

The Campaign to End Statelessness

January – March 2021 Update



#IBelong

Join us in our Campaign to End Statelessness



In cooperation with
UNITED COLORS
OF BENETTON.

Mobilizing governments and civil society

On 25 February, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, UNHCR, and the International Association of Professionals in Humanitarian Assistance and Protection organized a webinar on [‘Parliamentary Action to End Statelessness by 2024’](#). It focused on the implementation of pledges from the 2019 High-Level Segment on Statelessness (2019 HLS) and on how parliamentarians can accelerate efforts to end statelessness by 2024.

On 25 February, UNHCR, UNFPA and the Expert Group on Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Statistics (EGRIS) organized a side event [‘Leaving no one behind: Improving Statistics on Statelessness’](#) on the margins of the UN Statistical Commission. It brought together a diverse range of experts to highlight to the statistical community the current scarcity and weaknesses of official statistics needed to estimate the size and characteristics of stateless populations globally. Emphasis was put on the ongoing development of new International

Recommendations on Statelessness Statistics (IROSS) under the auspices of EGRIS. The event galvanized technical and political support for IROSS, with recommendations expected to be submitted to the UN Statistical Commission for endorsement in 2023.

In March, UNHCR published [a series of six quick guides on researching statelessness](#) intended to serve as practical tools to improve knowledge, skills and capacity to collect reliable data on statelessness and to improve data collection output.

On the occasion of International Women’s Day (IWD), on 8 March, UNHCR published the [2021 update of the Background Note on Gender Equality, Nationality Laws and Statelessness](#).

On 10 March, ID4Africa commemorated IWD with a Livecast [‘Gender Matters in Identity Systems’](#). It focused on challenges faced by women and girls in accessing civil registration services.

On 25 March, the Refugee Advice and Casework Service (RACS) and Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness (Peter McMullin Centre) organized a [virtual event](#) to launch their report [“A Place to Call Home”](#) which highlights the legal and practical barriers to accessing citizenship faced by stateless refugee children born in Australia. Linked to the report, RACS, the Peter McMullin Centre and the Melbourne Law School Clinics at the University of Melbourne launched the Stateless Children Legal Clinic to offer legal support to stateless children in their application for Australian citizenship.

From 17 to 23 February, the **Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness**, with support from UNHCR, organized its third annual **Intensive Statelessness Course**. The course, which was held virtually, provided participants with knowledge, skills and practical tools to address statelessness.

Following a 2020 petition for the recognition of the stateless Pemba as **Kenyan** nationals hearings were held, in February and March 2021, by the Parliamentary Committee on Administration and National Security to gather historical information on the stateless Pemba population and their presence in Kenya. The Committee has now requested UNHCR and the Kenyan Human Rights Commission to support the compilation of a community register. This will be presented to the Committee and the National Task Force on the Identification and Registration of Stateless Persons, which will support efforts to address their statelessness.



The Parliamentary Committee on Administration and National Security of Kenya meets with the stateless Pemba community to discuss their situation. © Kenya Human Rights Commission



Consultations continued at the meeting between the Parliamentary Committee on Administration and National Security of Kenya and the Pemba community © Kenya Human Rights Commission

In January, UNHCR and the Executive Secretariat of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) commenced a **study on displacement, statelessness and solutions in the East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region**.

The study will assess the risk of statelessness among protracted refugee populations and explore their prospects for durable solutions. The findings and recommendations will contribute to the development of a comprehensive strategy for displaced persons and support implementation of the Consolidated Action Plan on the Eradication of Statelessness in the Great Lakes region. The study is in line with pledges made by the ICGLR Secretariat and individual member States at [the 2019 High Level Segment on Statelessness](#) and the Global Refugee Forum.



Thandeka Chauke and Tshegofatso Mothapo of Lawyers for Human Rights trained community journalists in Mpumalanga with Save the Children South Africa and Inter News. © UNHCR

From September to December 2020, UNHCR and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child conducted a [pilot learning course on the eradication of childhood statelessness](#) in the **East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region**. The course was designed to reinforce the engagement of civil society actors and national human rights institutions in efforts to prevent and resolve childhood statelessness.

On 10 February, in **South Africa**, Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR) published an [open letter](#) to the President calling for an inclusive approach to the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out and the avoidance of discrimination against undocumented persons and stateless persons. The Southern African Nationality Network, together with LHR, also called on member States of the **Southern African Development Community** to include stateless persons in COVID-19 vaccine plans, highlighting the vulnerability and risk of exclusion of such persons.

On 17 February, Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR) and Save the Children South Africa, with the support of Inter News, co-hosted a training for community

journalists on the causes and consequences of statelessness. In March, LHR co-hosted a workshop with the South African Judicial Education Institution on the role that the Children’s Court can play to eradicate childhood statelessness. Over 140 magistrates from across South Africa participated.

