

# The Campaign to End Statelessness

October – December 2018 Update



# #IBelong

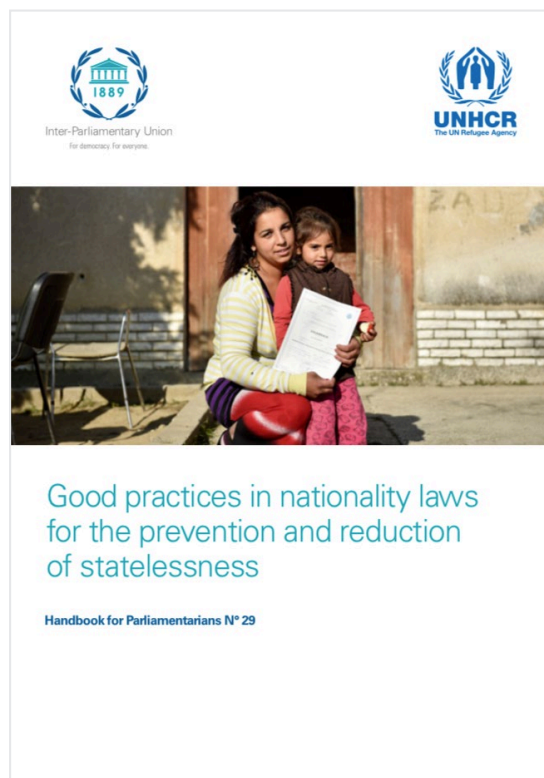
Join us in our Campaign to End Statelessness



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## Mobilizing Governments and Civil Society

The **fourth anniversary of the #IBelong Campaign** was commemorated on 14 November at UNHCR Headquarters in Geneva. Government representatives, sister UN agencies, civil society partners, high-level supporters and UNHCR staff gathered to mark the mid-point of the Campaign. The event featured remarks by the High Commissioner for Refugees, the Ambassador of Brazil on behalf of some members of the Group of Friends, and **Artee Mayer**, a formerly stateless young woman from Thailand who recounted her journey from being stateless to becoming a citizen. Spirits were lifted with a performance by eShun, UNHCR's High-Level Supporter from Ghana, who performed her Afropop-inspired **IBelong song**. The event also included the launch of a new Handbook for Parliamentarians on **Good Practices in Nationality Laws for the Prevention and Reduction of Statelessness**. The Handbook is a joint publication by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and UNHCR.





Maha Mamo was given Brazilian citizenship during the statelessness side event at UNHCR's 2018 Executive Committee meeting, Switzerland ©UNHCR/S. Hopper

In preparation for the 2019 High-Level Event on Statelessness, **two regional preparatory meetings** took place. From 12 to 14 November, a **Regional Meeting on Statelessness** was held in Saly, **Senegal**, organized by UNHCR and ECOWAS. The discussions focused on the implementation of the Banjul Plan of Action on the Eradication of Statelessness in West Africa and the road towards the 2019 High-Level Event on Statelessness.

On 4 and 5 December, an **International Statelessness Conference** took place in Minsk, **Belarus**, organized by the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Belarus, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Executive Committee and UNHCR. The event brought together over 100 participants, including representatives from the CIS, the UN agencies in Belarus, and participants from academia and civil society. Participants discussed current practices, gaps and challenges in terms of addressing statelessness.

On 29 and 30 November, the **Eleventh Session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues** was convened in Geneva with the theme "**Statelessness: A Minority Issue**". The Forum gathered over 500 participants representing governments, the UN, intergovernmental, national and regional organizations, and civil society.

On 18 and 19 December, the **High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges in 2018** looked at "Protection and solutions in urban settings: engaging with cities". The Dialogue focused on the role of cities and local authorities in protecting and assisting displaced and stateless populations.

Sisters **Maha and Souad Mamo** were granted **Brazilian nationality**, with Maha receiving hers during a surprise ceremony that took place at a side event during the 69th session of the UNCHR Executive Committee meeting in Geneva on 4 October. In June, the two young women had been the first to have their statelessness status confirmed under Brazil's new migration law, which grants protection to stateless persons and provides for residence and simplified naturalization procedures.

