The Campaign to End Statelessness



July – September 2021 Update



Join us in our Campaign to End Statelessness



Mobilizing governments and civil society

The year 2021 marks the **60**th **anniversary of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness**(1961 Convention) and UNHCR and partners
organized several events to commemorate it.

On 17 September, UNHCR and the United Nations Office of Legal Affairs (UNOLA) organized a virtual Treaty Event to acknowledge States that have recently acceded to the 1961 Convention and to encourage States yet to become party to also take this step. UNHCR's Assistant High-Commissioner for Protection, Ms. Gillian Triggs, opened the event and congratulated Iceland and Togo for recently acceding to the Convention. The Head of the Treaty Section at the United Nations Office of Legal Affairs, Mr. David Nanopoulos, provided States with practical information on his office's role as treaty depository. An intervention by the Director of the Division of Programmes of the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Ms. Kareen Jabre, emphasized the important role of parliamentarians in the domestic process leading up to accession to international treaties.

Finally, the Minister of Justice of Togo, Mr. Pius Agbetomey, spoke about Togo's recent accession to the Convention and a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Congo, Ms. Cyre Deloria Ongoundou Awandza, announced that the Government will soon deposit its instruments of accession to the UN Statelessness Conventions.

On 16 September, UNHCR and the Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness convened a virtual event entitled "Sixty years on – The 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness". Convention's history, evolution and continuing relevance. The event was moderated by the Founder and Co-Director of the Institute of Statelessness and Inclusion, Ms. Laura van Waas, and included interventions from representatives of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, UNHCR, the Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness and the Refugee Advice and Casework Service who discussed the Convention's history, evolution and continuing relevance. The event can be watched here.

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On 7 July, UNHCR organized the event "Ending Statelessness: The Road Ahead" on the margins of UNHCR's 81st Standing Committee. Interventions were made by representatives from the United States Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, UNICEF and UNHCR and the NGO United Stateless. The event was an opportunity to share progress and facilitate interaction with States and civil society towards a strong final push in the last years of the #IBelong Campaign. Important initiatives to improve data on statelessness were shared, as well as findings from the newly published report Background Note on Sex Discrimination in Birth Registration.

In August, the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion published the briefing paper "Failure to Protect: The Denial of Status, Detention and Refoulement of Rohingya Refugees in India" which was developed as a resource for those advocating for stronger protection of Rohingya in India. It provides an overview of the situation since 2017 and describes the impact of the deteriorating protection context on the Rohingya community.

In July and September, the European Network on Statelessness (ENS) organized several events, including the webinar "Deprivation of nationality and the prevention of statelessness" to launch a new **Statelessness Index briefing** on this topic; the webinar "Is Europe falling behind on statelessness determination and protection?" to launch the publication of its **Statelessness Index briefing on statelessness determination and protection in Europe**; and an online debate on "**Using litigation to end statelessness**" to mark the launch of their new **Statelessness Case Law Database.**

On 23 and 24 September, UNHCR and the Council of Europe's European Committee on Legal Cooperation (CDCJ) convened the "International Conference on Statelessness and the Right to a Nationality in Europe". Comprising a technical meeting of experts followed by an international conference, the event sought to open a discussion on how Council of Europe Member States can achieve the goals of the #IBelong Campaign by 2024. UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for



Protection, Ms. Gillian Triggs, reminded delegates that a spirit of partnership can make statelessness a fact of the past. Christiana Bukalo, a statelessness activist and founder of Statefree, called for stateless persons to be given the chance to influence the political space that decides on their situation.

On 10 September, UNHCR and the Government of **Turkmenistan**, with the support of the UN Resident Coordinator in Turkmenistan, organized a **subregional International Conference on Statelessness Eradication in Central Asia**. Attended by over 50 participants, the conference was an opportunity for all five Central Asian States to take stock of achievements, exchange good practices and develop comprehensive strategies to address remaining gaps, including accession to the UN Statelessness Conventions.



