

Policy Brief

Economic incentives have large positive impacts on birth registrations in Fiji



KEY MESSAGES

Economic incentives resulted in a large increase in birth registrations, particularly among iTaukei children and children born to single mothers.

- The Inflation Mitigation Assistance Programme resulted in a 521% increase in birth registrations,¹ compared to the 19 months prior to the programme.
 - iTaukei birth registrations increased 631% and registrations to single mothers increased 610% under the Programme.
- The Parental Assistance Payment Programme increased registrations of births within the legally

specified timeframe (one year) by 77%, compared to the 19 months prior to the programme.

- The Parental Assistance Payment Programme more than doubled birth registrations for iTaukei children under age one year, and registrations to single mothers saw a four-fold (232%) increase under the Parental Assistance Payment Programme.

Birth registrations did not remain elevated upon completion of these programmes, but instead declined back to pre-programme levels.

Small but permanent economic incentives should be instated to ensure the majority of children receive a birth certificate by their first birthday.

¹ Includes all birth registrations, as well as those registered outside of the legal timeframe since the Inflation Mitigation Assistance Programme did not require timely registration (within one year of birth).

THE PROBLEM

Comprehensive and timely registrations of births are necessary to inform policy and adequately allocate resources

to serve populations for services such as education, health care (hospitals, vaccines, medical staff), social protection and other services administered at a local level. Without reliable statistics derived from civil registration, it is difficult to understand how fast a population is growing (or shrinking) and to anticipate its future needs, as well as monitor the health and well-being of different populations so that health interventions can be put in place accordingly.

Further, birth registration is a human right as recognized by the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#)² and the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#).³ The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes a target (16.9) dedicated specifically to providing legal identity for all, including birth registration. An official birth certificate, as issued through the civil registration system, is a breeder document for other legal identity documents. Collectively, these documents can afford

rights and opportunities such as the right to an education, the right to open a bank account, the right to gainful employment, the right to access medical care, the right to vote, and the right to travel freely (with an official passport).

Timely birth registration is also critical in emergency situations. Accurate population data is necessary to support disaster response programmes, such as after a cyclone. Further, proof of legal identity through a birth certificate may be necessary for individuals to access services or claim insurance benefits, and acute emergencies may disrupt access to and operations of civil registration offices, preventing new issuance of birth certificates.

However, many parents in Fiji delay the registration of their child's birth until they reach school age. This means a child is without an official legal identity and the government does not have an accurate legal record of the number of births occurring in that interim period. iTaukei children are least likely to have their births registered within the legal timeframe, as are poorer mothers, single mothers, and teenage mothers.⁴

2 UN General Assembly, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, 16 December 1966, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 999, p. 171

3 UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, 20 November 1989, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577, p. 3

4 Findings from the recent Fiji Bureau of Statistics report: *Assessing inequalities in registration of births and deaths in Fiji*.

SOLUTIONS THROUGH ECONOMIC INCENTIVES

In an effort to improve birth registration, the Fiji Government introduced the Parental Assistance Payment Programme (PAPP) from August 1, 2018 to July 31, 2020. Under this program, parents receive two cash payments – \$500 Fijian dollars at the time of registration, and an additional \$500 Fijian dollars when the child attends preschool (around age 5) to support with school supplies, or other needs.

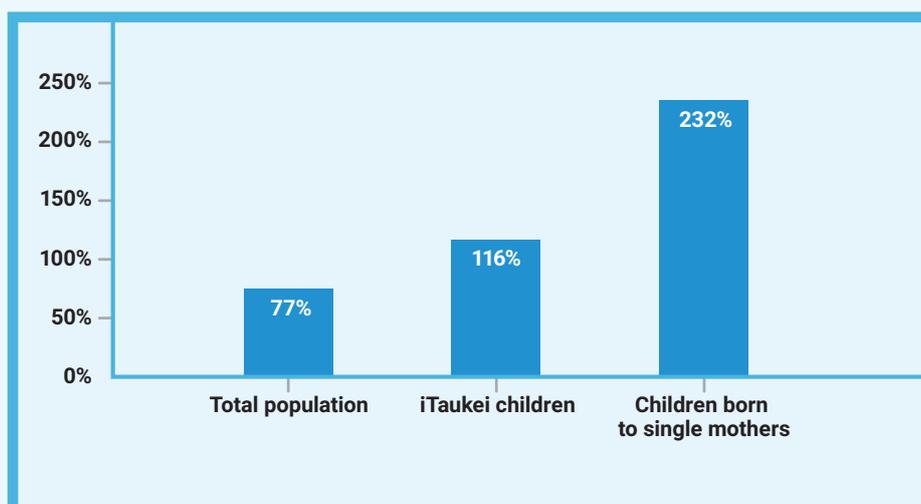


Figure 1: Percentage increase in registered births within the legally specified timeframe during the Parental Payment Assistance Programme (PAPP), compared to the 19 months prior