On 9 March, UNHCR and Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR) conducted a [parliamentary briefing](#) on statelessness in **South Africa** before the Home Affairs Ministry. UNHCR and LHR made recommendations on accession to the UN Statelessness Conventions; access to citizenship and birth registration; the development of a National Action Plan; and the establishment of a statelessness determination procedure.

UNHCR, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Social Affairs of the **Republic of Congo** hosted two training sessions to raise awareness of statelessness. A two-day event accommodated 50 law students in Brazzaville in February while an event in March urged 60 local journalists to mobilize in support of the eradication of statelessness in the country.



Mukhamadjon Turgunov, a former kickboxing champion and currently a taekwondo coach, finally received Uzbek citizenship in April 2020.
© UNHCR/Elyor Nematov, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

On 26 March, in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, UNHCR and the National Human Rights Committee organized a **regional roundtable on statelessness reduction and prevention in Central Asia**. Participants included representatives of relevant authorities and civil society partners from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. It was an opportunity for participants to assess progress on efforts to eradicate statelessness in the region, review the implementation of pledges submitted at the 2019 HLS, present best practices and achievements in the region, and discuss ways to close remaining gaps.

On 11 January, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was concluded among UNHCR's partners in **Kazakhstan**, the Migration Service Committee and the Ministry of Justice. The MoU aims to strengthen joint efforts including assistance to and protection of stateless persons, the roll-out of identification and documentation campaigns, and improvement of the legislative framework related to nationality and statelessness.

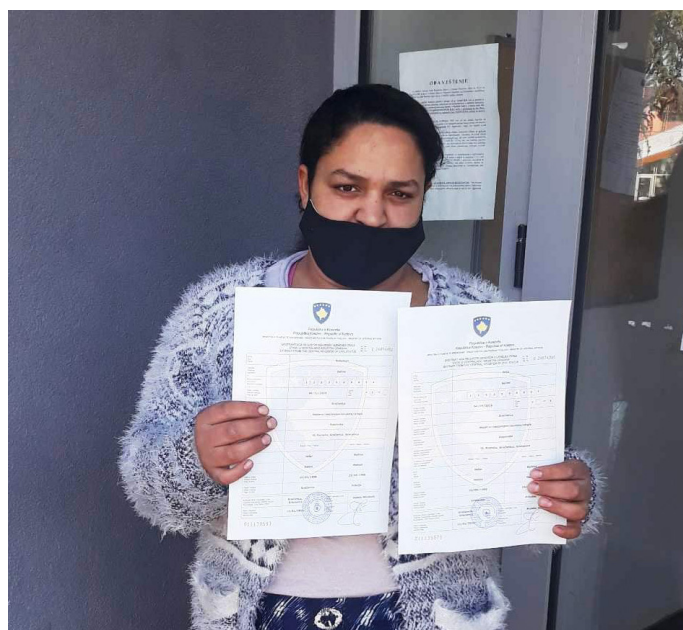
In January, UNHCR **donated** 19 sets of information and communication technology equipment to the **Uzbek** State Committee on Statistics to support the collection and management of disaggregated data on stateless persons and those with undetermined nationality.

On 4 March, in Karaganda, **Kazakhstan**, UNHCR contributed to a **press briefing** organized by the Migration Service Committee of the Ministry of Interior as part of the second phase of a joint country-wide statelessness identification and documentation campaign. The **press briefings** and outreach sessions aim to raise awareness of statelessness and support national eradication efforts.

On 24 March, the European Commission adopted the first comprehensive **EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child**. The strategy explicitly recognizes the special needs of stateless children, urging Member States to ensure access to birth registration for all children and to increase the capacity of front-line officials to respond to statelessness in the context of migration.

On 24 March, the **European Network on Statelessness** organized a **webinar** to launch its annual **StatelessnessINDEX** and provide a forum for experts to report on key trends.

As part of a broader awareness raising campaign in **Kosovo (S/RES/1244(1999))**, UNHCR and its legal partner organization Civil Rights Program Kosovo (CRPK) issued a **report** documenting individual success stories in obtaining birth and other civil registration documents.



Dragana Maksimovic-Durlevic received documentation proving that she was born in Kosovo (S/RES/1244(1999)). © Vushtri/Vučitrn Municipality

Implementation of the Global Action Plan

In line with **Action 1, Resolve existing situations of statelessness**, on 3 February, the President of **Uzbekistan** signed a Decree instructing the Government to grant citizenship to stateless persons who arrived before 1 January 2005 and have permanently resided in the country since. The Government estimates that some **20,000 stateless persons** will benefit from the new procedure, out of a total stateless population of over 97,000.

