

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	332
Land:	Cameroun
Kilde:	Nationalt ID-center
Titel:	Cameroon: Registration of birth and issuance of birth certificates
Udgivet:	22. november 2023
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	21. marts 2024



Cameroon: Registration of birth and issuance of birth certificates

22 November 2023

Danish National ID Centre

Birkerød Kongevej 2
DK-3460 Birkerød
Denmark

Phone +45 61 98 39 00
Email nidc@nidc.dk
Website www.nidc.dk

Introduction

The following note describes the procedure for birth registration and issuance of birth certificates in Cameroon. In doing so, the note will include a description of the system for civil registrations in Cameroon.

The description of civil registrations in Cameroon includes information on the declaration of birth and differences between hospital birth and home births, while the sections on issuance procedures touches upon copies, reissuance of civil status certificates and changes in the format and appearance of the layout introduced after 2011. These include among other the replacement of the document serial number with a matriculation code, along with space for information on nationality and ID-number.¹

For more information regarding the 2011 changes in format and layout of Cameroonian civil status documents, see note '*Cameroon: Civil registration and civil certificates*'.

The note is primarily based on interviews conducted in Cameroon in March 2019 and is one out of several notes focusing on Cameroon.

Civil registration in Cameroon

Civil registration such as birth registration may take place in one of three types of administrative offices: a main centre, a secondary centre or a Cameroonian diplomatic mission abroad.² As of April 2019, Cameroon has 420 main centres, 2,406 secondary centres and 45 diplomatic missions abroad with civil status registries.³ All three types of administrative offices mentioned here will be referred to as civil status registries in this note.

¹ General Manager of the National Civil Status Registration Office, March 2019.

² National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019.

³ General Manager of the National Civil Status Registration Office, April 2019.

Civil status registrars have competence to sign civil status certificates at the civil status registries. At main centres, the civil status registrars are the government delegates in city councils and their assistants as well as mayors and their assistants. At Cameroonian diplomatic missions abroad, the civil status registrars are the heads of diplomatic missions and consular posts as well as those assuring interim.⁴

Regarding secondary centres, registrars are appointed by the Minister of Decentralization and Local Development.⁵ Civil status registrars of secondary centres are assisted by clerks, who are appointed by the competent senior divisional officer. They jointly sign civil status certificates.⁶

Declaration of birth

When a child is born in Cameroon, it is mandatory by law to register the birth within 90 days. The registration should take place at a civil status registry at the place of the birth, regardless of the parents' place of birth.⁷

Depending on whether it is a home birth or a hospital birth, the birth may be declared by medical staff or a traditional ruler of the community.

When a child is born at a hospital, the birth should be declared by the medical staff within 30 days. The hospital or a health centre files a declaration and sends it directly to the nearest civil status registry.⁸ The birth declaration carries the name of the mother and will include a registration number, which is noted in the registration books at the civil status registry.⁹ The information pertaining to the child-birth may in some cases be archived in the hospital's health records.¹⁰

The person with competence to declare home births is not articulated by law. According to an amendment of Law No. 2011/11 of 6 May 2011, the traditional ruler of the community is expected to declare home births; however, the General Manager of the National Civil Status Registration Office (hereafter BUNEC) stated that home births may also be declared by the parents, head of family or other relatives. When a birth is not declared by the hospital within 30 days, it is possible for other parties to declare the birth within an additional 60 days, meaning that the birth should be registered within 90 days at the latest.¹¹

⁴ General Manager of the National Civil Status Registration Office, March 2019.

⁵ General Manager of the National Civil Status Registration Office, March 2019.

⁶ General Manager of the National Civil Status Registration Office, March 2019.

⁷ National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019.

⁸ Amendments of Law No. 2011/11 of 6 May 2011, p. 17.

⁹ Main Centre Yaoundé 6, Yaoundé, March 2019.

¹⁰ National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019.

¹¹ National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019; Amendments of Law No. 2011/11 of 6 May 2011, p. 17.

After 90 days, but before 6 months, the birth also has to be declared through state council in a community court of first instance.¹²

In big cities like Yaoundé children are often born at hospitals. However, more than 70% of children from remote areas are born at home.¹³

Registration

If the information in the birth declaration received by the civil status registry is incomplete, the parents are expected to come to the civil status registry to complete the file. The file must be completed within 90 days after the birth, and before a birth certificate is issued.¹⁴ The required information is provided by the applicant by filling in an information sheet and handing it over to an officer at the civil status registry.