UNHCR High Commissioner Filippo Grandi addresses the participants of a sub-regional International Conference on Statelessness Eradication in Central Asia. © UNHCR/Yelena Sim

On 20 August, in Kinshasa, the **Democratic Republic** of the Congo, UNHCR and the International Conference for the Great Lakes Region convened a workshop to take stock of progress on the implementation of pledges made by the Government at the 2019 High-Level Segment on Statelessness. The workshop resulted in the adoption of a roadmap for pledge implementation and the establishment of a taskforce to follow up on the commitments.

On 16 July, in Baku, the Working Group on Statelessness in **Azerbaijan** held its periodic **meeting** on the implementation of pledges made at the 2019 High-Level Segment on Statelessness. At the meeting, Working Group members highlighted a number of positive developments, including the issuance of a recent decree which granted citizenship to 93 stateless persons and the fact that an increasing number of stateless people have started approaching the authorities for support in acquiring documentation, thanks to the success of awareness-raising activities.

On 29 and 30 July, in Kinshasa, the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, the Interinstitutional
Technical Committee for the Fight against
Statelessness and UNHCR conducted a training
workshop on statelessness for members of the
Parliamentary Liaison Office of the NGO, the
Episcopal Conference of Congo. This will enable the

Episcopal Conference to support advocacy efforts for the country's accession to the UN Statelessness Conventions. From 7 to 9 September, UNHCR and the Interinstitutional Technical Committee for the Fight against Statelessness hosted a workshop to develop and validate a roadmap to end statelessness in the Kasai provinces together with local political, administrative, and civil society actors. The roadmap focuses on four pillars: (1) advocacy for provincial ownership of efforts to address statelessness; (2) improving the governance of civil registration; (3) improving data collection on statelessness to inform policymaking on civil registration and documentation; and (4) awareness raising among the public on risks of statelessness.

On 7 July, in **Madagascar**, the NGO Focus Development Association (FDA) organized a meeting with the National Assembly and its Secretary General which led to the development of a strategic action plan for the adoption of a new nationality bill. The nationality bill provides for the grant of Malagasy nationality to children born in Madagascar who would otherwise be stateless and the elimination of discriminatory provisions on the grounds of gender and disability amongst others. As part of this action plan, FDA held a briefing with the President of the Senate's Legal Commission in Mahajanga on 31 July for the Senate to advance the bill with a view to its adoption.

In July, **Georgia** adopted a National Action Plan on Statelessness. The document covers all the pledges made by the Government at the 2019 High-Level Segment on Statelessness and foresees, among other objectives, the introduction of facilitated naturalization for stateless persons and free legal aid for statelessness status applicants.

On 23 September, the Ministry of Interior of **Montenegro** adopted the 2021-2025 Strategy on Migration and Reintegration of Returnees in Montenegro and an accompanying 2021-2022 Action Plan. The strategy foresees, among other issues, legislative changes to improve the statelessness determination procedure, development of guidance on birth registration for case workers and judges, and the creation of a referral mechanism among line State institutions for immediate birth registration of children born in Montenegro.

On 19 August, in the **Philippines**, UNHCR and UNICEF convened a meeting with the local government of Bongao to develop a work plan to improve birth registration. The agreed work plan includes birth registration of 200 members of the Sama Bajau — a maritime nomadic ethnic minority - in Barangay, support towards the digitization of civil registration and activities to raise awareness on the importance of birth registration. The work plan forms part of UNHCR and UNICEF's joint strategy under the umbrella of the Coalition on Every Child's Right to a Nationality.

In July, in **Zambia**, under the banner of the UNHCR-UNICEF Coalition on Every Child's Right to a Nationality, the two UN Agencies held a series of meetings to develop a new two-year joint strategy to end childhood statelessness in Zambia. As part of the strategy, the two organizations will join forces to advocate for the inclusion of safeguards in the nationality law to prevent childhood statelessness and to strengthen birth registration in the country.

