

The Campaign to End Statelessness

January – March 2019 Update



#IBelong

Join us in our Campaign to End Statelessness



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Mobilizing Governments and Civil Society

On 25 January, a new [Guidance Note of the Secretary-General on the United Nations and Statelessness](#) was issued. It replaces the 2011 Guidance Note on the same subject and contains useful updates, including references to UNHCR's #IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness and many new resources that have been produced to assist States and others to address statelessness. The Guidance Note and the accompanying [UN Key Messages on Statelessness](#) document are designed to support advocacy by actors across the UN system, and particularly in the lead-up to the High-Level Segment on Statelessness. The High-Level Segment on Statelessness will take place on the first day of UNHCR's Executive Committee meeting, on 7 October 2019, and will mark the mid-point of the #IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness by 2024. In March, UNHCR launched a [website on the High-Level Segment on Statelessness](#) which contains background information on the #IBelong

Campaign and guidance documents for States and international organizations to submit pledges at the event. In the lead-up to the High-Level Segment on Statelessness, regional preparatory meetings are being convened to review progress and prepare pledges.

On 14 February, UNHCR and UNICEF jointly issued an [advocacy brief on Ending Childhood Statelessness in Europe](#). The two agencies call on States and regional organizations to take urgent action to ensure that no child is born, or remains, stateless in Europe and proposes a series of low-cost, effective and sustainable solutions.

On the occasion of International Women’s Day on 8 March, UNHCR published the 2019 version of the [Background Note on Gender Equality, Nationality Laws and Statelessness](#). There remain 25 countries where women cannot confer their nationality to their children on an equal basis with men. To strengthen advocacy efforts, the Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights prepared a [video](#) explaining why gender discrimination in nationality laws is harmful and can lead to statelessness, pointing to the need for law reform.

From 4 to 8 February, the Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness organized its inaugural **statelessness intensive course** at the University of Melbourne, **Australia**. The course brought together more than 30 participants from 12 different countries, representing universities, government departments, NGOs, law firms and human rights organizations. The program also involved UNHCR representatives, international legal scholars and statelessness practitioners from around the world.

On 13 March, during the **40th Session of the Human Rights Council**, the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues held an interactive dialogue with States, UN agencies and NGOs to discuss the [recommendations](#) from the [eleventh session](#) of the [UN Forum on Minority Issues](#) which was focused on the theme ‘Statelessness: a minority issue’. Issues around statelessness and the right to nationality featured prominently in this dialogue, and many participants noted the importance of the #IBelong Campaign.



Participants at the inaugural statelessness intensive course organized by the Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness © Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness

Interview with Volker Türk, Assistant High Commissioner - Protection

As the AHC/P and in previous roles in UNHCR you have acted as a champion of the Organization's work on statelessness. Can you share your perspective on how the statelessness work has evolved over the years?

My first posting with UNHCR was in Kuwait from 1991 to 1993. Statelessness was of course a big issue there. Having written a PHD about UNHCR and its mandate, I had a strong feeling about UNHCR's responsibility towards stateless people and the role we had to play in fighting for the rights of the Bidoon, including their access to education. It was a very enlightening experience for me. I then went to Headquarters in the mid-1990s as a Legal Officer for Central and Eastern Europe exactly when the breakup of the Soviet Union led to massive statelessness issues in the region, and UNHCR's work on the issue really started to increase. At the time the understanding within UNHCR of the issue and its potential linkages to displacement was not very pronounced yet. But by the time I became the Director of the Division of International Protection we had some momentum and even strong encouragement from the General Assembly to do more.

I was so happy when in 2014 we were able to launch the #IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness by 2024. We realized of course that it was highly ambitious, but we thought, "Why should the world not be ambitious about resolving an issue that is entirely man-made?" In that time, we expanded the Statelessness Section, upgrading it from a Unit, and created new regional statelessness positions around the world, helping to make the work much more operational. There's no doubt the Campaign has helped enormously in raising awareness. Our expertise is widely recognized now, including in the



Volker Türk, Assistant High Commissioner – Protection © UNHCR

very complex situation in Myanmar. I think that we've gone from a situation where statelessness was not yet fully embraced by the organization to reaching a state where it has really become part of our DNA.

The transformation is visible also in the number of accessions to the statelessness conventions. For example, the number of accessions to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, has taken it from being moribund to having very meaningful adherence; there were fewer than 20 Parties for decades after its initial adoption and almost four times that number today. And there will be more accessions to come.