Once the information is complete, it is checked by a civil status officer and handed back to the person, who applied for a document, for their final verification of the content.¹⁵

Grandparents to the child are regarded as the best witnesses. A local lawyer expressed that in terms of witness regulations, common practice applies along with age restrictions. It is up to the court to rule on regulations, and to assess the witnesses.¹⁶

The child is not required to be present for the registrations.¹⁷

If registration of a child is done later than 6 months after birth, a court judgement (*judgement supplétif*) is required.¹⁸

Nationality and ID numbers

As of 2011, nationality has been included on birth and marriage certificates in Cameroon. According to an amendment of Law No. 2011/11 of 6 May 2011, the civil officers have to see either ID cards, passports, birth certificate or a civil status attestation in order to register the parents' nationalities in birth certificates.¹⁹ When registering the nationality of the parents, their national ID numbers are also registered based on the abovementioned documents. ID numbers were not included in civil status documents until after 2011, which means that the ID-number

¹² National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019.

¹³ National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019.

¹⁴ National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019.

¹⁵ Main Centre Yaoundé 6, Yaoundé, March 2019.

¹⁶ Local lawyer (A), Yaoundé, March 2019.

¹⁷ National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019.

¹⁸ National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019.

¹⁹ Amendments of Law No. 2011/11 of 6 May 2011, p. 16.

cannot be registered if the parents provide civil status documents issued before 2011 as proof of nationality.²⁰

Issuance of the birth certificate

The parents must present the following documents to obtain a birth certificate:

- ID cards of both parents
- If the parents of the child are married, a copy of the marriage certificate²¹
- If the child is born out of wedlock, both witnesses' ID cards

When the secretary has verified the personal information about the child, it is recorded in three different books. Every page in one of these books consists of two identical certificates that are easily separated.²² The assistant to the secretary fills in both certificates in each of the three books and presents them for attestation by the registrars with competence to sign.²³

One of the certificates from the local registry's book is separated upon completion and issued to the registrants as the birth certificate. The remaining five certificates are archived; two are archived at BUNEC headquarter, two are archived with the court and the last one from the civil status registry's book is archived locally.²⁴ This remaining certificate at the civil status registry is referred to as the "souche" in French.

²⁰ Main Centre Yaoundé 6, Yaoundé, March 2019.

²¹ General Manager of the National Civil Status Registration Office, March 2019.

²² Main Centre Yaoundé 6, Yaoundé, March 2019.

²³ Main Centre Yaoundé 6, Yaoundé, March 2019.

²⁴ Main Centre Yaoundé 6, Yaoundé, March 2019.