# Interview with Carol Batchelor, UNHCR's Special Advisor on Statelessness

## What is your role as UNHCR's Special Advisor on Statelessness?

The High-Level Event on Statelessness, planned to take place in October 2019, will mark the mid-way point in our 10-year #IBelong Campaign. This Campaign was launched in 2014 with a view to ensure all stateless persons have been identified and supported with solutions by 2024. My particular role is to facilitate a High-Level Event which advances these goals by ensuring that at this critical mid-way point, together with states, organizations, civil society and stateless persons, we take stock of successes in the first five years of the Campaign and that we secure concrete commitments in the form of pledges for the remaining five years. The mid-way point therefore represents our opportunity to ensure the success of the entire Campaign, running until 2024, in securing solutions for stateless persons.

## What do you expect to accomplish during your assignment?

I first worked on statelessness in the early '90s. Coming back to it after many years working in other fields, it is remarkable to see all the progress made. Having said that, there is still a lot that remains to be done. Stateless people continue to live on the fringes of society and most cannot claim an absolute entitlement to live, work, marry, educate themselves or even access health care. Children continue to be born without registration or an identity in any state. Through this Campaign we have the opportunity to shine a much greater light on the nature and scope of the problem of statelessness and to secure lasting solutions so that those who are either stateless or at risk of statelessness today will have a chance to find their place in society.

## What have been the biggest achievements of the #IBelong Campaign so far?

The #IBelong Campaign calls on all states to individually ensure 10 critical steps which, when combined at the global level, would result in the eradication of statelessness. An extremely important achievement of the Campaign to date is that it has brought focus and has moved many states to take proactive, forward-looking actions that deal with the issue now. We will likely never



UNHCR's Special Advisor on Statelessness, Carol Batchelor, speaks at the statelessness side event during UNHCR's 2018 Executive Committee meeting, Switzerland, ©UNHCR/S. Hopper

know how many people have already been spared a life of statelessness as a result of these progressive steps, but we can unequivocally say that the number is significant. Several states have made progress on one or more of the Campaign goals, such as improvements in birth registration, avoiding statelessness at birth, resolution of protracted situations of statelessness, and the adoption of procedures to help to determine if someone is stateless. The Campaign has also served as a platform for states to address this issue at the regional level through concerned organizations, and the positive impact of this will be felt for years to come. I hope to see a greater focus in the second half of the Campaign on the gathering of reliable data as well as on statistical reporting which will help to define the scope of the problem of statelessness. With concentrated ongoing determination and advocacy, we will see continued progress and even greater dividends ahead in the reduction of statelessness.

## What can field operations do to support the High-Level Event and the Campaign?

The High Commissioner recently sent a letter to all member and observer states to remind them of the #IBelong Campaign, to invite them to the High-Level Event, and to appeal for their increased efforts toward the elimination of statelessness. At the Event, states will have the opportunity to highlight their accomplishments to date and to outline concrete, timebound pledges for the remaining five years of the Campaign. In support of this all, operations are encouraged to strengthen their advocacy, identify areas where they can facilitate progress toward specific goals, and actively advise HQs of where we can collaborate in advancing our Campaign's success.



UNHCR marks the fourth anniversary of the #IBelong Campaign Update, Switzerland ©UNHCR/S. Hopper

On 10 and 11 October, the European Network on Statelessness convened an [advocacy workshop](#) in **Strasbourg** to take stock of what the **#RomaBelong** project has achieved so far, share learning and expertise, and strategize and prioritize action for the next phase of the project. The event brought together Roma civil society, NGOs and key regional institutions. At a separate event in Strasbourg on 10 October, the European Network on Statelessness convened a lunchtime reception where it presented its [Statelessness INDEX](#), an online comparative tool that assesses how countries in Europe protect stateless people and what they are doing to prevent and reduce statelessness. The event also provided a forum to discuss recent action taken and future activity by the Council of Europe.

On 10 and 11 October, UNHCR facilitated the [7th Regional Course on Statelessness](#) in the **Americas** in Antigua, Guatemala. The course was attended by 65 participants from across the region, among them government representatives, officers of the National Committees for Refugees (CONARE), Inter-American System lawyers and NGO staff. The course was an opportunity for participants to improve their understanding of statelessness issues in the region and to discuss the preparations for the High-Level Event on Statelessness in 2019.

From 16 to 19 October, the International Institute of Humanitarian Law, with the support of UNHCR, organized the [6th Course on Statelessness](#) in **Sanremo, Italy**. The course brought together government officials from Cameroon, Greece, Israel, Italy, Pakistan, Serbia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Uganda, as well as representatives from the OSCE.

