



**UNHCR**

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés



## **The Statelessness Conventions Campaign** ***Why States Should Accede to the*** ***1954 and 1961 Statelessness Conventions***

Stateless people are the overlooked millions who are not recognized as nationals of any State. Statelessness is a global issue, with an estimated 12 million persons worldwide affected. While some regions have larger stateless populations than others, every continent is confronted with statelessness. Stateless persons often fall through a protection gap because too few governments have adopted concrete measures to address their concerns. Pursuant to its mandate from the UN General Assembly and guidance from the Executive Committee, UNHCR is committed to changing this.

In anticipation of the 50th Anniversary of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, UNHCR has launched the ***Statelessness Conventions Campaign***, encouraging States to accede to that convention as well as the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons. These conventions provide a legal framework to prevent statelessness from occurring and to protect people who are already stateless.

***Below are six reasons why it is in States' interests to accede to the 1954 and 1961 Statelessness Conventions:***

### **1. The statelessness conventions set global standards.**

The 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness provide the international legal foundations for addressing the causes and consequences of statelessness, which are not addressed in any other treaty.

The 1961 Convention is about preventing statelessness from occurring and thereby reducing it over time. The convention sets clear rules according to which States must grant nationality to children so that they do not become stateless at birth. It also prevents statelessness later in life, for example, when people become stateless as a result of failed attempts to become naturalized.

The 1954 Convention recognizes that statelessness continues to occur. It therefore seeks to ensure that stateless persons have a status and enjoy minimum standards of treatment until such time as their predicament can be resolved. The 1954 Convention sets the internationally recognized definition of who counts as a stateless person.

### **2. The statelessness conventions help to resolve conflict of law issues, and prevent individuals from falling through gaps between citizenship laws.**

With increased global migration and the rise of intermarriages between citizens of different States, more and more individuals are confronted with complex legal and procedural requirements to establish their citizenship. Accession to both statelessness instruments ensures increased legal transparency and predictability with respect to other States, as more States accept the baseline global rules enshrined in these treaties.

### **3. Preventing statelessness and protecting the stateless contribute to international peace and security and prevent forced displacement.**

Citizenship provides people with a sense of identity and is fundamental to full participation in society. Because they are not citizens of any State, stateless persons often comprise the most disenfranchised segments of society.

Several large stateless situations occur in border regions between States, in recently independent States or in countries that have experienced significant migration flows. In the absence of clear rules to prevent statelessness such as those in the 1961 Convention, disputes can occur between States over whether specific individuals or populations are nationals. Similarly, tensions may arise where stateless populations are not afforded minimum standards of treatment such as under the 1954 Convention. Destitute stateless populations are vulnerable to violent conflict and in some contexts have been forcibly displaced, either within the borders of the countries of their long-term residence or across international borders, creating refugee crises.

In acceding to the statelessness conventions, States can help prevent forced displacement by addressing one of its causes. The more States accede to the statelessness conventions, the stronger the international framework will be to prevent statelessness and therefore address a potential cause of instability.

### **4. Reducing statelessness improves social and economic development.**

In acceding to the statelessness conventions, States undertake to identify potential stateless populations and take measures to prevent and reduce statelessness within their borders. States thereby obtain a more accurate picture of not only the populations who are in need of State protection and services, but also those who can contribute to the economic and social development of States.

The Asian Development Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the European Commission have undertaken various studies that confirm the link between citizenship, providing legal identity, and social and economic development. Efforts to reduce statelessness are not necessarily costly – simple legislative or administrative reforms can have a significant impact by ensuring that all people with significant links to a State have citizenship. That said, identifying and addressing the risks of statelessness could have a positive impact in allowing for larger swathes of society to participate fully in a country's economic and social development.

### **5. Resolving statelessness promotes the rule of law and contributes to the better regulation of international migration.**

Reducing statelessness and identifying and regularizing the status of stateless persons contribute not only to economic and social development, but also to the broader respect for the rule of law in all societies. In today's age of widespread global migration, all States benefit from efforts to resolve statelessness, as reciprocal acceptance of minimum rules on citizenship contributes to better regulation of international migration flows.

### **6. Acceding to the statelessness conventions underscores a State's commitment to human rights.**

Several international human rights instruments affirm the right to a nationality. But the Statelessness Conventions are the only UN treaties that provide practical steps that assist States in realizing this right. By acceding to the statelessness conventions, States demonstrate their commitment to human rights and their cooperation with the international community to reduce and eliminate statelessness and respect the dignity of all individuals in need of protection.

*For more information please consult the following two brochures published by UNHCR in 2010: "Protecting the Rights of Stateless Persons: The 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons," and "Preventing and Reducing Statelessness: The 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Stateless Persons," available on: [www.unhcr.org/statelessness](http://www.unhcr.org/statelessness).*