

The Campaign to End Statelessness

October – December 2019 Update



#IBelong

Join us in our Campaign to End Statelessness



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Commemorating the 5th anniversary of the #IBelong Campaign

Events were organized in different locations to commemorate the **5th anniversary and mid-point of the #IBelong Campaign**. In Geneva, Switzerland, a special screening of the award-winning movie **Capernaum** was hosted by the Graduate Institute Geneva on 4 November. The movie sensitively depicts statelessness and social issues such as early marriage, irregular migration and poverty. Opening remarks were made by UNHCR's Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, Gillian Triggs. The movie was followed by a panel discussion with Anuradha Sen Mookerjee, a Research Fellow at the Graduate Institute Geneva, Emma Batha, Journalist at Thomson Reuters, and Melanie Khanna, Statelessness Section Chief of UNHCR.

In Italy, UNHCR marked the anniversary of the #IBelong Campaign on 12 November with the **presentation of a new report “[The impact of statelessness on access to human rights in Italy, Portugal and Spain](#)”**. The report draws on testimonies of (formerly) stateless persons and persons at risk of statelessness, as well as contributions by civil society and authorities from the three countries concerned. During the event, UNHCR also **screened a documentary on the Rohingya** produced in 2018 by Innerspeak Digital Media Inc. The screening was followed by a Q&A session and debate with Paolo Farci, a lawyer with vast expertise on statelessness, and stateless persons who contributed to the report.



One of the photos of the photo exhibition 'Passport Photo' by Ukrainian photographer Oleksandr Chekmenev. This particular photo portrays a Roma woman, Vironika Brynzachka, currently assisted by UNHCR and NGO NEEKA in obtaining civil documents. © UNHCR/O.Chekmenev

On 5 November, UNHCR and the Ukrainian photographer Oleksandr Chekmenev launched the [photo exhibition "Passport Photo"](#) at the Kyiv History Museum. The exhibition features 29 photos and stories of stateless and undocumented people and sheds light on the needs and challenges of the up to 35,000 people in Ukraine who are stateless or at risk of statelessness. The exhibition was also

shown at the Ukrainian Parliament during Human Rights Week from 2 to 6 December. In that same week, Parliament adopted a law to establish a statelessness determination procedure in the first reading. The rap-singer Alina Pash [participated](#) in the opening of the exhibition and has become the voice of this year's #IBelong Campaign in Ukraine.

Mobilizing governments and civil society

On 3 December, the **358 pledges made by States, civil society and international and regional organizations on the occasion of the High-Level Segment on Statelessness were made public**. The pledges can be accessed via UNHCR's [#IBelong website](#). The pledges will feature in an outcome document which will be published in the first quarter of 2020.

From 9 to 11 December, UNHCR and UNFPA co-convened a **global expert meeting on improving official statistics on statelessness** in Bangkok, Thailand. The meeting gathered technical experts from 14 countries, UNECA, UNESCAP and UNESCWA, to enhance the capacity of national statistical offices and to lay the ground for the development of a handbook with recommendations on the production of statistics on statelessness. Work on this initiative will continue in 2020.



Participants of the National Roundtable for senior judges in Indonesia organized by the Supreme Court of Indonesia and UNHCR. © UNHCR

From 11 to 15 November, UNHCR supported a **study mission of the Philippine Government to the United Kingdom** to learn about best practices in addressing statelessness. The mission provided a useful platform to exchange lessons learned and current efforts of both States in identifying and protecting stateless persons and at-risk populations and strengthening mechanisms to prevent and reduce statelessness. The study mission was organized in the context of the Government's National Action Plan to End Statelessness by 2024.

On 28 November, **UNHCR met with the Parliamentary International Relations Committee of Myanmar** to give a briefing on UNHCR's statelessness mandate and statelessness issues globally. UNHCR also updated the committee on the progress of the #IBelong Campaign and provided examples of the kind of technical support UNHCR contributes to governments' efforts to address statelessness.

On 16 and 17 December, UNHCR and the **Supreme Court of the Republic of Indonesia organized a National Roundtable** on refugee and statelessness issues for senior judges in Indonesia. The participants were briefed on UNHCR's statelessness mandate and discussed efforts to address statelessness in the Indonesian context, including through universal birth registration.

In November and December in **Kazakhstan**, UNHCR and partners conducted a **series of awareness-raising and capacity-building events** for government officials in the cities of Nur-Sultan, Shymkent, Karaganda, Taraz and Kyzylorda. The events focused on issues related to the identification of stateless persons and referral to legal partner organizations.