On 18 August, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Costa Rica established the <u>Institutional Liaison</u> Commission on Statelessness, by Executive Decree No. 42794-RE, to facilitate coordination between different government institutions in efforts to address statelessness.

On 7 September, in Pristina, **Kosovo (S/RES/1244(1999))**, UNHCR, the legal NGO Civil Rights Programme Kosovo and the national Ombudsperson convened the meeting "Leave no one behind – the importance of establishing legal identity and access to justice" which gathered representatives from different line ministries and civil society organizations. The meeting was an opportunity for relevant authorities to discuss issues related to *in-situ* statelessness in the country, including lack of birth registration among marginalized groups. As an outcome of the meeting, the Civil Registration Agency committed to creating a mechanism to improve coordination between line ministries to address statelessness.

On 29 July, in **South Africa**, the NGOs Lawyers for Human Rights and Jesuit Refugee Services launched a **petition** in support of their joint advocacy campaign titled "This is Home". The aim of the campaign is to raise awareness on the issues faced by migrant children in securing documentation and citizenship in South Africa. The petition and signatures will be delivered to the Portfolio Committee of the Parliament.

On 6 July, in **Serbia**, UNHCR organized a press briefing to present the results of a statelessness survey entitled "Persons at Risk of Statelessness in Serbia – Overview of the Current Situation and the Way Forward". The survey was commissioned to collect data on the situation of undocumented Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian living in informal settlements in Serbia and was conducted from October to November 2020. UNHCR also presented the outcomes of the collaboration with the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government and the Ombudsman of the Republic of Serbia to address risks of statelessness. The Minister of Public Administration and Local Governments, Ms. Marija Obradović, noted that Serbia may be able to completely eradicate statelessness by 2024, given the progress that has been made so far. The national Ombudsperson, Mr. Zoran Pasalic, highlighted the importance of working directly with the Roma community and that his office will continue to undertake field visits to enable persons at risk of statelessness to obtain civil registry documents as efficiently as possible.

Across the globe, many training sessions were organized for government and civil society partners to improve their awareness and technical knowledge on matters relating to nationality and statelessness.

From 26 to 30 July, the third edition of the Nationality and Statelessness Course for French-speaking practitioners was held. Opened by UNHCR's Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, Ms. Gillian Triggs, this virtual training was attended by 65 people from 23 different countries in Africa and beyond. It included members of the newly established statelessness determination bodies in Côte d'Ivoire, civil registration officers and participants from UN agencies, civil society organizations and human rights institutions. The course was delivered by 13 trainers from universities in Western Africa and the United States.

At the end of August, in **Uganda**, UNHCR facilitated two online statelessness trainings for officials from the Ministry of Internal Affairs aimed at raising awareness of statelessness and solutions to address the problem, with a particular focus on the pledges delivered by the Government at the 2019 High-Level Segment on Statelessness.

In 18 August, in **Kazakhstan**, UNHCR, the NGO Bureau for Human Rights and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, conducted an online training on the topic of identification and documentation of stateless persons for 350 social workers in Kazakhstan.

On 15 and 16 June, in **Yemen**, UNHCR and the Migrant and Refugee Study Centre organized a training for 35 senior field officials of the Civil Status and Civil Registry Authority on the importance of universal birth registration for the prevention of statelessness.

From July to September, in **Jordan**, UNCHR delivered four training sessions to employees of the Civil Status Department which focused on the importance of registration and documentation as a tool to prevent statelessness.

On 28 September, in **Morocco**, UNHCR and the Moroccan Human Rights Organization convened an event to sensitize civil status officers on the importance of birth registration for the prevention of statelessness.

Implementation of the Global Action Plan

In line with Action 1, Resolve existing major situations of statelessness, on 2 September, the Kenyan national taskforce on statelessness organized a ceremony during which 52 stateless persons of Asian descent were granted citizenship certificates. During the ceremony, Kenya's Director-General of Immigration reiterated the Government's commitment to resolve statelessness. There were also positive developments with regards to the stateless persons of Pemba descent. On 10 August, the departmental Committee on Administration and National Security of Kenya issued a **report** recommending the Government to initiate a process to recognize this group as citizens. The report follows a petition submitted to the **National Assembly** in September 2020 which called on the government to resolve the statelessness situation of this group.