On 27 February, the Migration Service Committee of the Ministry of Interior of **Kazakhstan**, the International Bureau for Human Rights and the Rule of Law (KIBHR) and UNHCR launched the second phase of the country-wide statelessness identification campaign. Throughout March, the Migration Service Committee and KIBHR conducted outreach visits in six regions to raise awareness of statelessness, monitor the implementation of legislation, identify stateless persons and assist in resolving their situation. Since the launch of the first phase of the campaign in Kazakhstan in October 2020, more than 3,000 stateless persons have been identified and provided with legal assistance and counselling.

In line with **Action 3, Remove gender discrimination from nationality laws**, as of **6 February**, in **Iran**, a total of 86,558 applications were submitted following the legal amendment in June 2020 that made it possible for children of Iranian mothers and foreign fathers to apply for citizenship. Of these, 570 applicants have so far received their Shenاسنامه (Iranian nationality document). To support the process, lawyers contracted by UNHCR are providing legal assistance to individuals in the application procedure.

In line with **Action 6, Grant protection status to stateless migrants and facilitate their naturalization**, on 23 February, the Minister of Justice of **Côte d'Ivoire** formally installed members of the statelessness status determination commissions (first instance and appeal commissions) following the adoption of a Statelessness Determination Procedure (SDP) in September 2020. The **ceremony** also marked the 6th Anniversary of the Abidjan Declaration of ECOWAS Member

States against statelessness in West Africa and was attended by UNHCR, the UN Resident Coordinator and members of the diplomatic community. The event received considerable news coverage, including by **Radio France Internationale**. Further steps in establishing the SDP were made on 11 and 12 March, when Standard Operating Procedures were validated at a workshop organized by UNHCR and the Directorate for Aid and Assistance to Refugees and Stateless Persons.

On 26 January, **Thailand's** Cabinet approved a resolution to provide access to legal immigration status and permanent residency for registered stateless residents who have lived in Thailand for 15 years. The resolution will enhance the ability of up to 400,000 registered stateless persons to access a wider set of entitlements. Permanent residency will facilitate their eventual access to Thai nationality.

In January, the Ministry of Interior of **Montenegro** informed UNHCR that five persons had been granted statelessness status through the SDP established in 2018. Statelessness status provides these individuals with legal residence and access to basic rights. UNHCR and partners are supporting the Ministry of Interior to strengthen the SDP and to secure effective access to rights for those granted statelessness status by providing free legal aid and monitoring status determination interviews. These efforts are in line with Montenegro's pledge at the 2019 HLS to strengthen its SDP and better protect stateless persons.

On 1 January, **Slovakia** introduced provisions to its domestic law (**Act no. 145/1995 Coll. on Administrative Fees**) that will allow administrative authorities to reduce or waive the fee for a citizenship application submitted by a stateless person. This legal amendment is an important step towards facilitating the naturalization of stateless persons in line with Article 32 of the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons.

On 24 February, the President of the **Russian Federation** endorsed the introduction of amendments to the law "*On the Legal Status of Foreign Citizens in the Russian Federation*" to allow



Members of Parliament in Japan submitted the Bill for the Protection of Refugees and Other Persons to Parliament.
© Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan

stateless persons to obtain temporary identity cards (IDs). The IDs will be valid for ten years, although stateless persons will be required to renew them annually. The law will enter into force on 23 August this year. Former citizens of the USSR who did not acquire the citizenship of any of its successor countries will be able to benefit from this new law. They will also benefit from the right to work, the right of residence, and access to naturalization.

Finally on **Action 6**, on 18 February, a coalition of six opposition parties in **Japan** submitted a [Bill for the Protection of Refugees and Other Persons](#) to Parliament. Among other protection measures, the Bill adopts the customary international law definition of a stateless person and provides for the establishment of a SDP, as well as for the reception and integration of stateless persons.

In line with **Action 7, Ensure birth registration for the prevention of statelessness**, on 11 February, the ‘*Law on Amendments to the Law on Extra-Judicial Procedures*’ entered into force in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It enables courts to determine the place and date of birth of persons who were not previously able to provide documentary proof to complete birth registration. The law is expected to particularly benefit children born outside of hospitals and children born abroad without a birth certificate and to reduce the risk of statelessness among the Roma community. The law’s enactment follows concerted advocacy efforts by UNHCR and the legal aid NGO Vasa Prava BiH.

On 12 January, the Governments of **Haiti** and the **Dominican Republic** adopted a joint declaration to launch a process to identify and register all Haitian citizens on the territory of the Dominican Republic who lack a birth certificate.

On 8 March, the Department of Brazzaville in the **Republic of Congo** launched an awareness campaign on birth registration and prevention of statelessness. The campaign is supported by twenty community-based volunteers trained by UNHCR. The campaign aims to sensitize 40,000 households and expand to other departments in April 2021.

On 15 January, the [National Law on Comprehensive Health Care and Care during Pregnancy and Early Childhood](#) was published in the Official Gazette of **Argentina**. The law introduces substantial changes to the late birth registration procedure, allowing late birth registration to be processed through an administrative procedure rather than only by judicial decisions.

