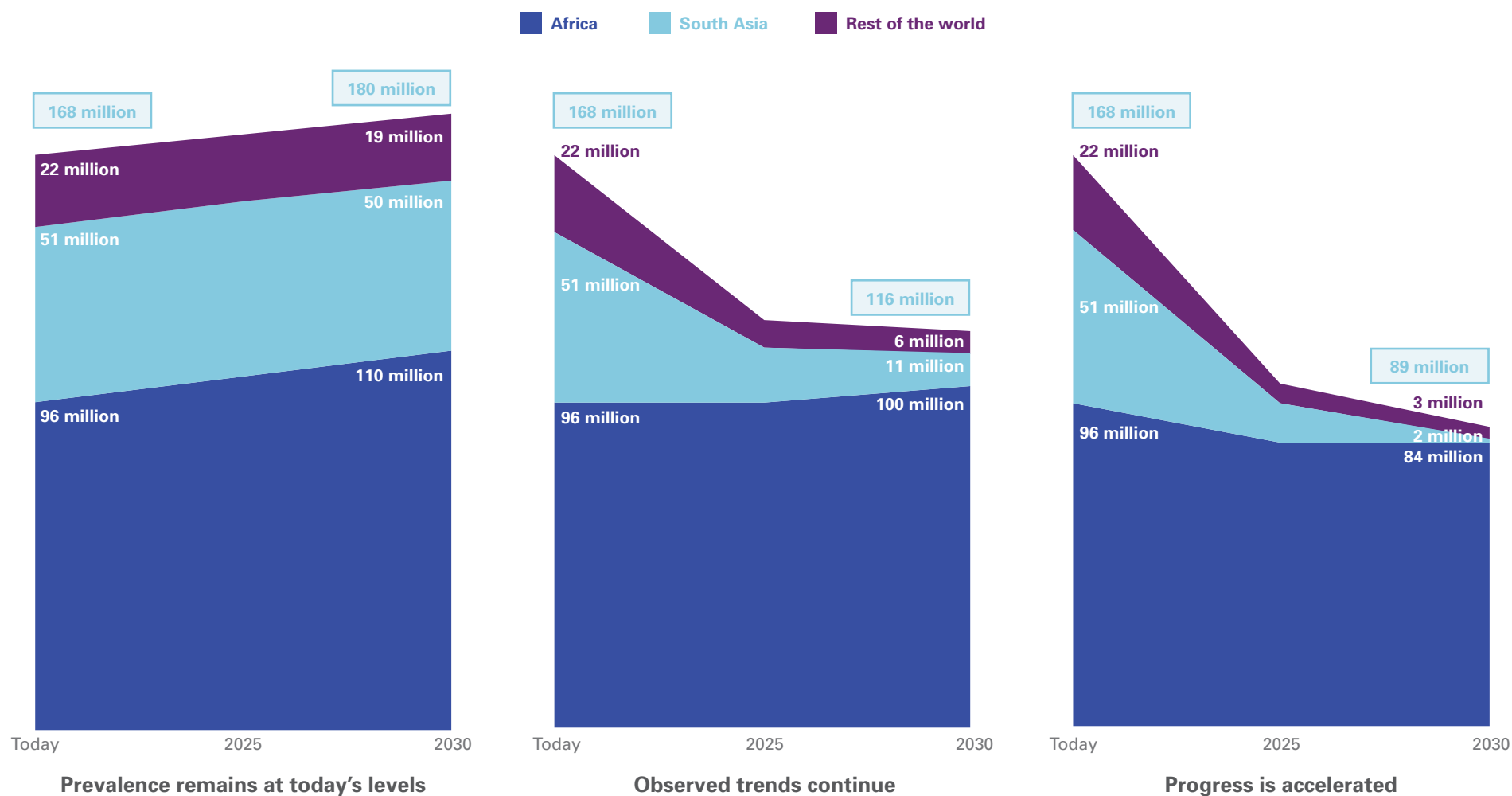
FIG. 12 Percentage of children under age 5 whose births are registered and average annual rate of change, in African countries on track and not on track towards the SDG target



Note: This chart does not include countries that have already met the target of universal birth registration and those for which there were insufficient data to assess trends.

# UNLESS PROGRESS IS ACCELERATED, THE TOTAL NUMBER OF UNREGISTERED CHILDREN IN AFRICA WILL CONTINUE TO INCREASE AND WILL EXCEED 100 MILLION BY 2030

FIG. 13 Number of children under age 5 whose births are not registered, observed and projected, by region



Note: Figures have been rounded and may not add up to totals.







ACHIEVING  
UNIVERSAL  
BIRTH  
REGISTRATION  
IN AFRICA:  
**WHAT WILL IT TAKE?**

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**Legal identity for all in Africa – starting from birth – could be a game-changer in closing the global identity gap and fulfilling the promise to leave no one behind.** Progress has been made, but acceleration is needed for African countries to achieve their ambitions for children.

As countries employ both technological and non-technological solutions to improve their civil registration and vital statistics systems, three policy directions – namely decentralization, digitization and interoperability – emerge as proven solutions for increasing coverage while promoting cost-efficient service delivery.

Governments need to demonstrate political commitment through sufficient financing and

revamping of systems to make them sustainable and inclusive for marginalized population groups, including migrants and those who are displaced, with the goal of universality.

The target date for the Sustainable Development Goals is now only a decade away. Concerted efforts are needed to achieve birth registration for all children, anchored in the collective action of partners engaged in the *Africa Programme for Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics*, with investments geared towards continued decentralization, digitization and interoperability. Only by bringing these proven solutions to scale can the registration of every child's birth in Africa become a reality.

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UNICEF  
Data and Analytics Section  
Division of Data, Analytics, Planning  
and Monitoring  
3 United Nations Plaza  
New York, NY 10017, USA

Email: [data@unicef.org](mailto:data@unicef.org)  
Website: [data.unicef.org](http://data.unicef.org)