

The Campaign to End Statelessness

March 2020 Update



#IBelong

Join us in our Campaign to End Statelessness



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Mobilizing governments and civil society

From 2 to 5 March, in Rubavu, **Rwanda**, UNHCR and the newly established Government Taskforce on Statelessness [convened](#) to discuss statelessness eradication and methodologies to identify stateless persons. In line with the pledges made by the Government of Rwanda at the High-Level Segment on Statelessness in October 2019, consensus was reached to draft a National Plan of Action to eradicate statelessness in Rwanda. Once complete, it will serve as a national strategy for the four remaining years of the #IBelong Campaign.

On 26 and 27 February, in Kismayo, **Somalia**, UNHCR organized a training on international protection for Government officials from Jubaland. Participants were briefed on statelessness issues in the region and the risk of statelessness due to gender discrimination in the nationality law, as well as the pledges the Government of Somalia submitted in the context of the High-Level Segment on Statelessness. The training helped to raise awareness and build support for the implementation of Somalia's pledge to accede to the two UN Statelessness Conventions.

In **South Africa**, the organization Lawyers for Human Rights successfully advocated for the inclusion of statelessness as a central pillar in the National Action Plan to Combat Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (NAP). On 28 January, the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development held its first national consultative workshop and announced that the resolution of statelessness and participation in the #IBelong Campaign would form part of the implementation roadmap for the NAP.

On 13 February, the Constitutional Court of **South Africa** heard a case involving five persons at risk of statelessness who were retroactively deprived of their nationality following amendments to the Citizenship Act in 2013. The Government holds the view that based on the 2013 amendments, persons born before 2013 to South African parents outside the country are no longer to be regarded as South African nationals. The Constitutional Court must now decide whether it will uphold the judgment of the High Court, which decided the applicants are entitled



Participants at the regional childhood statelessness advocacy workshop for civil society organizations that took place in Nairobi, Kenya. © UNHCR

to citizenship. The case, brought by the organization Lawyers for Human Rights, is the first of its kind before the Constitutional Court and should help bring clarity to many children of South Africans who were born in exile during Apartheid.

In January and February, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, visited **Burkina-Faso** and **Niger** and endorsed the UNHCR protection strategy for the Sahel crisis; the strategy prioritizes the provision of nationality and identification documents as a means to prevent statelessness and promotes access to services.

On 7 January, the Government of **Côte d'Ivoire** adopted its National Action Plan against Statelessness (NAP), in accordance with its pledges submitted at the High-Level Segment on Statelessness and its commitments under the 2015 Abidjan Declaration. The NAP builds on the conclusions of the statelessness mapping exercise conducted in 2018 and 2019, according to which the total number of stateless persons and persons at risk of statelessness in the country (including those identified as at low risk, me-

dium risk, or high risk) stands at 1,656,330, or 6.57% of the entire population.

On 17 and 18 December 2019, in Nairobi, **Kenya**, a regional childhood statelessness advocacy workshop for civil society organizations was organized under the auspices of the UNHCR-UNICEF Coalition on Every Child's Right to a Nationality. A total of 30 members of civil society organizations from Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda attended the workshop, which aimed at strengthening the engagement of these organizations in advocacy campaigns to support law reform in the three countries. The workshop resulted in ten civil society organizations formalizing their membership to the UNHCR-UNICEF Coalition, as well as the development of draft advocacy strategies which are expected to be finalized soon.

In March, the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion and the Open Society Justice Initiative launched a **Year of Action Against Citizenship Stripping** in response to the growing number of States resorting to deprivation of nationality as a counterterrorism and national security measure. Over the course of the

Year of Action, a series of webinars, seminars and other events will be organized. The year was kicked off on 18 March with a [webinar](#) launching the [World's Stateless 2020: Deprivation of Nationality](#) and on 19 March with a [webinar](#) on the [Principles on Deprivation of Nationality as a National Security Measure](#).

From 24 to 26 February, in Pyi Taw, **Myanmar**, the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the Union Assembly of Myanmar organized a seminar on the role of Parliament in the peacebuilding process, bringing together 80 Members of Parliament (MPs) from different political backgrounds. The event included a session on access to citizenship and the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies, which featured presentations from Thai and Filipino former MPs about their experiences in addressing statelessness in their respective countries.