Brothers Dhruv and Parv Kavia receive their Kenyan citizenship certificates during a ceremony organized by the Government of Kenya to confirm the Kenyan nationality of stateless individuals of Asian descent. © Paresh Kavia



Shaame Hamisi, 59, is a fisherman and spokesperson for the stateless Pemba community. A parliamentary committee issued a report in August recommending the Government to initiate a process to recognize this group as citizens of Kenya. © UNHCR/Roger Arnold

On 12 June, the President of the Republic of **Azerbaijan** signed a **Decree to grant citizenship to 245 persons**, including 93 stateless persons.

On 30 July, the Parliament of **North Macedonia** adopted <u>amendments to the Law on Citizenship</u> which present a window of opportunity for people who are stateless due to the dissolution of former Yugoslavia to naturalize. Former Yugoslav citizens who have resided in North Macedonia until 8 September 1991, when independence was declared, can acquire citizenship if they meet certain evidentiary requirements. This provision will be implemented for a period of three years from the day the law is published in the official gazette.

With regard to Action 2, Ensure that no child is born stateless, and Action 7, Ensure birth registration for the prevention of statelessness, on 19 August, the National Registrar's Office of Colombia issued Resolution 8617/21, which extends Resolution 8470/19 and makes it possible for children born in Colombia to Venezuelan parents to obtain birth certificates which are valid to prove Colombian nationality. As of August 2021, the measure has benefitted more than 63,000 children and will remain in place for two more years.



Yonielys Villegas, 25, holds the birth certificate of her newborn son, Enmanuel Antonio Sequera Villegas. Emmanuel benefited from a measure allowing babies born in Colombia to Venezuelan parents to obtain Colombian nationality. © UNHCR/Daniel Dreifuss



The Minister of Justice of Japan, Ms. Yoko Kamikawa, announces the findings of a study on stateless children born in Japan and measures to be taken to resolve their plight. © The Asahi Shimbun

On 20 July, the Ministry of Justice of **Japan** announced the findings of research carried out by the Immigration Services Agency (ISA) regarding the legal status and eligibility to Japanese nationality of a group of 300 children who were born and registered as stateless in Japan. To resolve the nationality status of these children, the Ministry has committed to improve relevant data compilation, enhance legal counselling, and improve coordination with concerned agencies.

In line with Action 6, Grant protection status to stateless migrants and facilitate their naturalization, on 4 August, Colombia enacted Law 2136 creating a Comprehensive Immigration policy which includes provisions on the protection of stateless persons and establishes a statelessness determination procedure. The law guarantees a series of rights for those granted statelessness status, including the right to travel documents and to facilitated naturalization. Applicants will have the right to stay in the country while their application is under consideration. The adoption of the law is in line with a pledge submitted by the Government of Colombia at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum.

In **Kuwait**, in a meeting on 13 September, the Parliamentarian Committee for persons with undetermined nationality (Bidoon) approved three proposals to further the protection of the Bidoon. The proposals entail specific measures for Bidoon working in education, healthcare and the military to benefit from equal pay and related benefits, among other provisions.

On 28 July, **Rwanda** published a <u>new nationality</u> <u>law</u> which provides for facilitated naturalization for stateless persons and fulfils one of Rwanda's pledges at UNHCR's 2019 High-Level Segment on Statelessness.

In **Azerbaijan**, UNHCR provided legal support to 13 persons to establish statelessness before the court. Their cases were subsequently referred to the Citizenship Commission, and thus far five have been granted nationality.

In line with Actions 6 and Action 10, Improve quantitative and qualitative data on stateless populations, the Ministry of Justice and Public Security (MJPS) of Brazil launched SisApatridia, an online platform dedicated to the submission and processing of applications for statelessness determination. This system is expected to improve data on statelessness as it centralizes all new applications and consolidates past applications. It will also accelerate the processing of statelessness claims, improve protection prospects for stateless people and facilitate their naturalization.

