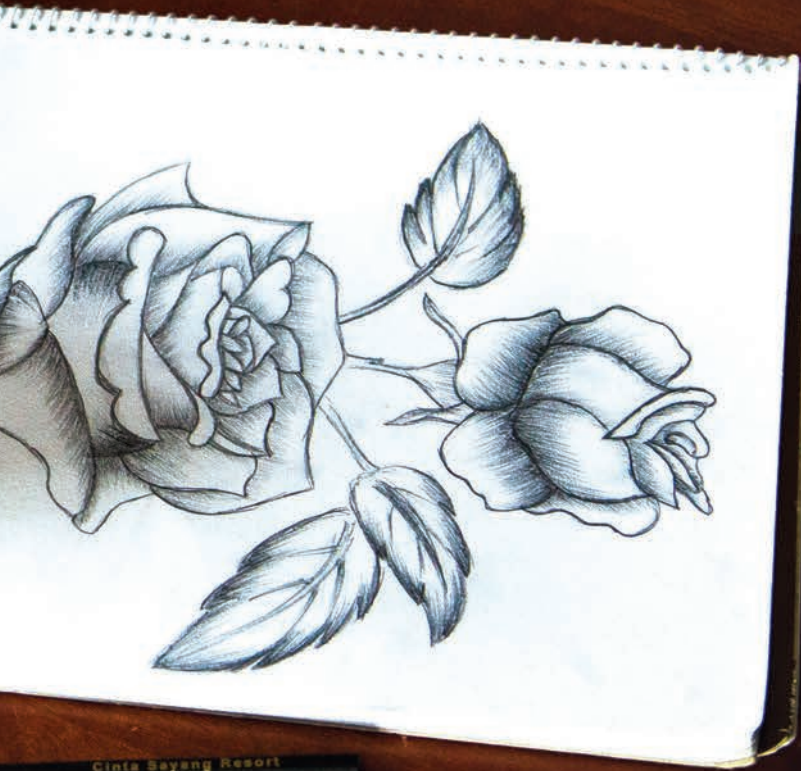


Kavita, a 22-year-old Indian Tamil woman in Malaysia, dreams of becoming an art teacher, but being stateless prevents her from enrolling in college. Steps are being taken by the Government of Malaysia, UNHCR and a community-based NGO to help Kavita and others in her community to resolve their situation by acquiring Malaysian nationality.



# *Ending* Statelessness





**O**ne year on since the launch of UNHCR's Global Campaign to End Statelessness by 2024 (the Campaign), awareness about statelessness and its impact on families has grown considerably, as has global momentum on the issue. Six States have acceded to one of the two statelessness conventions in the past 12 months, and a number of States have undertaken meaningful law reform to help address statelessness.

Nonetheless, at least 10 million people worldwide continue to suffer the hardship and indignity of being denied nationality. UNHCR must now build on the momentum it has achieved and push for the additional reforms needed to resolve existing situations and prevent new cases from emerging. ●●●

# #IBELONG Campaign one year on

In 2016, UNHCR will continue to focus on meeting the goals of the Campaign, which are set out in the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness and a corresponding set of 10 Actions. Already in 2015, 19 UNHCR operations – representing all regions – received additional support to boost their implementation of statelessness activities. These ranged from in-depth studies to providing legal assistance to stateless people to apply for citizenship. In Malaysia, for example, UNHCR worked with local NGOs to enable stateless people of Tamil/Indian origin to prepare applications to acquire or confirm Malaysian nationality.

The organization has also been assisting Governments, including Côte d'Ivoire, Kyrgyzstan, the Philippines and Thailand, to grant nationality to stateless people and resolve the status of those with undetermined nationality. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, following efforts by the Government and a local NGO, supported by UNHCR, more than 4,400 cases have been resolved since June 2014. This should pave the way for full resolution of statelessness in Kyrgyzstan in coming years.

In all of these countries, work has advanced largely thanks to UNHCR's Seeds for Solutions (see *Glossary*) or other sources of additional funding, combined with dedicated human resources.

In addition to its operational work, in 2015 UNHCR launched a series of good practice papers, each of which corresponds to one of the 10 Actions in the Global Action Plan. Each paper highlights examples of how States, UNHCR and other stakeholders have addressed statelessness in a number of countries. Papers on Actions 1, 2, 3, 6 and 9 were published in 2015

and a first good practices meeting on the identification and protection of stateless migrants (Action 6) was held in Brussels in May. In 2016, additional meetings will focus on good practice in the areas of ending childhood statelessness (Action 2) and gender discrimination in nationality laws (Action 3), while papers on Actions 4, 7 and 8 are planned for publication in the course of the year.