On 12 December, in Bishkek, **Kyrgyzstan**, a **National Roundtable on Birth Registration and Prevention of Childhood Statelessness** was organized under the umbrella of the UNHCR-UNICEF Global Coalition on Every Child's Right to a Nationality. The event brought together civil registry officers and statelessness practitioners to discuss current challenges related to birth registration and develop plans to move towards universal coverage in Kyrgyzstan.

On 3 October, UNHCR organized a **roundtable discussion in Juba, South Sudan, on accession to the two UN Statelessness Conventions**. The roundtable was organized in close collaboration with the National Statelessness Focal Point and the National Coordinator of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and was attended by 35 members of the South Sudan Transitional National Legislative Assembly and representatives of UN sister organizations and civil society. The roundtable covered the causes and consequences of statelessness, the international legal framework on statelessness, including the two UN Statelessness Conventions, as well as South Sudan's pledge to adopt a National Plan of Action to Eradicate Statelessness.

On 12 and 14 October, a **participatory assessment exercise with persons at risk of statelessness was held in Juba, South Sudan**, organized by UNHCR, the Directorate of Nationality, Passports and Immigration, the National Focal Point on Statelessness and the UN Association for South Sudan. The exercise involved individual interviews with 13 community chiefs and focus group discussions with 66 persons representing 14 tribes. Respondents raised issues related to the lack of documentation and limited access to education, vocational training, and healthcare. The findings of the participatory assessment are to inform advocacy and assistance activities by UNHCR, its partners and government entities working on statelessness.

On 12 and 13 November, in South Sudan, UNHCR convened a **workshop on the right to a nationality and reduction of statelessness with the South Sudan Directorate of Nationality, Passports and Immigration (DNPI)** which was attended by officers of the DNPI, the Ministry of Gender and the Norwegian Refugee Council. The workshop aimed at improving the implementation of national procedures for the issuance of nationality certificates. A second workshop on 27 and 28 November in Juba assisted DNPI officers to interpret and apply the Nationality Act and Regulations in order to prevent statelessness.

From 9 to 13 December, UNHCR and the Catholic University of Central Africa organized a **French course on statelessness and nationality law in Yaoundé, Cameroon**. The course was attended by 32 representatives of civil society, academia and governments who work on civil registration and nationality. The purpose of the course was to analyse gaps in nationality and civil registry laws and identify challenges in preventing statelessness. It is expected that after this training the university will include a course on statelessness and nationality law in its curriculum and explore other opportunities for collaboration with UNHCR on statelessness, including through research.

From 20 to 22 November, UNHCR organized a **three-day workshop in Mombasa, Kenya for the members of the newly constituted Government taskforce on statelessness**. The aim of the training was to equip the taskforce with knowledge concerning the causes and consequences of statelessness; familiarize them with methods to identify stateless persons and resolve cases of statelessness; and to conduct an initial review of the nationality framework and related practices. On the last day, the taskforce met with representatives of stateless communities and county commissioners. This allowed the taskforce members to gain a better understanding of the situation of stateless communities and hear their views on how to work towards the resolution of statelessness in Kenya.

From October to December, UNHCR organized **'Breakfast Seminars' on statelessness in Norway, Finland and Sweden**. The events provided a platform for dialogue on statelessness, awareness raising of the situation of stateless persons, and stocktaking of progress made so far and challenges that remain. The events were attended by a wide variety of stakeholders, including representatives from ministries, civil society, researchers and stateless persons. On 1 October, a breakfast seminar with the theme ['Statelessness in Norway: A Life Without Rights'](#) was organized in Oslo in partnership with UNICEF and the Norwegian Organisation for Asylum Seekers under the umbrella of the UNHCR-UNICEF Coalition on Every Child's Right to a Nationality. The seminar also offered stateless

persons an opportunity to share their [personal stories](#). On 5 December, a [breakfast seminar was organized in Helsinki](#) in partnership with the Finnish Refugee Advice Centre. On 10 December, UNHCR hosted a [breakfast seminar in Stockholm](#). One of the speakers at the event was [Lynn al-Khatib](#), a student and activist from Syria with Palestinian heritage who has been living in a situation of limbo since she came to Sweden four years ago. The new NGO “Swedish Organization Against Statelessness” (Svenska organisationen mot statslöshet) was introduced during the event.