From 17 to 19 October, the **Latin American and Caribbean Council of Civil Registration, Identity and Vital Statistics (CLARCIEV)** held its [15th annual meeting](#) in Cartagena, Colombia. The meeting brought together representatives from civil registry institutions across the region to exchange experiences and good practices with respect to the registration and identification of stateless persons. The meeting concluded with the adoption of a declaration recognizing statelessness as a human right violation and underlining the key role that National Civil Registry Offices play in eradicating statelessness.

On 25 October, UNHCR held a workshop at the **Constitutional Court of Colombia**, training 35 magistrates and magistrate assistants on the prevention and reduction of statelessness. The topics covered in the workshop included legal mechanisms to prevent and resolve statelessness and the harmonization of domestic law with international legal standards on statelessness prevention.

On 25 and 26 October, UNHCR organized the annual “**Nationality and Statelessness Moot Court Competition and Conference**” in Mutare, **Zimbabwe**. The competition and conference aims to raise awareness and strengthen knowledge on nationality and statelessness among future lawyers, leaders and decision-makers.

From 29 October to 3 November, in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, the **African Union’s Specialised Technical Committee (AUSTC) on Migration, Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons** adopted the [draft Protocol on the Specific Aspects on the Right to a Nationality and the Eradication of Statelessness in Africa](#). It will next be reviewed by the AU STC on Legal Affairs, prior to its adoption and ratification by States.

On 31 October, the **2nd OSCE-UNHCR Practical Seminar on Sharing Good Practices on Statelessness** among OSCE participating States took place in Vienna, Austria. The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and delegates from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Iceland, the Russian Federation and Turkmenistan attended the seminar, where they shared their good practices and lessons learned concerning the prevention and reduction of statelessness.

On 8 November, UNHCR and UNICEF organized an [award ceremony for the “My nationality has a story” contest](#) in Santiago, **Chile**. The contest was an initiative of the UNHCR-UNICEF Coalition to End Childhood Statelessness and invited 5th to 8th grade students to write stories on the right of every person to a nationality.

On 8 and 9 November, in Dalat, Vietnam, Vietnam’s Representatives to the **ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children**, in partnership with UNHCR, organized a regional consultation workshop on ensuring the recognition of legal identity for all women and children in ASEAN. The workshop resulted in an agreement that Member States need to prioritize the issues of universal birth registration, access to nationality for foundlings, gender equality in nationality laws and improved data collection.



Award ceremony for the “My nationality has a story” contest in Santiago, Chile, ©UNHCR/E. Paz

On 22 November, UNHCR, the **State Registration Service of the Kyrgyz Republic** and civil society organizations convened the second working group meeting with all territorial passport divisions on the statelessness caseload. The meeting was an opportunity to discuss challenges that impede resolution of the remaining cases of statelessness. It resulted in an agreement to work towards resolving 700 stateless cases by early 2019. It was further agreed that law and regulations need to be amended to require registration of all births irrespective of the parents' documentation and/or legal status.

On 19 November, UNHCR organized a seminar in **Madrid, Spain**, on "**Practices and Challenges in the Sphere of Statelessness**". The event gathered over 100 participants, among them representatives of the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Internal Affairs, the European Network on Statelessness, NGOs and UNHCR. The participants discussed the existing statelessness determination procedure and ways to improve it, as well as the way forward to address statelessness in Spain, in light of the High-Level Event in 2019.

On 21 November, the Ministry of Justice of **Guinea Bissau** approved a **National Action Plan on Statelessness**.

On 24 November, the Government of the **Republic of Congo** launched a multisectoral Statelessness Taskforce to develop a country's National Action Plan to end statelessness, in line with Commitment No. 11 of the [Brazzaville Declaration of ICGLR Member States on the Eradication of Statelessness](#).

On 28 November, the Government of **The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia** hosted a **high-level event** in Skopje to address issues related to birth and civil registration. The event was supported by the OSCE Mission and UNHCR's partner organization Macedonian Young Lawyers Association (MYLA). UNHCR, OSCE and MYLA agreed to work towards a legal analysis to identify gaps in the existing legal framework. The Prime Minister together with the Minister of Labor and Social Policy, stated that during the first quarter of 2019, the Government will outline its preferred model and proposals for amendments of the legislation.