In the Campaign's first year, two regions have already committed to achieving its overall goal: 28 Latin American and Caribbean States adopted the Brazil Declaration and Plan of Action, which aim to eradicate statelessness in the subregion by 2024; and in West Africa, the Abidjan Declaration of Ministers of ECOWAS Member States on the Eradication of Statelessness was adopted in February 2015.

Meanwhile, in Asia and the Pacific in November 2014, 44 States agreed to support universal civil registration and endorsed a regional action framework that recognizes the vital

role of birth registration in preventing statelessness. In the coming year, UNHCR will seek resources to support the implementation of these initiatives and work with other regional organizations towards similar achievements.

The tally of States party to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons has reached 86, with recent accessions by El Salvador, Niger, Peru and Turkey. Meanwhile, 64 States are now party to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, with recent accessions by Argentina, Belize and Peru.

Supporting the establishment and work of regional civil society networks on statelessness is important for UNHCR's efforts to end statelessness by 2024. With regional networks already in place in Europe and the Americas, and the formation of a network in the Asia and Pacific region at an advanced stage, UNHCR hopes to continue the trend in Africa and the Middle East and North Africa. Together with



**10 Actions to End Statelessness 2014-2024**

- Action 1:** Resolve existing major situations of statelessness.
- Action 2:** Ensure that no child is born stateless.
- Action 3:** Remove gender discrimination from nationality laws.
- Action 4:** Prevent denial, loss or deprivation of nationality on discriminatory grounds.
- Action 5:** Prevent statelessness in cases of State succession.
- Action 6:** Grant protection status to stateless migrants and facilitate their naturalization.
- Action 7:** Ensure birth registration for the prevention of statelessness.
- Action 8:** Issue nationality documentation to those with entitlement to it.
- Action 9:** Accede to the UN statelessness conventions.
- Action 10:** Improve quantitative and qualitative data on stateless populations.

OHCHR, UN Women, and a number of NGOs, the organization continues to participate in a coalition aimed at removing gender discrimination from nationality laws. The Office is also strengthening its partnerships with NGOs and others to ensure robust engagement with UN human rights

mechanisms on topics that support the prevention and resolution of statelessness.

The Campaign aims at meeting set interim goals, or milestones, by the end of 2017, and UNHCR is appealing for increased financial support and human resources to do so.

## Ending childhood statelessness

Over a third of the stateless population globally are children: a stateless child is born at least every 10 minutes. This is particularly troubling as the effects of childhood statelessness can leave a person seriously disadvantaged for life.

UNHCR is focusing on ending childhood statelessness during this first phase of the Campaign. Preventing childhood statelessness requires addressing causes of statelessness, including discrimination – particularly on the basis of gender – and gaps in nationality laws, which leave children more vulnerable to being born stateless.

More than 50 per cent of all States lack adequate safeguards in their nationality laws for children born stateless in their territory. This is a major cause of childhood statelessness – at least 70,000 stateless children alone are born each year in the countries hosting the 20 largest statelessness populations.

Abandoned children, whose parents cannot be identified, are another group at risk of statelessness: at least 29 per cent of States lack provisions in their nationality laws to grant nationality to such children found in their territory. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, the absence of this

safeguard, combined with periods of upheaval in the country, has meant that approximately 300,000 of the country's estimated 700,000 stateless people are abandoned children.

“

Being stateless as a child is generally the antithesis of the best interests of children.

”

– *African Committee on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Nubian Minors v. Kenya, Decision, 22 March 2011.*

Ensuring birth registration (Action 7 of the Global Action Plan) is crucial to preventing child statelessness in the current Syrian refugee crisis. In Jordan, the Government has established a range of innovative solutions to ensure every child begins life with a birth certificate that proves their legal identity and nationality. These efforts may serve as a regional, or even global, model. Sustained efforts to pursue advocacy with governments and provide support for partners is needed to strengthen the universality of birth registration. ■

**AREAS OF INTERVENTION  
ANTICIPATED IN 2016**

**KEY ACHIEVEMENTS TARGETED**

**Durable solutions**

**Greater reduction of statelessness is achieved**

Develop and implement strategies to address protracted situations of statelessness

Assist stateless people and those with undetermined nationality to acquire or confirm nationality

Provide training and technical advice to government officials on statelessness reduction measures, including acquisition or confirmation of nationality by stateless people and those with undetermined nationality

- At least 100,000 stateless people will acquire nationality or have it confirmed.
- 3 regional meetings will be held to disseminate good practices relating to the prevention and reduction of statelessness.
- The media strategy for UNHCR's Global Campaign to End Statelessness by 2024 will be strengthened.