On 23 October, the **3rd Practical OSCE-UNHCR Seminar on Sharing Good Practices on Birth Registration and Childhood Statelessness** was convened in Vienna. The seminar was attended by the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, UNHCR, the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, the European Network on Statelessness, and a range of State and Roma civil society

representatives. In light of the OSCE-UNHCR project on statelessness, which kicked off in 2017 with the launch of the [UNHCR-OSCE Handbook on Statelessness in the OSCE Area](#), participants shared practical examples of how childhood statelessness can be prevented in the OSCE area.

On 30 and 31 October, the Ministry of Interior of **Montenegro** and UNHCR organized a **workshop on statelessness determination**. The workshop was organized upon the request of the Ministry following the 2018 adoption of a statelessness determination procedure and its recent pledge submitted at the High-Level Segment on Statelessness to strengthen the capacities of authorities to implement the procedure. The workshop gathered thirty officials from the Ministry of Interior and branch offices that will be running the procedure. During the two-day workshop, participants exchanged challenges and practices established so far and were briefed on international standards in the area of statelessness.



Participants at the workshop on statelessness determination in Montenegro, organized by the Ministry of Interior of Montenegro and UNHCR. © UNHCR



Actors of the Kyiv Roma Theatre of Music and Drama perform in a play “Invisible Roma” dedicated to the 5th Anniversary of the #IBelong Campaign. © UNHCR/A.Krepkih

On 4 November, in **Ukraine**, UNHCR hosted a **ceremony recognizing members of the State Migration Service and Civil Registry** for going the extra mile in supporting people to obtain civil documentation in five regions of Ukraine: Zakarpattya, Donetsk, Kharkiv, Odesa and Kyiv. From June 2017 to September 2019, UNHCR and its partners identified and provided legal assistance to 2,064 undocumented persons in these five regions. The ceremony was symbolically held at the Kyiv Roma Theatre, as the majority of people at risk of statelessness in Ukraine are members of the Roma community. The Theatre’s actors dedicated their play “Invisible Roma” to Roma people who lack documentation and have limited access to basic rights and services.

On 3 October, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Morocco and UNHCR organized a **workshop in Rabat on Morocco’s contribution to the Global Refugee Forum**. The workshop gathered 167 stakeholders from ministries, national institutions, international organizations, regional and municipal authorities, private sector, NGOs, academics and refugee associations. One of the sub-thematic groups discussed statelessness prevention and recommended accession to the UN Statelessness Conventions, the facilitation of birth registration

through assistance, sensitization and training, and reform of the Nationality Code to eliminate all forms of discrimination.

On 23 and 24 October, UNHCR and its implementing partner Moroccan Organisation of Human Rights organized a **training on refugee law and statelessness for representatives of the Ministry of Interior and security forces** in Nador, **Morocco**. The training aimed to strengthen knowledge of international standards in the area of statelessness, reinforce protection space, and raise awareness of relevant statelessness prevention measures. A similar training was organized on 22 and 23 November for lawyers in Morocco to strengthen the legal assistance capacity for the prevention of statelessness.

On 6 and 7 December, in Tunis, **Tunisia**, UNHCR and the Commissioner for the African Union on Refugees, Displaced and Stateless Persons organized a **seminar on the African Union Draft Protocol on the Right to a Nationality and the Eradication of Statelessness**. The seminar was convened to advocate for the support of North African countries for the protocol and to inform participants of progress in the implementation of the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness by 2024.

Three States adopted new **National Action Plans to End Statelessness**. On 10 September, **Niger** adopted a National Action Plan against Statelessness. On 21 November, a National Action Plan was validated in **Madagascar** during a workshop organized by the Ministry of Justice. Representatives of the Parliament, the Senate, Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Internal Affairs, and National Education, as well as the National Commission for Human Rights participated in the event. On 22 November, the **Central African Republic** adopted its National Action Plan to End Statelessness.

From 21 to 25 October, the Ministry of Home Affairs of **Eswatini** convened meetings in all four regions to **sensitize traditional leaders and chiefs about the importance of reforming the Constitution and uphold citizens' rights to transmit their nationality to their children**. The meetings were organized in the context of the recent adoption of the National Action Plan to End Statelessness by the Government of Eswatini.

From 8 to 10 November, UNHCR convened a **'Dialogue with Parliamentarians on Nationality and Statelessness in Zimbabwe'** with the Parliament of Zimbabwe. The workshop was attended by the Deputy President of the Senate, Chairpersons and 55 Members of Parliament from different portfolio committees. Participants discussed the significance of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness with a view to accession. Participants also developed a draft joint action plan to ensure Zimbabwe's legal, policy and administrative frameworks are in line with international instruments and safeguards on the prevention and eradication of statelessness.