What are your expectations for the High-Level Segment on Statelessness that will take place on 7 October this year?

I hope that the High-Level Segment on Statelessness will generate significant pledges and media attention that helps ensure that the momentum is kept and that addressing statelessness continues to be on the radar of the international community. In the first half of the Campaign we've had a number of achievements, including steady reductions in some parts of the world, important law reforms, and twenty accessions to the statelessness conventions. I hope the High-Level Segment on Statelessness will help us get to zero in terms of the number of States that have gender discrimination in their nationality laws, for example, and that we're going to see strengthened partnerships and commitments by others in this area. It's important to remember that the High-Level Segment on Statelessness is an opportunity for international organizations as well as for states to make pledges.

Where do you see the most potential for action for the remainder of the Campaign? Related to that, what are the main challenges that States are facing and how can UNHCR help them to overcome them?

I see the most potential in bringing about legal reform because this is ultimately how future cases of statelessness can be prevented. States need to ensure that no child is born stateless by eliminating discrimination and introducing safeguards in nationality laws. Not very long ago, before the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1979, over half of the countries in the world had discrimination in their laws that made it difficult or impossible for women to confer nationality on their children. Now we are down to 25 such countries. Another area where I expect to see a lot of progress is data and analysis. The Secretary-General's new Guidance Note on Statelessness calls on States to strengthen data collection, and we are supporting this actively with UNFPA and others. Statelessness is also part of the remit of the new UNHCR-World Bank Joint Data Center, and I expect we'll see strengthened

engagement by the Bank in general in years to come as the data (including the total number of stateless persons and the nexus between statelessness and poverty) becomes clearer.

The biggest challenge for the remainder of the Campaign is resolving protracted statelessness situations, such as in Myanmar. Here the issue isn't technical support; political shifts are required. Our role is to keep these issues at the forefront of international attention.

The adoption of the Global Compact on Refugees at the end of last year and the convening of the first Global Refugee Forum this year will change the refugee landscape and UNHCR's way of working with governments and others in important ways. Will statelessness figure in the Global Refugee Forum and the work on the Compact going forward?

I see statelessness as part and parcel of the Global Compact on Refugees. It's there in paragraph 83 because of the connection to refugee flows, but the paragraph goes beyond that. Really when you read it everything that needs to happen is there. It is very positive that States wanted to have a dedicated heading on statelessness in the Global Compact on Refugees and that the Campaign is mentioned. Having this in the Global Compact on Refugees shows clear recognition of the issue. As the High-Level Segment on Statelessness will take place just before the first Global Refugee Forum, I see the High-Level Segment on Statelessness as a kind of launching pad for the Forum and the pledges to be made there, including because we've said that pledges made at the High-Level Segment on Statelessness will feed into the outcome document of the Global Refugee Forum in December. This will ensure that there will be follow-up to the High-Level Segment on Statelessness pledges and that statelessness will continue to be on the agenda into the future.



UNHCR Representative in Greece Philippe Leclerc (left), UNHCR Associate Protection Officer Petros Mastakas (left), Interior Minister Alexis Charitsis (right) and Special Secretary for Citizenship Lampros Blatsiotis (right) sign the Memorandum of Cooperation © Ministry of Interior Greece/Y. Heliotis

On 21 January, the Ministry of Interior of **Greece** and UNHCR signed a [Memorandum of Cooperation \(MoC\) on nationality acquisition and prevention of statelessness](#). The MoC foresees, inter alia, the support of two experts to assist with the collection and processing of reliable statistics on Greek nationality acquisition, the design and implementation of capacity-building activities for civil servants and the enhancement of quality assurance mechanisms in the Greek nationality acquisition procedures.

On 21 March, the Issue-Based Coalition on Large Movement of People, Displacement and Resilience organized a **side-event “[Leaving no one behind: Addressing statelessness and enhancing the resilience of vulnerable groups through the Sustainable Development Goals](#)”** at the UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development. The event raised awareness with key representatives from States in Europe and Central Asia of the phenomenon of statelessness in the context of the 2030 Agenda.

On 17 and 18 January, the Kenya Human Rights Commission convened a **workshop on digital identity and citizenship** with representatives from the Government of Kenya and from stateless communities in Naivasha, **Kenya**. The workshop resulted in the creation of a government working group on statelessness to promote access to birth registration and nationality for the remaining stateless communities in Kenya.