On 28 November, UNHCR in **South Sudan** convened a [roundtable discussion on statelessness](#) with government officials, UN agencies and civil society in order to move towards the development of a National Action Plan on Statelessness. The event resulted in an agreement on an outline of the National Action Plan, which includes selected priority actions from the [Global Action Plan to End Statelessness](#) relevant to the South Sudanese context.

From 28 to 30 November, UNHCR and the Government of **South Africa** convened a regional Expert Meeting near Johannesburg on "**The Eradication of Statelessness in the SADC Region**". The meeting gathered representatives from SADC, civil society, and all SADC member States. Building on the 2017 Migration Dialogue for Southern Africa Ministerial recommendations, participants discussed best practices and challenges in the region, and reviewed a draft declaration and action plan on statelessness that will be submitted to governments and SADC for further consideration.

On December 1, the **Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights**, in partnership with UN Women and UNHCR, convened a **round table on Gender and Nationality in South Africa**. The round table gathered representatives of governments and civil society from Botswana, eSwatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. Participants reviewed international and regional standards, discussed best practices, and developed recommendations on how to ensure gender equality in nationality laws.

On 11 and 12 December, UNHCR and the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC) hosted an [inaugural strategic workshop on statelessness and legal identity documentation](#) in N'Djamena, **Chad**, with representatives from Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Republic of Congo and São Tomé and Príncipe. The event boosted engagement on the #IBelong Campaign in the region ahead of the 2019 High-Level Event on Statelessness.

## Implementation of the Global Action Plan

With respect to **Action 1 (Resolve existing major situations of statelessness)**, notable progress took place in Central Asia. As of October 2018, the region passed an important milestone of 50,000 resolved cases since the launch of the #IBelong Campaign in 2014. In **Turkmenistan**, 735 formerly stateless persons were granted citizenship during a [ceremony](#) in Ashgabat on 1 October, following promulgation of a presidential decree. In **Tajikistan**, UNHCR supported the Government in identification and reduction of statelessness activities in seven districts. By the end of 2018, most of the 31,500 persons that were identified through this project will have had their statelessness resolved.

On **Action 2 (Ensure that no child is born stateless)**, in October, a judge in the north of **Côte d'Ivoire** granted nationality to three foundlings on the basis of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, to which the country acceded in 2013. Two more foundlings are expected to obtain their nationality certificates before the end of the year. This is a remarkable achievement, as it is the first judicial decision on behalf of foundlings, one of the main profiles of stateless persons in Côte d'Ivoire.



Fotima (9), Zukhro (9), Bibikhadicha (7), Beniamin (5), and five-month-old Bibioisha received their birth certificates after their mother Jumagul was recognized as a citizen of Tajikistan. ©UNHCR/N. Akbaralieva

In line with **Actions 2, 3 (Remove gender discrimination from nationality laws), 4 (Prevent denial, loss or deprivation of nationality on discriminatory grounds) and 5 (Prevent statelessness in cases of state succession)**, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) issued a [decision on the case of Benjamin v. Government of Sudan](#) in November, concerning a child of mixed Sudanese and South Sudanese origin. The ACERWC recommended that Sudan grant Ms. Benjamin nationality on the basis that the child would otherwise remain stateless, and should take a similar approach in other such cases. The Committee further recommended reforms to guarantee gender equal nationality rights and to end discrimination against children of South Sudanese origin.

In line with **Actions 3, 4 and 5**, the Sudanese National Assembly approved the Nationality Act (Amendment) Bill 2018, which will restore Sudanese nationality to individuals of South Sudanese origin who have resided in the Northern parts of Sudan since 1924. The bill also allows Sudanese mothers to confer Sudanese nationality to their children in cases where the father is South Sudanese. The new bill will take effect after it is signed by the President of the Republic of the Sudan.

With respect to **Action 6 (Grant protection status to stateless migrants and facilitate their naturalization)**, on 18 October, the Government of **Uruguay** adopted a law on the [Recognition and Protection of Stateless Persons](#). The law establishes a legal protection framework for stateless persons and applicants for statelessness status to effectively access their fundamental human rights and facilitate their naturalization. This law was based on the [UNHCR Draft Articles on the Protection of Stateless Persons and the Facilities for their Naturalization](#).

With regard to **Action 7 (Ensure birth registration for the prevention of statelessness)**, from 20 November to 15 December, UNHCR supported the Government of **Burkina Faso** in the issuance of birth registration certificates to persons in border regions. From 4 to 13 December, UNHCR will support the Government in issuing 12,000 birth certificates in two border regions.