From 9 to 12 December, the UNHCR-UNICEF Coalition on Every Child's Right to a Nationality, in partnership with the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion and Lawyers for Human Rights, organized a **training on childhood statelessness in Pretoria, South Africa**. The training gathered government and NGO representatives from countries across southern Africa.



Participants of the Dialogue with Parliamentarians on Nationality and Statelessness in Zimbabwe, organized by UNHCR. © UNHCR

Implementation of the Global Action Plan

In line with **Action 1, Resolve existing major situations of statelessness**, on 30 September, the Ministry of Interior of Thailand issued a revised guideline to accelerate the registration of all non-Thai students in the national civil registration system. This development will benefit over 60,000 undocumented students who will be able to lodge a nationality application based on their eligibility under the nationality law. UNHCR and its partner ADRA organized a school sensitization campaign to raise awareness amongst students concerning the importance of lodging an application. Service points have been set up in several schools and communities to assist stateless persons in preparing and submitting their nationality and civil registration related applications.

With regard to **Action 2, Ensure that no child is born stateless**, on 17 October, the Latvian Parliament passed a landmark law that provides for the automatic grant of citizenship to children born to “non-citizens” of Latvia after 1 January 2020. The new law is a significant development towards ensuring that children are not born without a nationality.

Also in line with **Action 2**, on 4 October the Minister of Justice and Human Rights of Côte d'Ivoire issued a circular authorizing judges across the country to grant nationality to stateless foundlings.



A school sensitization campaign by the NGO ADRA in Thailand to raise awareness amongst students about the importance of lodging a nationality application. © UNHCR

In line with **Action 2** and **Action 3, Remove gender discrimination from nationality laws**, the legal commission of the Senate of Madagascar approved a bill to reform its nationality legislation, which is now pending review by the Government prior to submission to the Parliament. The bill aims to remove discriminatory provisions, grant nationality to children born in Madagascar to foreign parents who would otherwise be stateless, and introduce procedures to facilitate the grant of nationality to stateless persons.

With respect to **Action 6, Grant protection status to stateless migrants and facilitate their naturalization**, on 26 November, Bulgaria published amendments to the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on Foreigners that enable persons recognized as stateless to apply for a permanent residence permit.

In line with **Action 7, Ensure birth registration for the prevention of statelessness**, UNHCR provided support to several governments in issuing birth certificates to populations at risk of statelessness. From October to November, UNHCR, UNICEF and the Government of the Philippines launched a mobile birth registration pilot for the indigenous Sama Bajau population in Zamboanga City which resulted in the issuance of 412 birth certificates. The project is conducted under the umbrella of the UNHCR-UNICEF Coalition on Every Child's Right to a Nationality. Following the pilot, a ceremony was held in Zamboanga City on 10 December to present birth certificates to more than 250 indigenous Sama Bajau people. In South Sudan, the Ministry of Health issued birth notifications to 34 children in the Protection of Civilians Site in Bor in October and November, in line with the Government's pledge made at the High-Level Segment on Statelessness to strengthen birth registration in remote areas. The birth certificates will protect these children from becoming stateless. In Niger, UNHCR and the NGO ICAHD supported the Government in issuing birth certificates to 858 persons.

Also in line with **Action 7**, on 25 November, the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan 'On Amendments and Additions to Some Legislative Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the Provision of Public Services' was adopted. The law provides for important amendments to the Code on Marriage and Family to ensure that all children born in Kazakhstan are registered at birth regardless of the legal status of their parents. Relevant line Ministries are to amend all relevant by-laws and ensure their implementation in 2020. Through these amendments, Kazakhstan implemented one of its pledges made during the High-Level Segment on Statelessness before the original deadline of January 2020.

With regard to **Action 7**, the Government of Cameroon has started implementing a Ministerial order to regularize the civil status of persons who do not have birth certificates. Instructions were given to municipal magistrates to identify persons who do not have birth certificates and regularize their situation through a procedure involving health institutions for age certificates and courts for issuance of orders for late birth registration.

Also in line with **Action 7**, on 2 November, a large-scale [children's fair](#) was organized in the Panj district of Tajikistan with the participation of local authorities to raise awareness of childhood statelessness. During the fair, over 300 children at risk of statelessness were issued with birth certificates. The event highlighted challenges related to birth registration and bolstered support for efforts to improve legislation and ensure universal birth registration for every child born in Tajikistan regardless of the legal status of the parents.