Finally, on **Action 7**, the Government of **Jordan** has continued its efforts to ensure that persons of concern to UNHCR are issued with birth certificates and other civil registration documents despite constraints imposed by the current pandemic. In the first quarter of 2021, the Civil Status Department issued a total of 616 birth certificates to refugees and asylum seekers while the local shari’a courts processed more than 250 marriage and kinship certificates that are usually needed to obtain a birth certificate.

In line with **Action 8, Issue nationality documentation to those with entitlement to it**, in February, the Government of **Namibia** [announced plans to grant nationality and issue nationality documentation](#) to stateless persons, persons with undetermined nationality and migrants who arrived in Namibia prior to independence.

In line with **Action 9, Accede to the UN Statelessness Conventions**, on 26 January, **Iceland** acceded to both the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. Prior to accession, Iceland undertook several steps to align its national legislative framework with both conventions: in 2016 the Act on Foreigners was adopted, which incorporates provisions pertaining to the protection of stateless persons, and in 2018 the Icelandic Nationality Act was amended to include safeguards for children born stateless in the country.

In line with **Action 10, Improve quantitative and qualitative data on stateless populations**, on 21 January, the Parliament of **North Macedonia** adopted the *“Law on census of population,*

households and dwellings in the republic of North Macedonia 2021” concerning the census exercise that will be rolled out from 1 to 21 April this year.

The census will include asylum seekers, refugees and stateless persons and presents an opportunity to identify the number of stateless persons on the territory and collect information on their profile. This should subsequently assist policymakers to develop prevention measures.

In 2020, the Lithuanian Migration Department carried out a [campaign](#) to analyse the situation of stateless persons in the country in line with its pledge at the 2019 HLS. As a result, 139 persons received individual counselling on the citizenship procedure, 57 of them submitted citizenship applications, and 15 became citizens of **Lithuania**. The campaign has helped to identify several issues that have discouraged stateless persons from applying for Lithuanian citizenship, including the requirement to pass Lithuanian language and constitution exams, lack of financial resources, and age considerations affecting the elderly.

Media Impact of the Campaign

From December 2020 to January 2021, UNHCR conducted an [awareness raising campaign](#) in Central Asia to highlight problems faced by stateless women. A series of human-interest stories were published and disseminated on social media platforms in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The campaign reached 340,000 people online and received over 23,000 views.

On 20 January, UNHCR published, [“A whole new world has opened in front of me”](#), profiling a former stateless taekwondo-trainer in Uzbekistan who acquired Uzbek nationality following the entry into force of a new citizenship law that benefited around 50,000 stateless persons.

On 25 February, UNHCR published a story on statelessness in Uzbekistan entitled [“Stateless for 20 years, a filmmaker becomes an Uzbek citizen at last”](#).

On 24 December, UNHCR issued a [press release](#) commending the efforts of the Supreme Court of the Philippines in establishing a new committee to accelerate the naturalization of refugees and stateless people.

On 29 January, UNHCR published a [press release](#) welcoming Iceland’s accessions to the UN Statelessness Conventions.

On 20 February, the Public Broadcaster in Georgia dedicated a [talk show](#) to the issue of statelessness. Representatives of UNHCR, the Public Services Development Agency, and the Office of the Public Defender discussed the importance of identifying and documenting stateless persons as well as the need for facilitated naturalization procedures.

Upcoming Events

15 April, virtually

The Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion, the Centre for Civil and Political Rights, Child Rights Connect, TB-NET and IWRAW Asia Pacific will organize the virtual event 'How to protect every child's right to a nationality' with UN Treaty Body experts. Registration is open [here](#).

In June

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation and UNHCR will convene a Roundtable on Statelessness to discuss policy responses to statelessness in the Middle East and Northern African region.

From 12 to 23 July, virtually

With support from UNHCR, the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion will organize its 2021 Statelessness Summer Course targeting civil society activists and statelessness practitioners. The course will be held in an adapted online format. Applications can be submitted [here](#).

From 21 June to 16 July, virtually

In partnership with UNHCR, the International Institute of Humanitarian Law will organize its 2021 course on statelessness. It is designed for government officials and NGOs dealing with stateless persons or addressing statelessness in their country. Applications can be submitted [here](#).

From 26 to 30 July, virtually

UNHCR and the Catholic University of Central Africa are organizing the third edition of the Statelessness and Nationality course for French-speaking practitioners. More information on the contents of the course and on how to register can be found [here](#). Applications can be submitted until 14 May.

In September

On the margins of the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly, UNHCR and the United Nations Treaty Office will co-organize a Treaty Event to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the adoption of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

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!



In cooperation with

UNITED COLORS
OF BENETTON.

unhcr.org/ibelong