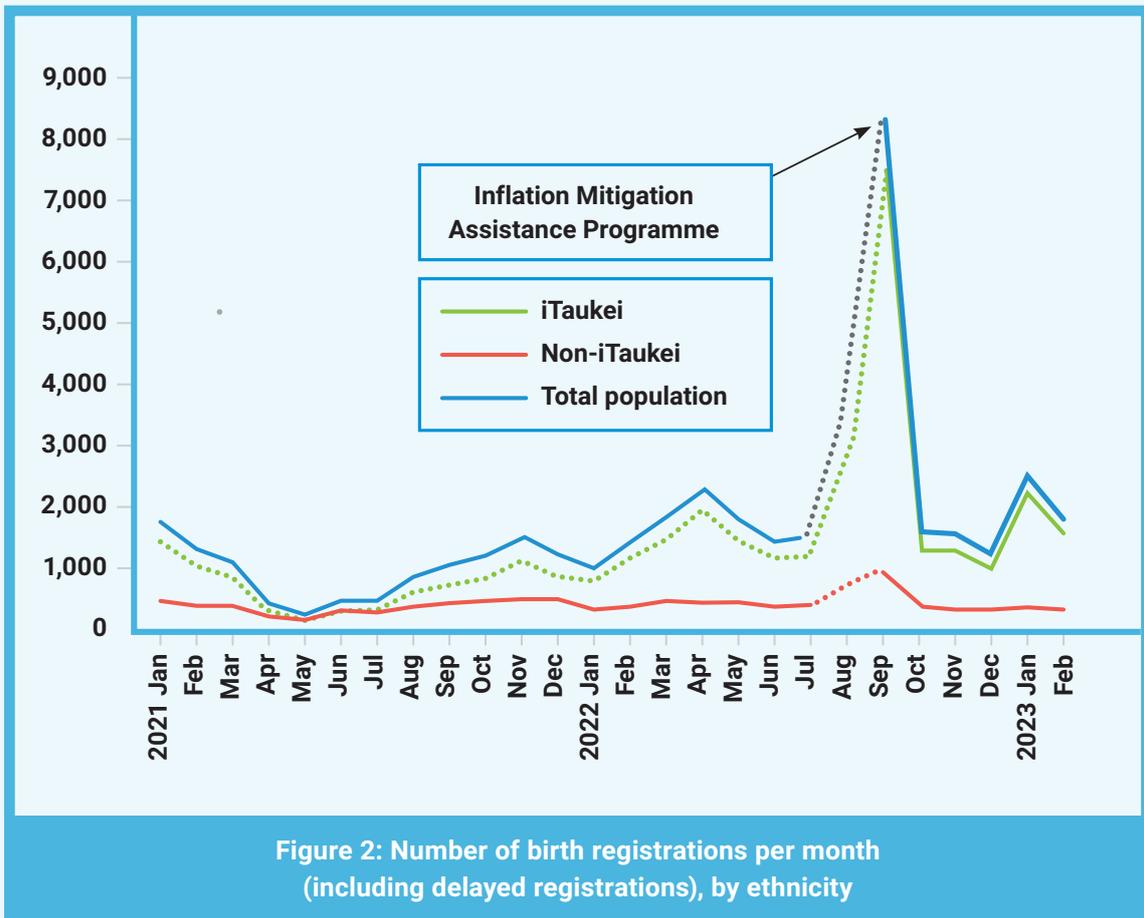


Figure 2: Number of birth registrations per month (including delayed registrations), by ethnicity

The Parental Assistance Payment Programme was successful in increasing birth registrations within the legally specified timeframe (by the child’s first birthday) by 77%. It was particularly effective among the iTaukei population, for whom registrations more than doubled, and for improving registrations more than four-fold among single mothers. However, the impact of the programme did not remain upon its completion; the number of births registered within the legally specified timeframe declined to that of the pre-programme era.

The Inflation Mitigation Assistance Programme (IMAP) also provided an economic incentive to register births as families received an additional \$30 FJ per child for 6 months (\$180 FJ total), but a birth certificate was required for proof of each child.