**Favourable protection environment**

**Law and policy developed or strengthened**

Advocate and provide technical advice to governments for reform of nationality laws, policies and procedures to close gaps that may lead to statelessness, to ensure that stateless people can acquire a nationality

Advocate and provide technical advice to governments for introduction or improvement of statelessness determination procedures

Advocate and provide technical advice to governments for elimination of gender discrimination in nationality laws  
Support civil society advocacy as part of the Campaign to End Gender Discrimination in Nationality Laws

- 10 States will be supported to take steps to improve their nationality laws, policies and procedures, in line with international standards on the prevention and reduction of statelessness.
- 4 States will be supported to establish or improve statelessness determination procedures.
- 5 States will be supported to introduce gender equality into their nationality laws.

**International and regional instruments acceded to, ratified or strengthened**

Promote accession to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness

- The number of States party to the 1954 and 1961 Conventions will be increased by 12.

**Fair processes and documentation**

**Identification of statelessness improved**

Support identification/registration exercises and surveys to increase knowledge of the number of stateless people, their situation and possible solutions

Advocate and provide technical advice for improved statistics on stateless people

- Quantitative and/or qualitative baseline data will be improved in 8 additional States.
- The number of countries for which UNHCR reports statistical data on stateless people will be increased by 5.



# Statelessness: Young Georgian mother breaks a cycle of suffering

*This article is an adapted version of a UNHCR news story*

8 May 2015



**DZEGVI, Georgia, May 2015** | Olga Khutsishvili has bad memories of her childhood in Georgia, growing up in poverty and lacking access to a full education and other rights. “I didn’t know how to read and write, and everybody was laughing about me. I can’t recall those years without tears,” the 19-year-old told UNHCR recently in the village of Dzegvi, where she lives with her mother and baby son.

19-year-old Olga proudly holds her new ID card in one hand and son Zaza in the other.

The root of her unhappiness went back to the marriage of her parents in 1980. As her Russian mother had lost all her documents, her marriage to Olga’s Georgian father could not be registered. This meant that Olga’s birth 16 years later was never recorded, and without a birth certificate – and proof of nationality – she lacked many rights.

But today, in a heartening turnaround made possible with UNHCR’s help, she has Georgian nationality and is taking part in a UNHCR awareness campaign aimed at helping 2,000 other people in Georgia who are at risk of statelessness. “I’m not stateless anymore, and I can go to the doctor, bring my baby and enjoy the same rights as everybody else,” she said.

As she grew up, Olga became painfully aware of how important documentation was in order to live a normal life and access the rights that others take for granted. In the first town that her family lived in, she was unable to go to school or visit the doctor.

After moving to another town, Olga’s mother managed to persuade the headmaster to enrol her, but she was not happy. “Can you imagine being in First Grade at the age of ten?” she asked. Olga and her mother moved again when her father died and she was able to study for two years, “but without documentation I was forced to leave school again.”

By mid-2013, Olga was in the same situation as her parents had been. She had a husband, but no marriage certificate, and she had baby Zaza, whose birth she could not register without documentation. It seemed as though the cycle of suffering was repeating itself.

But just when she thought her problem could go on and on for generations, she met UNHCR staff who were on a field visit to Dzegvi, meeting with vulnerable families. Together with a local partner, the Innovations and Reforms Centre, UNHCR told her how to get the necessary documents through the Public Registry, including papers to show she

had lived in Georgia more than five years, qualifying her for nationality.

She became a Georgian national in July 2013 and in January last year she finally got a birth certificate and an ID card. Her mother and son, Zaza, also got citizenship. “This means a lot to me,” Olga said. “Now my son will be able to get an education; I am happy he will not face the same difficulties we had.”

And she is determined to become self-sufficient and provide for her family after years of living in poverty because she and her mother were not able to work legally for lack of documents. She has learnt how to read and write and hopes to find a place at a vocational training centre. “Now I have my life back,” Olga said happily. ○