On 6 March, in **the Philippines**, UNHCR met with the Department of Justice, the Chair of the House of Representatives' Committee on the Welfare of Children, and lawmakers who previously proposed a bill to prevent statelessness among foundlings. The meeting resulted in an agreement that the bill will be submitted for review and deliberation upon the expected resumption of the Congressional session in May 2020.

On 12 and 13 March, in **Fiji**, a regional workshop on statelessness coordinated by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Council for World Mission was convened and attended by over 40 members of church groups from ten Pacific countries. The work-

shop resulted in a set of action points to involve local churches, national denominations and the Council for World Mission in efforts to prevent statelessness. The action points include conducting educational activities to help ensure that all children in the respective congregations possess or acquire birth certificates.

On 26 February, in Turkestan, **Kazakhstan**, the NGO Sana Sezim conducted a roundtable on legal assistance to stateless persons in South Kazakhstan for representatives of State agencies. The roundtable aimed at raising awareness about statelessness issues and recent legislative developments pertaining to civil registration. It also encouraged enhanced cooperation among State agencies responsible for civil registration and documentation procedures. As outcomes of the meeting, participants 1) developed a referral mechanism for people with undetermined nationality in the Turkestan region and 2) elaborated recommendations on statelessness reduction and resolution of complex cases.

In December and January, in Rome, **Italy**, UNHCR conducted a comprehensive training on statelessness for students of the Roma Tre University. The training, delivered jointly by UNHCR and NGO representatives working with stateless persons, covered international standards as well as practical case studies. The training is part of broader collaboration between UNHCR and the Roma Tre University with the goal of establishing a statelessness legal clinic in 2020.

Implementation of the Global Action Plan

With respect to **Action 1, Resolve existing major situations of statelessness** on 18 December 2019, **Tajikistan** adopted the Law on “[Amnesty and regularization of the legal status of foreign nationals and stateless persons irregularly residing in the territory of the Republic of Tajikistan](#)”, thus fulfilling one of its pledges submitted at the High Level Segment on Statelessness. The law came into effect on 7 January and covers foreign nationals and stateless persons originating from the former Soviet Union who arrived in Tajikistan before 31 December 2016, and who reside in Tajikistan undocumented or with invalid identity documents. The law envisages a waiver of both administrative penalties for illegal residence and criminal charges for illegal border crossing. It also establishes grounds to obtain legal status and stay

in Tajikistan for qualifying persons. Once stateless persons obtain legal residence in Tajikistan, they will have access to opportunities to naturalize. The law stipulates a three-year timeframe for the registration and regularization of the legal status of those falling within its scope.

Another important development in line with **Action 1** is the signing of a decree by the President of **Azerbaijan** on 27 February granting citizenship to 343 people, of whom 86 were stateless persons.

In line with **Action 1**, the Government of **Malaysia** enacted new standard operating procedures (SOPs) to ensure that citizenship applications are expedited. The SOPs have been in force since 1 January.



Zainab, 46, is one of thousands of irregular stateless persons in Tajikistan who will benefit from the recently enacted Amnesty Law that will end her legal limbo and open prospects for naturalization in Tajikistan. © UNHCR/Nodira Akbaralieva

Also in line with **Action 1**, on 28 February, the President of **Uzbekistan** approved an important new citizenship law that will, according to the Uzbek authorities, immediately allow approximately half of Uzbekistan's stateless population, or some 49,000 people, to become citizens of Uzbekistan ex lege. In addition to the general naturalization procedure, the law introduces new procedures for citizenship confirmation and simplified naturalization. Statelessness prevention is a cornerstone of the new law with important provisions to prevent statelessness at birth; during processes of adoption; after a change in the civil status of the parents; and during any citizenship change, including through renunciation. UNHCR issued a [press release](#) on the new law with further details.