The Registrar General’s Office registered 11,648 births over the 51-day period the Programme was operational (15 August 2022 to 4 October 2022) resulting in an increase of more than 500% compared to the previous year. It should be noted that 53% of these registrations were delayed registrations occurring beyond the legally specified time period of one year after birth. The surge in registrations were particularly significant among iTaukei children and children born to single mothers, where registration increased more than 600% in these populations. However, as seen after the conclusion of the Parental Assistance Payment Programme, birth registrations declined to their pre-programme era levels upon completion of the Inflation Mitigation Assistance Programme.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Continuation of economic incentives to improve the timeliness of registration should be considered.

Both the Parental Assistance Payment Programme and the Inflation Mitigation Assistance Programme had a measurable and positive impact on the number of birth registrations during their operational periods, indicating economic incentives are effective at motivating families to register births.

Policy makers are urged to consider a permanent one-time incentive for timely birth registration.

A small one-time payment of \$25 Fijian dollars upon registration would likely have a positive impact on increasing the timeliness of registration and the number of children receiving a birth certificate before their first birthday.

Approximately 20,000 births occur each year in Fiji. Assuming all families were in compliance, a small incentive of \$25 FJ upon registration by the child's

first birthday would result in an approximate yearly expenditure of \$500,000 FJ per year, (excluding other associated administrative costs). This equates to just 0.0125% of the total national budget each year, but would result in more timely registrations and thus more accurate legal records of the number of births occurring in the country. Further, families would have legal identity documents for their children should they be needed in cases of emergency such as for disaster response programmes.

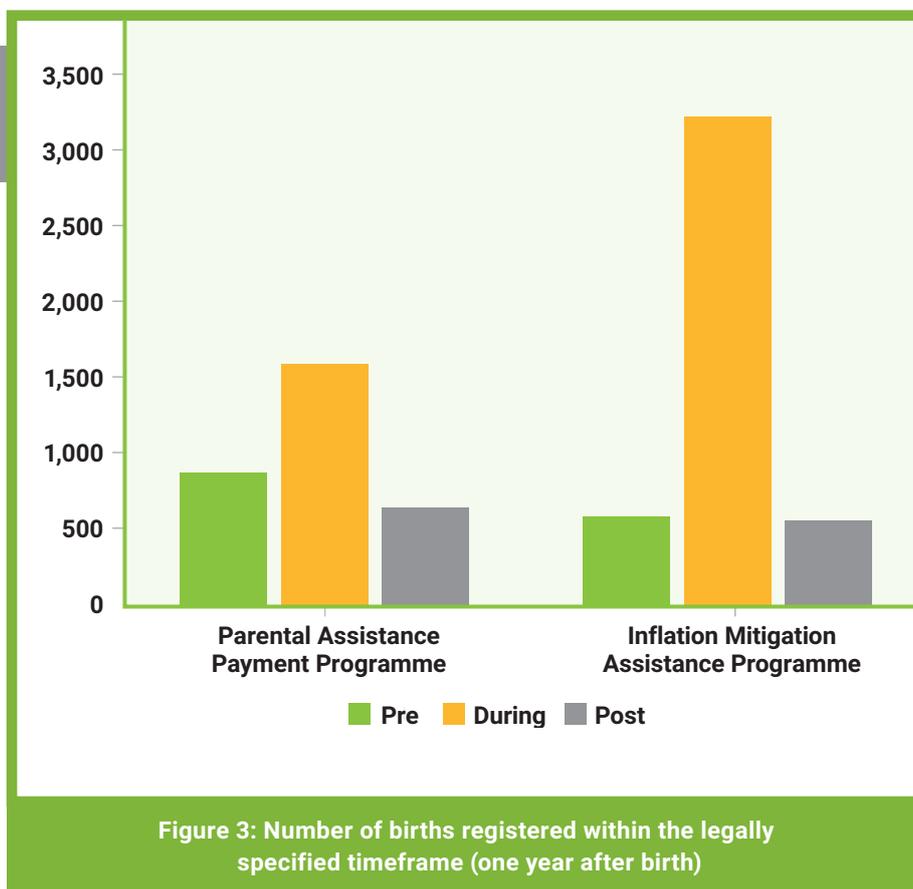


Figure 3: Number of births registered within the legally specified timeframe (one year after birth)

Table 1: Approximate government expenditure needed to implement a one-time payment for birth registration by age 1 year

	One-time payment for birth registration by age 1 (FJ\$)	Yearly cost of payments (FJ\$)
Option 1	\$20	\$400,000
Option 2	\$25	\$500,000
Option 3	\$30	\$600,000
Option 4	\$50	\$1,000,000
Option 5	\$75	\$1,500,000
Option 6	\$100	\$2,000,000
Option 7	\$250	\$5,000,000