

The Campaign to End Statelessness

July – September 2020 Update



#IBelong

Join us in our Campaign to End Statelessness



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Mobilizing governments and civil society

On 23 September, in line with the core themes of this year's UN General Assembly (Beijing +25 and UN's anniversary), UN Women, UNDP, UNHCR, the Commonwealth and the Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights co-sponsored a High Level Side-Event on [Achieving Gender Equality in Nationality Laws](#). UN Women Deputy Executive Director Anita Bhatia, speaking also on behalf of co-sponsors UNDP and UNHCR, emphasized that eliminating gender discrimination in nationality laws is a peace and security imperative, as well as a human rights and development issue. The Ministers of Justice of Eswatini and Togo discussed their countries' current efforts to ensure equal nationality rights for women and prevent statelessness. Eswatini noted the pledge it made at the High-Level Segment on Statelessness in this regard. Highlighting the importance of gender equality in nationality laws to individuals' and countries' well-being, Commonwealth Secretary-General Rt. Hon Patricia Scotland emphasized that gender



Panelists of a General Assembly Side-event called on States to put an end to gender discrimination in nationality laws.

equality and women's empowerment are essential components of human development and basic human rights. A young Nepali activist, Neha Gurung, shared the impact of statelessness on her life; her statelessness resulted from her mother's inability to confer nationality on her at birth. She and her mother powerfully called for all countries to finally live up to commitments to gender equality made long ago.

On 24 September, **UNHCR convened a global retreat on statelessness** to strengthen strategic coordination among a diverse set of actors including representatives of civil society, international and regional organizations. Over 100 participants discussed key objectives and potential areas of joint work for the remainder of 2020 and 2021.

On 27 August, the **European Network on Statelessness** launched new country briefings on [Austria](#), [Czech Republic](#) and [Spain](#) and updated ten country briefings as part of their annual [Statelessness Index](#) updates. These country briefings provide a short summary of each country's law, policy and practice in relation to statelessness and set out recommendations to governments on how to improve the protection of stateless people and prevent and reduce statelessness in their national context.

On 26 August, the Minister of Interior of **South Sudan** endorsed a National Action Plan to End Statelessness (NAP). The NAP includes the accession of South Sudan to the UN Statelessness Conventions and reform of the nationality law to bring it in line with international standards on statelessness.

On 20 July, the National Commission for Refugees of **Burkina Faso** (CONAREF) convened to discuss the legal framework for the introduction of a Statelessness Determination Procedure.

On 7 July, UNHCR and the Government of **Turkmenistan** organized a virtual national roundtable on the implementation of the National Action Plan to End Statelessness in Turkmenistan (2019-2024). The event was attended by Members of Parliament, senior government officials and civil society organizations. The Turkmen officials emphasized the importance of eradicating statelessness by the 2024

deadline, reported on the recent legal amendments to ensure universal birth registration, and committed to adopt a Statelessness Determination Procedure (SDP) by the end of 2020. In view of the commitment to establish an SDP, UNHCR organized a webinar for government officials on 21 July to present global best practices.

From 14 to 17 July, **Thailand's** Ministry of Interior undertook a visit to Trat, a province bordering Cambodia, to evaluate local civil registration services in remote areas. The delegation met with local civil registrars and members of the population. A number of gaps were identified and the findings will feed into a set of recommendations to improve the civil registration and vital statistics system in Thailand.

In September, the Department of Justice of the **Philippines** and UNHCR conducted a series of training sessions on international legal standards on statelessness for the Philippine House of Representatives and the Senate.

On 8 October, the **Rosa Luxemburg Foundation** launched the [Atlas der Staatenlosen](#) (Statelessness Atlas) at a press conference in Berlin. Using 19 country examples, the Atlas describes the causes and consequences of statelessness around the world and gives an insight into the situation of stateless persons. Newspapers and the [national radio](#) covered the event and the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation developed a [video](#) to accompany the launch of the publication. The English version will be launched on November 10th and a French version should also be available by then.

On 10 September, the **5th annual meeting of the Central Asian Network on Statelessness (CANS)** took place. CANS members shared updates and progress in terms of efforts to end statelessness in Central Asia. NGOs from Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, the European Network on Statelessness and the Statelessness Network for Asia Pacific also participated in the meeting and shared their experiences working to end statelessness in the context of COVID-19.