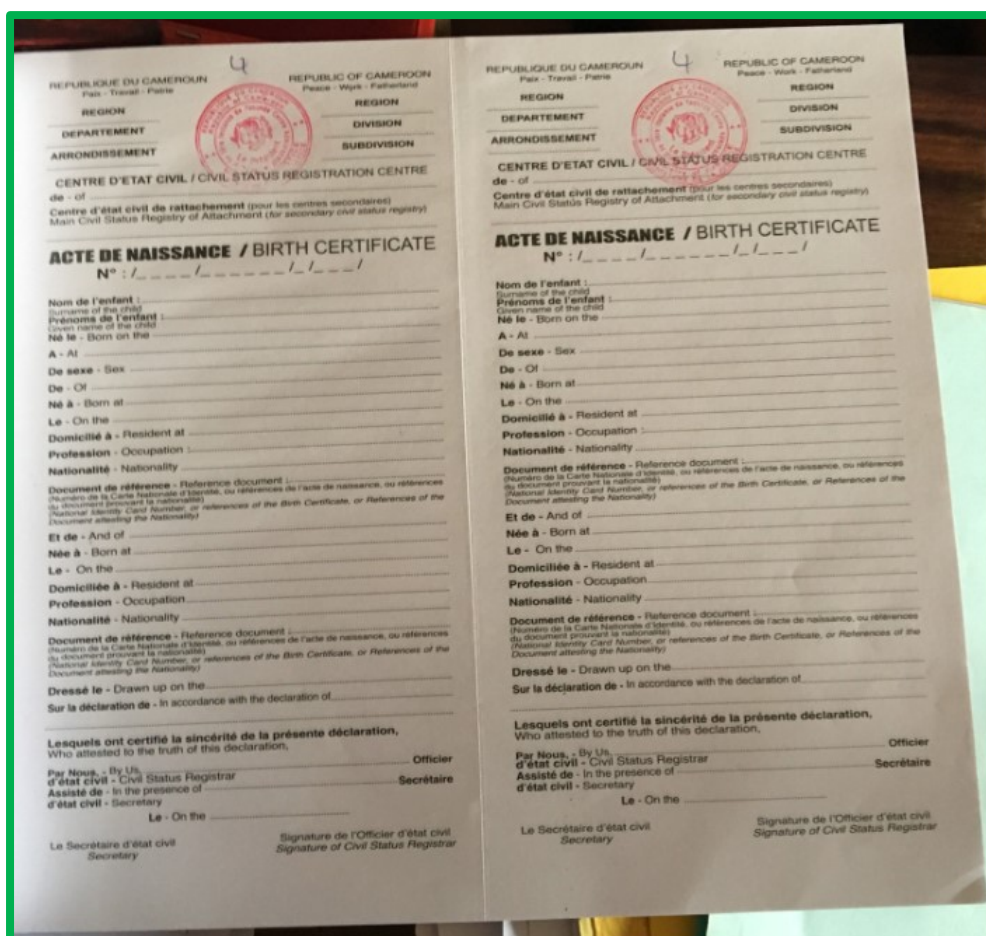


Image 1: A page from the civil registry's book. One of the certificates is issued to the registrant after they are filled in, while the other is the *souche* that is archived at the registry. (NIDC reference material)

The birth certificate must be jointly signed by a civil status registrar (mayor) and a secretary or clerk. According to the report of audience from BUNEC, civil status registrars will further affix a stamp on the civil status documents before they are issued to the registrant.²⁵ At the Main Centre Yaoundé 6, the civil status documents are signed by the secretary and signed and stamped by the mayor.²⁶ At a secondary centre, such documents will be signed by the civil status registrar and his clerk.²⁷

Registers and documents are printed in both English and French, but the document will only be filled in in one language. It is essentially up to the official filling in the certificate to decide between English and French.²⁸

²⁵ General Manager of the National Civil Status Registration Office, March 2019.

²⁶ Main Centre, Yaoundé 6, Yaoundé, March 2019.

²⁷ General Manager of the National Civil Status Registration Office, March 2019.

²⁸ National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019.

Matriculation code

Following the legislative changes in 2011 concerning civil registrations, a new matriculation code was introduced on civil status documents.



Image 2: Serial number on a birth certificate from 1982. (NIDC reference material)

Previously, the civil status documents included a serial number, based on the registration year of the event. The new matriculation code further contains information on the place of issuance and the type of event registered.²⁹

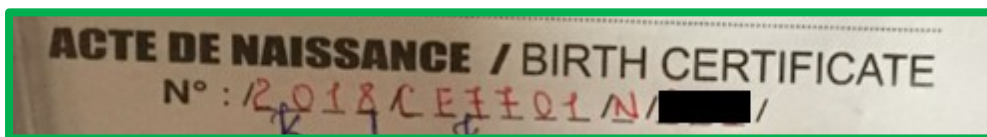


Image 3: Example of the matriculation code on a birth certificate introduced in 2011. (NIDC reference material)

The first four numbers indicate the year of registration, the next combination of letters and numbers (CE7701 in this example) indicate the issuing civil status registry.³⁰

The Danish National ID Centre is in possession of further details regarding the matriculation code.

Copies

According to the National Civil Status Registration Office, the holder must submit their original document to obtain a copy. The main centre will verify using the archive at the main centre. If the original document is lost, the holder must go to the court, who can order the main or secondary centres to issue a copy of the document, a “reconstitution order”. A mention of the court order will be included in the copy. The holder keeps the original court order and the main or secondary centre attaches a copy to their archives. Red pen ticks on the document indicate that the information is verified by the main centres.³¹

²⁹ National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019.

³⁰ National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019; Main Centre Yaoundé 1, Yaoundé, March 2019.

³¹ National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019.

Whether the copy is a handwritten “copie - copie” or a photocopy of the souche, the information should be approved by staff at the local civil status registry, where the original registration was made.³²

The process of purchasing the “copie - copie” and how it may be used as a legally valid copy of a civil certificate is, however, unclear. The NIDC team observed copies being purchased from private retailers operating close by some civil status registries, and that the same retailer may also offer to fill in the information for the buyer.

It further appears that the retailers aim to match the layout of the “copie - copie” with the original layout. As the layout has changed over time, the retailer will have to carry many different formats. This information could not be confirmed by Cameroonian authorities.

A fiscal stamp is added to the certified copy when the document is to be legalised by the Ministry of External Relations.³³

Reissuance

If the original birth certificate is lost, the person must obtain a court order to have the document reconstructed. On base of the reconstitution order from the court, the civil status registry will issue a new certificate. A reference to the court decision should always be mentioned in the certificate.³⁴

The applicant keeps the original court decision and the main or secondary centre attaches a copy to the register. The date of registration is always the new registration date.³⁵

³² National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019.

³³ Ministry of External Relations, Yaoundé, March 2019.

³⁴ National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019.

³⁵ National Civil Status Registration Office, Yaoundé, March 2019.

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