In line with both **Action 8, Issue nationality documentation to those with entitlement to it**, and **Action 10, Improve quantitative and qualitative data on stateless populations**, the NGO Mercy Hands, in partnership with UNHCR, conducted a qualitative and quantitative survey to identify stateless persons in governorates in central and southern Iraq. Mercy Hands provided legal counselling and representation to identified stateless persons. The total number of beneficiaries who received legal assistance as of November 2019 is 232. Mercy Hands has held multiple focus group discussions with stateless people and is continuing to process cases for beneficiaries seeking national identification documents.

With respect to **Action 8**, the Department of the Registrar General of Zimbabwe, with operational support from UNHCR, continues to issue nationality and civil status documentation to the populations affected by Tropical Cyclone Idai in the Chimanimani and Chipinge Districts in Manicaland Province. As of 2 December, a total of 37,609 civil status documents had been issued.

In line with **Action 9, Accede to the UN Statelessness Conventions**, Angola deposited its instrument of accession to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons (1954 Convention) and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness (1961 Convention) during the High-Level Segment on Statelessness on 7 October, while Colombia deposited its instruments to the 1954 Convention. On the same day, the Parliament of North Macedonia approved accession to the 1961 Convention. In the two months following the High-Level Segment, two States have implemented pledges related to Action 9. On 11 December, Malta acceded to the 1954 Convention. On 26 November, Sweden officially withdrew its reservations to Articles 8 and 24(1)(B) of the 1954 Convention. The total number of States Parties to the 1954 and 1961 Convention is now 94 and 74 respectively.

In line with **Action 10**, on 13 November, Zimbabwe officially commenced a study on statelessness with a desk review which is to inform primary data collection scheduled to be implemented in 2020. Similarly, in Niger, UNHCR has launched a study on statelessness in cooperation with the LARADES Research Institute and the University of Tahoua.

Media impact of the Campaign

On 4 November, UNHCR launched a **large-scale information and advocacy campaign in Tajikistan** on the consequences of statelessness and the importance of birth registration. The campaign included a series of radio programs aired by two radio stations, video clips broadcast through national TV channels and [human-interest stories](#) published in mass media and on social media platforms. A TV program on statelessness and birth registration was also broadcast through a national TV station with the participation of key government counterparts. The campaign was concluded on 16 December with a program on radio Asia Plus that included the UNHCR Representative of Tajikistan.

In Almaty, Kazakhstan, UNHCR and the NGO Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and the Rule of Law held a [press briefing with journalists](#) on 27 November to mark the mid-point of the #IBelong Campaign. The event raised awareness of statelessness-related issues and encouraged the Government, civil society and other stakeholders in Kazakhstan to join efforts to prevent and reduce statelessness. During the press conference, a former stateless person shared her experience in terms of the challenges she faced as an undocumented person and how acquisition of citizenship transformed her life.

UNHCR's Regional Representation for EU Affairs produced a **short animated [video](#) to support EU-related advocacy and communications work on ending statelessness**. The video calls upon EU Member States to act in order to end statelessness in their own countries while also supporting other countries to do so.

In Madagascar, the singer Jaojoby collaborated with the NGO Focus to launch a [national media campaign](#) to raise awareness on statelessness among the general public. Jaojoby is an artist and music composer known as the King of Salegy, which is the Malagasy traditional dance form from the north of the island.

Upcoming Events

From 3 to 7 February, in Melbourne, Australia

The Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness will offer its second [Statelessness Intensive Course](#) to provide participants with the skills and practical tools to understand and address the problem of statelessness.

On 8 March, worldwide

International Women's Day will be celebrated with the campaign theme [#EachforEqual](#).

In March, in Zimbabwe

UNHCR will organize a three-day annual Moot Court Competition and Conference in Harare with all four faculties of law in the country with the theme '1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness'.

From 6 to 9 April, in Sanremo, Italy

The International Institute for Humanitarian Law and UNHCR will organize an Arabic Statelessness course in Sanremo, Italy.

From 8 to 12 June, in Sanremo, Italy

The 9th 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 17 to 19 June, in Geneva, Switzerland

The UNHCR Annual Consultations with NGOs will be held to provide a forum for debate on global and regional themes and an opportunity to explore collaboration on advocacy and operational issues.

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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