Dilnaz Usenova, a third-year student from Kazakhstan (left), receives the prize from UNHCR for winning the regional Central Asian research paper competition for students on "Nationality and Statelessness: Modern Challenges and Innovative Solutions". © UNHCR/Yelena Sim

On 26 and 27 August, in **Tunisia**, UNHCR and the Arab Institute for Human Rights convened a workshop on the prevention of statelessness in the country. The workshop gathered a group of 15 Tunisian lawyers and judges to discuss current gaps in the nationality legislation, policies and practices. The importance of lifting Tunisia's reservations to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness was highlighted as was the need to support adherence to the Draft Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Specific Aspects on the Right to a Nationality and the Eradication of Statelessness in Africa.

On 3 September, UNHCR and the African Committee on Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child launched a three-month pilot learning course on the eradication of childhood statelessness in the **East and Horn of Africa**. Participants from civil society and national human rights institutes are being equipped with the legal knowledge and tools to be able to monitor, report and advocate on issues relating to birth registration and nationality.

On 1 September, the **Regional Central Asian Research Paper Competition for Students** on "Nationality and Statelessness: Modern Challenges and Innovative Solutions" was concluded. The competition, organized by UNHCR, the Al-Farabi Kazakh National University and the Central Asian Network on Statelessness, aimed to stimulate research on statelessness. Submissions covered topics such as the socio-economic rights of stateless persons, consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for stateless persons and innovative solutions for accelerating the reduction of statelessness. An independent jury selected winners from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

In September, the **European Network on Statelessness** and Fundación Cepaim organized a [series of online webinars](#) to discuss key issues faced by stateless people in Europe today and identify opportunities for law and policy reform. While the first session focused on closing protection gaps and addressing statelessness in Europe, subsequent webinars focused specifically on statelessness in Spain. Participants included stateless persons, activists, representatives of the refugee community, NGOs, policy makers, and UNHCR.

On 27 August, a number of organizations including UNICEF, the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion (ISI), the Global Campaign on Equal Nationality Rights, and UNHCR participated in a webinar to launch a text and materials book on '[The child's right to a nationality and childhood statelessness](#)'. The publication comprises excerpts from relevant sources - book chapters, reports, articles, jurisprudence, UN materials and treaty provisions - which were selected to provide an introduction to concepts related to childhood statelessness and to build the capacity of practitioners working in relevant fields.

On 8 October, the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion organized a webinar "[Together we can: A consortium to protect the stateless in times of COVID-19](#)". The webinar showcased projects being implemented by an alliance of NGOs and citizenship rights activists who are on the frontline of the crisis. The projects are made possible thanks to the [COVID-19 Emergency Statelessness Fund](#) which was recently set up by the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion.

On 26 August, the Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness hosted a panel discussion on the effects of COVID-19 on stateless persons, refugees and asylum seekers who seek protection in Australia. A recording of the event is available [here](#).

Implementation of the Global Action Plan

In line with **Action 1, Resolve existing major situations of statelessness**, in July, members of the Pemba community in Kenya made submissions at a hearing of the Justice and Constitutional Affairs Committee of the Kilifi County Assembly in relation to a petition they submitted in March. The Pemba are a stateless community who qualify for citizenship under Kenya's nationality law but lack evidence to prove eligibility. A representative of the Pemba community shared how their lack of nationality impedes their effective enjoyment of rights, while local communities and government officials detailed how they live in peaceful cohesion with the Pemba community. In August, a field verification exercise among the Pemba community was carried out by the Justice and Legal Affairs Committee of the local assembly and it is expected that the Committee will draft a report detailing their findings and making recommendations for the registration of the Pemba in Kenya.



Mekombo Abdalla and her husband Hassan Mbwana are members of the stateless Pemba community who qualify for citizenship under Kenya's nationality law but lack evidence to prove eligibility. © UNHCR/Roger Arnold

Furthermore on **Action 1**, in August, a bill seeking the recognition of the Maragoli community as one of the indigenous communities under the **Ugandan** Constitution was tabled before the Parliament by a member of the National Assembly. The bill underwent its first reading and was referred to the Legal and Parliamentary Affairs Committee for consideration. It will undergo scrutiny by the committee members, executive branch officials, UNHCR, and members of the public before the report is tabled back to parliament for the second reading.

Also in line with **Action 1**, on July 16, the President of the **Dominican Republic** promulgated an [executive decree concerning the Dominican nationality to 750 persons of Haitian descent](#) who applied to naturalize according to Law 169-14. All 750 persons had been affected by a 2013 Constitutional Court judgment depriving them of nationality. UNHCR issued a [press release](#) on this development.

With regard to **Action 2, Ensure that no child is born stateless**, on July 29, the Parliament of the Republic of **Albania** approved a new citizenship law which contains a number of positive provisions. The law uses the definition of a stateless person in the 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons and provides for an unrestricted safeguard to grant Albanian citizenship to all children born in Albania who would otherwise be stateless. The new law also removes the requirement of birth in the country for naturalization of stateless persons. The law is expected to be published in the Official Gazette in coming weeks.