Similarly, from June to November, UNHCR supported the Government of **Côte d'Ivoire** in issuing approximately 400,000 birth certificates to children at risk of statelessness. The birth certificates will allow the children to sit for their primary school exams and grant them access to secondary education.

In **Chad**, as of November, the Directorate of Political Affairs and Civil Status has issued approximately 35,000 birth certificates for children of refugees and refugee-hosting communities at risk of statelessness. The project started in March 2018 and is being implemented in ten provinces.

Also with respect to **Action 7**, on 11 October, the Parliament of **Albania** adopted legal amendments to the country's civil status law removing barriers to birth registration. The amendments will reduce the risk of childhood statelessness, particularly among children born to Albanian parents outside the country and for children of the Roma and Egyptian communities. The amendments followed a [baseline study](#) by UNHCR and its partner Tirana Legal Aid Society, as well as a period of consultation with the Friends of Children Parliamentary Group, facilitated by the UNHCR-UNICEF led Coalition on Every Child's Right to a Nationality.

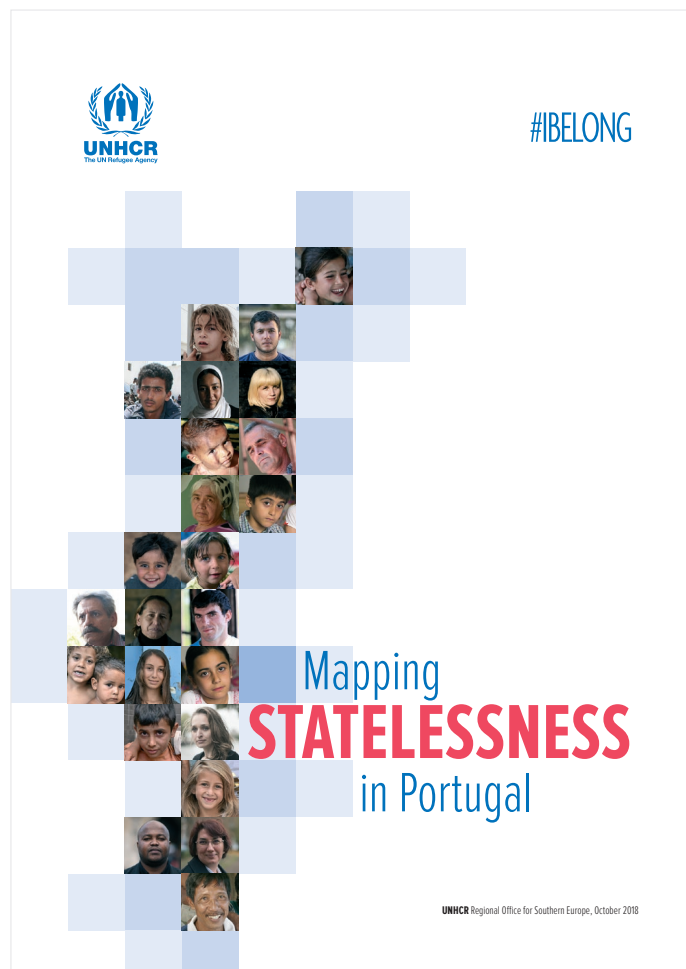


On **Action 8 (Issue nationality documentation to those with entitlement to it)**, the first issuance of official temporary ID cards for IDPs in **Yemen** was completed on 22 November. UNHCR is supporting the Civil Registration Authority in issuing civil documentation to 2,000 IDPs and IDP returnees, which allows them to apply for birth certificates and improve their access to services, including cash assistance. So far, 263 individuals have been issued the temporary identification cards.

In line with **Action 10 (Improve quantitative and qualitative data on stateless populations)**, UNHCR published two new mapping studies on statelessness. In October, a **Mapping on Statelessness in Portugal** was launched that undertakes a comprehensive analysis of the Portuguese legal system in relation to statelessness, provides quantitative data on the phenomenon and describes the challenges faced by stateless persons in the country. In November, UNHCR launched a **study on the situation of stateless persons in Switzerland** at an event in Bern.

In September, **UNHCR published** a study on **Statelessness and Citizenship in the East African Community**. The report addresses the intertwined issues of belonging, identity, nationality, migration and the legacy of colonialism in the region, and sets out clearly what States and others can do to support the eradication of statelessness in East Africa.