With regard to Action 7, Ensure birth registration for the prevention of statelessness, from 17 – 19 August in Nigeria, UNHCR, the National Population Commission and the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons conducted a birth registration exercise for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in three settlements in Abuja. A total of 1,516 IDP children were registered and issued with birth certificates during the three-

day exercise. The IDPs were displaced from Northeast Nigeria during the Islamist insurgency and had either lost the certificates or had never registered their children's births. The exercise supports the government's pledge delivered at the 2019 High-Level Segment on Statelessness to scale-up the issuance of birth registration to IDPs, refugees and returnees.

Also in **Nigeria**, since the beginning of 2021, 20,731 birth certificates have been issued to internally displaced children and 20,000 certificates of indigeneity have been delivered to IDPs as part of UNHCR's "access to legal documentation" project in Borno state. UNHCR worked closely with local authorities to achieve this result.

From 13 to 19 July, UNHCR and the Office of the Commissioner for Refugees in **Zambia** conducted a three-day civil documentation drive in Mantapala refugee settlement, which resulted in the issuance of 504 birth notices. The information will be submitted to Lusaka Central Registration Office for the issuance of birth certificates.

In line with Action 7 and Action 8, Issue nationality documentation to those with entitlement to it, from July to September, in Mozambique, the Catholic University of Mozambique assisted 5,756 displaced and host communities in Cabo Delgado to obtain birth certificates and identity documents through its mobile legal clinics. To date, 13,412 people have received legal assistance since the start of the project in June 2021.

In line with **Action 8**, the Government of **Mauritania** has made progress on its pledges related to the issuance of documentation submitted at the 2019 High-Level Segment on Statelessness and the Global Refugee Forum. Regional authorities, together with UNHCR, the national civil registry agency and the National Commission on Human Rights have recently launched a review of the situation of 11,000 individuals in Mbera camp whose refugee status was inactivated when it was found that they had Mauritanian nationality but who regardless are experiencing difficulties in accessing civil registration as nationals.

In line with Action 9, Accede to the UN
Statelessness Conventions, on 14 July, Togo
acceded to the 1954 Convention relating to
the Status of Stateless Persons and to the 1961
Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.
Togo's accession to these two Conventions will
facilitate the ongoing reform of its nationality
law, with a view to eliminating discrimination and
establishing gender equality in relation to nationality
acquisition.

On 28 June, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of **Mexico** and UNHCR convened a meeting to analyze the legal implications of the Government's possible accession to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and its withdrawal of reservations to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons. Experts on statelessness and nationality issues from governmental agencies, academia and civil society contributed to the deliberations. The event was held as a follow-up to Mexico's commitments made at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum.

On Action 10, Improve quantitative and qualitative data on stateless populations, on 1 September, the Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia confirmed that a census will be held in October next year, which will also collect data on naturalization and statelessness.

In September, in **Kazakhstan**, UNHCR undertook several activities to support the Bureau of National Statistics in preparing for its national census and to ensure that quality data on stateless population is collected. The activities included a three-day training for officials involved in conducting the census, the production of a video instruction for census enumerators explaining how to fill in the census questionnaire with regard to nationality and statelessness issues, and a general awareness-raising campaign to ensure that stateless people participate in the census.

In **Zimbabwe**, the National Statistics Agency announced that questions on access to documentation and citizenship will be included in the 2022 census to improve data on statelessness. This is an important step as there is currently no official data on the number of people who are stateless or at risk of statelessness in the country.

In the **Philippines**, UNHCR, the Joint IDP Profiling Service (JIPS) and local partners conducted a study to map the situation of persons at risk of statelessness, the Sama Bajau, and internally displaced persons in Tawi-Tawi province. The resulting reports include information about living conditions, protection risks and vulnerabilities, and serve as a baseline for duty-bearers to craft policies and interventions. The key findings and recommendations were presented to relevant stakeholders in Tawi-Tawi Province and in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. On 7 September, the report was officially handed over to the Ministry of Social Services and Development. The Ministry committed to follow up on the recommendations of the report.