In line with **Action 6, Grant protection status to stateless migrants and facilitate their naturalization**, on 1 September, **Kazakhstan** adopted a Statelessness Determination Procedure (SDP). The new SDP is accessible to any person claiming to be stateless, regardless of whether they possess valid identity documents or are lawfully residing in the country. The new procedure includes a number of procedural guarantees and the burden of proof is shared between the Government and applicant. The SDP will improve identification and protection of stateless persons, and contribute to reducing statelessness.

Also in line with **Action 6**, on 2 September, **Côte d'Ivoire** became the [first country on the African continent to adopt a Statelessness Determination Procedure](#). The adoption of the SDP is in line with Strategic Objective 3.1 of the ECOWAS Banjul Action Plan against Statelessness and the country's National Action Plan to Address Statelessness. A 2019 study identified 1.6 million people as stateless or at risk of statelessness in Côte d'Ivoire. The adoption of the SDP is a significant milestone which will help protect stateless people pending a nationality solution by allowing them to access basic rights.

With regard to **Action 6**, the **Russian Federation** is in the process of adopting a law which will introduce identification documents for stateless persons. The draft law passed its first reading in the State Duma, the lower Chamber of the Parliament, and is expected to be signed by the President this fall. The identification documents will allow stateless persons who meet certain criteria to reside and work legally and to apply for temporary stay in Russia. It is expected that thousands of stateless persons and persons with undetermined nationality will be able to regularize their stay and eventually their residency status in the Russian Federation.



A woman holds her infant in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, in 2006. © UNICEF/Giacomo Pirozzi

In line with **Action 7, Ensure birth registration for the prevention of statelessness**, on 1 July, **Turkmenistan's [new Law on Civil Status Acts entered into force](#)**. The new provisions will ensure that all children born in the country – including those with undocumented parents – will have their births registered. With this new law, Turkmenistan fulfils one of its pledges submitted at the 2019 High-Level Segment on Statelessness.

Also in line with **Action 7**, with support from UNHCR, on 30 September the Government of **Burkina Faso** issued late birth registration to 21,665 individuals in the Center-North and Northern regions facing conflicts and risks of statelessness. The General Directorate for Modernization of Civil Status of Burkina Faso and UNHCR also signed an agreement to introduce electronic civil registration in 37 health centers to prevent statelessness, using the iCivil platform. These health centers are located in areas where civil registration and documentation services are difficult to access, including as a result

of ongoing armed conflict. The project will also be implemented in border regions where a decision of the International Court of Justice has resulted in border demarcations following land disputes.

Furthermore on **Action 7**, UNHCR also supported the **Sudanese** Directorate of Civil Registry in resuming birth registration campaigns in a number of states including South Darfur, North Darfur and West Kordofan states. From August to September, a total of 4,895 children born to refugees, IDPs, returnees and host populations had their birth registered and were issued birth certificates.

Also on **Action 7**, in March the **Jordanian** Government passed Defense Order No. 5 suspending deadlines for birth registration in response to COVID-19. This allowed for the late birth registration of children whose births could not be registered during the lockdown. Late birth registration fees were also waived.



In line with **Actions 7** and **Action 8**, Issue nationality documentation to those with entitlement to it, on 8 September, **Lebanon** launched the electronic issuance of individual civil extracts, which will improve access to nationality documentation. UNHCR provided technical support and equipment to 55 personal status offices in Lebanon.

The Lebanese Ministry of Interior launched the electronic issuance of individual civil extracts. © UNHCR

Upcoming Events

In November, globally

November will mark the 6th anniversary of the #IBelong Campaign. The anniversary will be commemorated through virtual activities and communications around the world.

On 17 November, virtually

The Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion (ISI) and Open Society Justice Initiative will host an event featuring a report of the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance that will be launched in November. The event will consider nationality deprivation in relation to race, technology and borders. More information will follow soon on the website of ISI.

From 30 November to 4 December, virtually

UNHCR and the Catholic University of Central Africa/Catholic Institute of Yaoundé will organize a second course on statelessness and nationality law for French-speaking practitioners. Applications are open until 16 October through this [link](#).

From 17 to 23 February 2021, virtually

The Peter McMullin Centre will offer its [third Statelessness Intensive Course](#). The course provides participants with the skills and practical tools to understand and address the problem of statelessness. This live and interactive course is multi-disciplinary and employs a blend of theoretical and practical components, utilising mixed delivery methods.

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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