In line with **Action 10**, from 2-3 October, the **Philippine Statistics Authority** organized a public forum in Quezon City on the implementation of the Philippine Identification System Act signed on 6 August 2018. UNHCR and the Department of Justice successfully advocated for the inclusion of refugees, stateless persons, foundlings, Sama Bajaus and registered Persons of Indonesian Descent in this new Act. Among other things, the law will improve national data on persons of concern to UNHCR for purposes of registration, documentation and delivery of public services.



## Campaign Publicity

Many events took place around the globe to commemorate the fourth anniversary of the #IBelong Campaign, including the following:

In **Chad**, UNHCR and the Ministry of Territorial Administration, Local Governance and Public Security, held an event in the Lake Chad region to shed light on the situation of undocumented populations in the area. An exhibition on statelessness and nationality was also launched in the Lake region.

In **Kazakhstan**, a [press briefing](#) marking the anniversary was held on 13 November, raising awareness on statelessness issues and encouraging the Government, civil society and other stakeholders to join efforts in the prevention and reduction of statelessness.

In **Kenya**, UNHCR held a reception on 28 November that gathered stateless persons and Government representatives. The Director of Immigration Services declared the Government's commitment to regularizing the status of the Shona and persons of Burundian and Rwandan descent and announced the creation of a taskforce to this end. The National Bureau of Statistics announced that it would gather official data on statelessness as part of Kenya's population and housing census which is scheduled for August 2019.

In **Niamey, Niger**, UNHCR organized a sensitization campaign on 22 and 23 November to promote birth registration and documentation to celebrate the the #IBelong Campaign anniversary.



Sensitisation campaign on birth registration and documentation in Niamey, Niger ©UNHCR/B. Siddo



"Stateless. The labyrinth of the invisible", a photo exhibition launched by the UNHCR and the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID) in Madrid, ©UNHCR/O. Calvo

On 14 November, a cinema played a short UNHCR #IBelong Campaign video on one of the main avenues in the center of **Lisbon, Portugal** to commemorate the fourth anniversary of the #IBelong Campaign. On the same day, one of the country's largest daily newspapers published an [editorial article](#) on UNHCR's mapping of statelessness in Portugal.

In **Serbia**, UNHCR organized a conference on "[Combating Statelessness in Serbia – Achievements and the Way Forward](#)" on 2 November.

In **Madrid, Spain**, UNHCR and the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID) opened the [photo exhibition "Stateless. The labyrinth of the invisible"](#). The exhibition features a maze-like path that invites visitors to put themselves in the shoes of stateless persons.

In **Tajikistan**, statelessness related content was broadcast on local and national TV stations, radio programmes and published in newspapers, conveying messages on the importance of having nationality and identity documents.

In **Kiev, Ukraine**, UNHCR organized a conference on 5 November on "Eradicating Statelessness in Ukraine: Achievements and Challenges". Participants discussed the draft law on the establishment of a statelessness determination procedure, among other topics.

In October, UNHCR released a [video](#) on its partnership with the European Youth Parliament launched in July 2017. Through the partnership, UNHCR provides expertise on topics related to statelessness, refugees and migration, and supports the participation of (former) stateless persons at the international and national EYP events.

From 9 to 14 November, a team of journalists trained on statelessness by UNHCR in the **Republic of Congo** rolled out a campaign in Gamboma to raise awareness on the importance of birth registration. Over 500 persons were reached through a carnival event, a radio show, and awareness raising activities held with the public.

On 5 December 2018, a TV show on statelessness was launched on national television in **Burkina Faso**.

# Upcoming Events

## In February and March in Central Asia

National Consultations on the Right to Legal Identity and Birth Registration will be organized in Central Asia in partnership with UNICEF, other UN agencies and civil society organizations. The consultations will take place in February in the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan and in March in Turkmenistan.

## From 4 to 8 February in Melbourne, Australia

The Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness at Melbourne Law School will hold an [intensive course on statelessness](#), providing participants with knowledge, skills and practical tools to understand and address the problem of statelessness.

## On 25 February in Côte d'Ivoire

To celebrate the fourth anniversary of the Abidjan Declaration, UNHCR will host an award ceremony to honour three winning journalistic productions raising awareness on statelessness issues in the region.

## 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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