On 9 February, UHNCR and the National School of Administration (ENA) convened a conference in Kinshasa, **Democratic Republic of Congo**, on **“Statelessness, Nationality, and the Right of Asylum”**. The conference was attended by more than 100 participants and resulted in a commitment on the part of ENA to integrate a module on addressing statelessness in its academic curriculum.



Nominated Working Group members from relevant Ministries, civil society sectors and UNHCR met for the first time to plan the implementation of the pilot project of the Bali Process Civil Registration Assessment Toolkit © Thailand's Ministry of Interior

On 4 March, the Committee of Justice and Human Rights of the Pan-African Parliament organized a **Workshop on the Eradication of Statelessness in Africa** in Midrand, **South Africa**. The workshop was facilitated by UNHCR and culminated in a draft resolution on statelessness, which will be submitted to the Pan-African Parliament General Assembly session in May 2019.

On 5 March, the Statelessness Country Technical Team (ETAP) in **Burkina Faso** reviewed the achievements of the Government to end statelessness during a meeting which was attended by Government officials, UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM and civil society organizations. The Minister of Justice emphasized the ongoing revision of the Code of Persons and the Family, including in relation to aspects concerning civil status and nationality, as well as the Government's commitment to adopt a law on the status of stateless persons and adopt a statelessness determination procedure.

On 13 March, the Ministry of Interior of **Thailand** organized the first meeting of a working group that will lead the pilot project of the [Bali Process Civil Registration Assessment Toolkit](#) which targets hard-to-reach populations including stateless persons, persons of undetermined nationality and undocumented persons. The pilot aims to evaluate the Toolkit and draw lessons from its implementation prior to a complete roll-out to the

other Bali Process Member States, including Bangladesh, Malaysia, Pakistan and the Philippines. The working group exists of focal points from relevant ministries, civil society and UNHCR. The meeting resulted in an agreement to conduct an initial mapping of hard-to-reach populations in Thailand.

In January, the Government of **Turkmenistan** formally endorsed a **National Action Plan (NAP) to Eliminate Statelessness (2019-2024)**. Among other actions, the NAP foresees reform of the civil registration legislation to allow children of undocumented parents to be registered at birth.

On 1 February, UNHCR and UNICEF in the **Kyrgyz Republic** convened a [Parliamentary Roundtable on Birth Registration and Prevention of Childhood Statelessness](#) in Bishkek. The roundtable was organized within the framework of the UNHCR-UNICEF Coalition on Every Child's Right to a Nationality and the country-specific joint strategy on addressing childhood statelessness. The event convened parliamentarians and experts to raise awareness of Kyrgyzstan's legislative gaps in birth registration and discuss amendments needed to prevent childhood statelessness. It resulted in an agreement to create a working group to review the draft law on civil registry acts with the aim of amending the legislation by mid-2019.

Implementation of the Global Action Plan

With respect to **Action 1 (Resolve existing major situations of statelessness)**, from 18-20 February, UNHCR and NGO partners in the Kyrgyz Republic conducted a profiling exercise of stateless persons in the north and south of the country. The exercise aimed at improving UNHCR's and the Government's understanding of the stateless population, their backgrounds, capacities, integration needs and access to services. Data obtained as a result of profiling will be used to further develop a solutions strategy for stateless persons.

In line with **Action 1, Action 7 (Ensure birth registration for the prevention of statelessness)** and **Action 8 (Issue nationality documentation to those with entitlement to it)**, the Government of Tajikistan approved the expansion of statelessness identification and reduction activities in eight new districts of Tajikistan. The project is implemented as part of the UNHCR-UNICEF Coalition on Every Child's Rights to a Nationality and is combined with a birth registration component covered by UNICEF targeting some 2,500 children. By this decision, the Government again confirmed its commitment to address the issue of statelessness in the country. UNHCR continues advocating for the adoption of an amnesty law to address statelessness issues among persons for whom solutions cannot be found under the existing legal framework.

Also in line with **Action 1**, the National Legislative Assembly of Thailand passed a bill to amend its Civil Registration Act in January 2019. Among other things, the amendment facilitates the acquisition of Thai nationality for abandoned stateless children who have resided in Thailand for at least 10 years.

On **Action 2 (Ensure that no child is born stateless)**, the number of foundlings who were granted Ivorian nationality following legal proceedings in Côte d'Ivoire has gone up to eleven since the beginning of 2019. In 2018, a court granted nationality to five children following a landmark court decision. A judge in Soubre recently followed the decision and issued nationality certificates to an additional six children.