On 30 August, the Royal **Thai** Government reported its latest statistics of the registered stateless population, which now provides a more comprehensive picture of the situation in the country. While in the end of 2020 the registered stateless population amounted to 480,549, this increased to 553,969 in August this year. The additional 74,254 stateless people were able to register as stateless due to amendments to the civil registration laws which were adopted in 2008 and 2019. Registration allows them to obtain an ID card for non-Thais and to improve their legal status in Thailand.

Media Impact of the Campaign

The 60th anniversary of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness received coverage around the globe. Press releases issued in **Spain**, **Armenia** and **North Macedonia** were picked up by various news outlets, including by **Euronews**, **Makpress**, **Opserver**, **Vecher**, **A1on.mk** and **MIA**. In Southern Africa, UNHCR used the occasion to advocate for accession to the 1961 Convention. An **addendum** on statelessness in Southern Africa was shared globally and an opinion piece on the situation in the region featuring real life stories of stateless persons was published in the **Mail &Guardian**.

The NGO Lawyers for Human Rights was interviewed by the <u>Saturday Star</u> and the <u>Sunday Times</u> on access to COVID-19 vaccines for undocumented migrants in **South Africa**, highlighting the Government's duty to extend vaccines to non-citizens, both documented and undocumented.

On 18 August, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Costa Rica, with the support of UNHCR, launched the campaign "You are not invisible" ("No Sos Invisible") to help eradicate statelessness in the country. The campaign contains visual materials to inform the public about the existence of the statelessness determination procedure as well as video testimonies of stateless persons (videos available here and here). It also promotes a new informative section on statelessness in the MFA's website.

On 19 June, in **North Macedonia**, the Platform of Investigative Journalism and Analysis posted a video depicting a stateless person, explaining how her lack of a nationality inhibits access to other rights.

On 21 August, in **Spain**, the news medium Newtral published two articles on statelessness following interviews with UNHCR. One article discussed the **statelessness determination procedure in Spain**, with a focus on persons of Saharawi origin, and the other article discussed **statelessness as a global issue**, capturing UNHCR statistics.

Upcoming Events

On 21 October, virtually

UNHCR and OHCHR are co-convening the "Roundtable on Equality and Non-Discrimination in Nationality Matters to End Statelessness" which will call attention to the right to nationality and the plight of stateless populations, in particular those who are stateless as a result of discrimination. The event will highlight good practices with respect to ensuring the right to nationality, including the removal of all forms of discrimination from nationality laws, policies, and practices. The event is organized in furtherance of OHCHR's pledge at the 2019 High-Level Segment on Statelessness. Registration is open here.

On 28 October, in Montenegro

UNHCR, in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior of Montenegro, the French Embassy and the UN System in Montenegro, is organizing the "International Statelessness Conference: Best Practices in Montenegro and France".

On 4 November, virtually

UNHCR is organizing a "Thematic Stocktaking Event on Statelessness" which will take place in the lead-up to the High-Level Officials Meeting in December in relation to the Global Compact on Refugees. The event will be an opportunity for States and other stakeholders to prepare for the HLOM as well as a way to commemorate the 7th anniversary of the #IBelong Campaign. Registration for this event will open soon via unher.org.

From 24 to 26 November, in Skopje, North Macedonia

The Council of Europe is organizing the **8th International Roma Women's Conference** entitled "Protecting the human rights and dignity of Roma and Traveler women in times of crises".

14 and 15 December, Geneva

UNHCR will convene the first High-Level Officials Meeting to follow-up on the Global Compact on Refugees. The event will be an opportunity for senior government officials and representatives of the international community to take stock of progress and maintain the momentum towards achieving the objectives and actions of the Global Compact on Refugees, including those related to statelessness, taking into consideration the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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 <u>self-study module</u> from the comfort of your armchair!