In line with **Action 3 (Remove gender discrimination from nationality law)**, Lesotho enacted [constitutional reforms](#) to grant women and men an equal ability to confer nationality on spouses. UNHCR and the Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights have advocated for this reform, which puts an end to the inequality between men and women with regard to the acquisition of nationality.

With regard to **Action 6 (Grant protection status to stateless migrants and facilitate their naturalization)**, on January 16, Panama enacted an [Executive Decree on the protection and identification of stateless persons](#). This Decree establishes a statelessness determination procedure and guarantees access to rights for stateless persons, including family reunification, access to work, health, education, housing and travel documents. The Decree also includes safeguards against statelessness for foundlings. This Executive Decree was based on the [UNHCR Draft Articles on the Protection of Stateless Persons and the Facilities for their naturalization](#).

Also in line with **Action 6**, on 8 March, the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo adopted “Ministerial Decree 1061”, establishing an inter-institutional committee to coordinate and oversee the eradication of statelessness in the country. In particular, the committee will oversee the country’s accession to the statelessness conventions, ensure that its legislation conforms to international standards set by the conventions, develop a National Action Plan on eradicating statelessness, and establish a body responsible for implementing statelessness determination in accordance with established procedures.

Further progress on protection occurred in Moldova, where the Constitutional Court, in a [decision](#) of 18 January, established the right for stateless parents of four or more children to benefit from State health insurance free of charge. Moreover, on 10 February, a new [“Law on the promotion of employment and unemployment insurance”](#) entered into force providing subsidies to employers who offer jobs to stateless persons at risk of social exclusion.

In line with **Action 8 (Issue nationality documentation to those with entitlement to it)** and **Action 10 (Improve quantitative and qualitative data on stateless populations)**, UNHCR partner Mercy Hands completed a qualitative and quantitative survey to identify the size of stateless persons and those at risk of statelessness in Diyala and Barsa governorates in Iraq. Mercy Hands continued provision of legal assistance to cases identified that meet the statelessness criteria.

With respect to **Action 9 (Accede to the UN Statelessness Conventions)**, on 14 March, the Council of Ministers of Angola approved the country’s accession to both the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. The bill will now go to the Parliament, prior to endorsement by the President.

In line with **Action 10**, UNHCR and the National Institute of Statistics of Côte d’Ivoire held a workshop from 12 to 14 February to validate the findings of the nation-wide statelessness mapping exercise conducted in 2018. The report will be launched later in the year.

Campaign Publicity

UNHCR released a [video](#) about the Evaluation and Follow-up Mechanism “Towards Zero Statelessness”. This evaluation mechanism was developed to support States in **Latin America and the Caribbean** to determine if they have managed to eradicate statelessness. It is also a tool that contributes to the development of strategies and operations plans at the national level and gives visibility and recognition to the progress of States.

In the **Kyrgyz Republic**, the UNHCR-UNICEF Coalition on Every Child’s Right to a Nationality organized a successful public information campaign called ‘[invisible children](#)’ from 28 January to 1 February. Transparent child-shaped installations were placed in the Parliament and in key public spots in Bishkek to support and raise awareness of the fundamental right of every child to birth registration, a name and a nationality. The campaign ended with a parliamentary roundtable on birth registration.



Transparent child-shaped installations placed around Bishkek as part of the “Invisible Children” campaign to raise awareness of the fundamental right of every child to have a nationality © B. Zhanibekov

The Nepali NGO Forum for Women Law and Development, together with ‘Network of Persons Affected by Citizenship’, organized a photo exhibition in Kathmandu, **Nepal**, from 4 to 7 February called “My Womb, Whose Child”. The exhibition showcases photos and stories of 52 persons who have not been able to obtain citizenship. The photo exhibition was organized as part of an advocacy effort to bring about positive reforms in the Citizenship Act of Nepal, which is currently under discussion in parliament.

A number of events took place in **West Africa** to celebrate the 4th anniversary of the Abidjan Declaration on the Eradication of Statelessness. On 2 March, in **Côte d’Ivoire**, UNHCR and government authorities hosted a large event, which included an information session featuring a puppet show on statelessness. During the month of February, UNHCR published a number of short videos on statelessness on UNHCR [Niger’s Twitter profile](#).

In the **United Kingdom**, UNHCR supported a [Nowhere People exhibition](#) on statelessness at the Migration Museum in London. On 25 March, UNHCR hosted a [‘Museum Lates’ drinks reception](#) where a stateless person, as well as the Migration Museum Curator, the Director of the European Network on Statelessness, and the UNHCR Representative to the UK discussed the impact of statelessness on people in the UK and in the wider world.



Visitors at the Nowhere People exhibition during the opening reception on 25 March © UNHCR/J. Bulman

Upcoming Events

From 16 to 18 April in Nairobi, Kenya

The International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and UNHCR will convene a Ministerial Conference on the Eradication of statelessness in the Great Lakes Region bringing together States and other key stakeholders. It is expected that the 12 ICGLR Member States will formally extend the timeline of the Regional Action Plan, which currently concludes in 2019 and will work on the formulation of pledges that will be presented at the High-Level Segment on Statelessness.

From 16 to 19 April in Sanremo, Italy

The 3rd Arabic Statelessness course will be held at the international Institute for Humanitarian Law in Sanremo. The course is co-organized by UNHCR and focuses on government representatives from North Africa, the Middle East and the Gulf sub-region. The course aims to strengthen awareness of international standards while also providing a platform for participating States to share positive experiences and explore solutions and innovations.

On 23 April in Dushanbe, Tajikistan

UNHCR, in partnership with UNICEF and in close coordination with the Government of Tajikistan, will convene National Consultations on statelessness prevention and reduction to further promote the statelessness eradication agenda and prepare for the High-Level Segment on Statelessness.

On 25 and 26 April in Madrid, Spain

A regional statelessness conference will be convened by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain and UNHCR. The event will gather representatives from European Union Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland, EU candidate and neighbouring countries, as well as EU institutions, civil society representatives, academia and independent experts. The conference will serve as a platform for dialogue between States and other participants to share good practices, challenges and experiences in the lead-up to the High-Level Segment on Statelessness, and to develop pledges to be delivered on that occasion.

29 April, Iraq

A national conference on statelessness will be convened by UNHCR's partner Mercy Hands. The event is intended to discuss potential legislative solutions and engage key Government authorities in preparation for the High-Level Segment on Statelessness.

On 15 May in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

The UNHCR-UNICEF Coalition on every Child's Right to a Nationality will hold National Consultations on Birth Registration and the Right to a Nationality in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

On 30 and 31 May in Bangkok, Thailand

A regional preparatory meeting for the Asia-Pacific region will be convened in Bangkok, bringing together representatives from States in South East Asia, South Asia, East Asia and the Pacific, as well as from international institutions and civil society. The meeting will be an opportunity for States to take stock of progress made in addressing statelessness and advance country-specific undertakings for concrete commitments to be made at the High-Level Segment on Statelessness.

On 13 and 14 June in Astana, Kazakhstan

UNHCR, in partnership with UNICEF and ESCAP, will hold the 2nd Regional Conference on the Right to Legal Identity and Prevention of Statelessness. The conference will provide a platform to review progress towards the implementation of the [2018 Conference Outcome Document](#) and prepare pledges for the upcoming High-Level Segment on Statelessness.

From 17 to 21 June in Sanremo, Italy

The 8th English Course on Statelessness will take place at the International Institute for Humanitarian Law in Sanremo. The course is co-organized by UNHCR and focuses on government representatives looking into addressing statelessness and NGOs working with stateless people.

From 26 to 28 June in The Hague, the Netherlands

The Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion will convene the [2019 World Conference on Statelessness and Inclusion](#) with the theme “Citizenship for Inclusive Societies”. The conference will gather around 250 stateless activists, NGOs, academics, UN officials, government officials, artists and journalists from around the world to explore progress and unpack the challenges that need to be met to realize the right to a nationality for all.

From 29 July to 2 August in Tilburg, the Netherlands

The annual Statelessness Summer Course will take place at Tilburg University in the Netherlands. The course examines statelessness globally and draws participants from all regions of the world, including government officials, NGO representatives and UNHCR staff.

Campaign Resources

Want to support the Campaign? Take a look at our [#IBelong website](#) and post a digital banner on your website, mobilize your social media contacts by sharing one of our posts, download and post our Twitter cards or embed a short video that explains statelessness. Videos, photo essays and web stories can be found on our [#IBelong stories page](#). Legal resources are available on [Refworld](#).

Learn More About Statelessness

Learning about statelessness is fun and easy. Take advantage of our [self-study module](#) from the comfort of your armchair!



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