With regard to **Action 1**, the Ministry of Interior of **Thailand** issued two new legislative guidelines on 31 January and 19 February to help further reduce the number of stateless persons in the country. The first guideline reduces administrative and documentation requirements, including birth registration, for applicants who are over 60. The second guideline focuses on easing a number of naturalization requirements for registered ethnic minorities, including requirements related to income, tax payments and language abilities.

With respect to **Action 2, Ensure that no child is born stateless**, amendments to the Act on **Croatian** Citizenship came into force that strengthen safeguards against statelessness for children born to Croatian nationals abroad. UNHCR provided comments during the drafting process, which are available [here](#). The English translation of the Act is available [here](#).

Also in line with **Action 2**, on 28 January, the **Estonian** Parliament adopted an amendment to the Citizenship Act (which entered into force on 17 February), giving children who are born to one stateless parent and one foreign national and who reside in Estonia the option of becoming Estonian nationals without having to sit an examination, provided that their family links to Estonia go back to at least 1991.

Further on **Action 2**, on 17 January, the **Colombian** Constitutional Court issued a ruling in a case involving two children who were born in the territory to Venezuelan parents who were legally residing in the country under a humanitarian temporary permit for Venezuelans. The children were denied nationality at birth due to an administrative resolution enacted



Around half of Uzbekistan's registered stateless population, or more than 49,000 persons, will become citizens of Uzbekistan through the new citizenship law endorsed by the Senate on 28 February 2020. © UNHCR/ Mirfozil Khasanov

by the national civil registry that provided that parents with such permits do not meet requirements concerning domicile in the country at the time of the child's birth. The Court declared the [administrative resolution](#) to be unconstitutional. In doing so the Court made reference to the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights and global standards on the prevention of statelessness at birth. UNHCR submitted an amicus brief advocating for this result.

With respect to **Action 6, Grant protection status to stateless migrants and facilitate their naturalization**, in **Bulgaria**, UNHCR launched a [website](#) for stateless persons living in Bulgaria with the aim of providing information on the statelessness determination procedure in various relevant languages – Bulgarian, Russian, English and Arabic. In addition to general information about issues affecting stateless persons, a special section is dedicated to the provision of legal assistance.

In line with **Action 7, Ensure birth registration for the prevention of statelessness**, on 10 March, the Government of **Tanzania** agreed to start issuing birth certificates to refugee children born in Nduta Camp following advocacy by UNHCR. The exercise may be extended to Mtendeli and Nyarugusu refugee camps in the near future.



A UNHCR staff member visits a family in Montenegro to facilitate late birth registration. © UNHCR

Also with respect to **Action 7**, the Government of **Montenegro** started to implement a new procedure in January to register the birth of children abandoned by their mothers or whose mothers lack identity documents. Under this joint procedure of the Ministry of Labor and Social Care and the Ministry of Interior, social workers at municipal centers are tasked to undertake visits as soon as they are informed of a non-registered child with the purpose of registering the child's birth. This development is in line with Montenegro's pledge submitted at the High-Level Segment on Statelessness to intensify collaboration on birth registration among relevant line Ministries.

Regarding **Action 7**, in **Niger**, UNHCR and the telecom company Orange partnered to send sensitization text messages on statelessness and the importance of birth registration in six local languages, reaching a total of 138,983 persons across the country and targeting areas where risks of statelessness are most prevalent.

In line with both **Action 7** and **Action 8, Issue nationality documentation to those with entitlement to it**, with support and encouragement from UNHCR, the Government of **Cameroon** issued nationality certificates to 17 IDPs from the north-west region where violence has displaced hundreds of thousands of

people, as well as 935 birth certificates to children in three regions facing conflicts, including to 73 orphans who were internally displaced.

In line with **Action 8, Issue nationality documentation to those with entitlement to it**, from December 2019 to March, the Government of **Burkina Faso** issued 40,000 identification documents to displaced populations and host communities in the center-north and south-west regions with the support of UNHCR. These efforts were aimed at addressing risks of statelessness in the context of the ongoing security and humanitarian crisis facing Burkina Faso and the entire Sahel region.

In relation to **Action 9, Accede to the UN Statelessness Conventions**, on 3 January, **North Macedonia** acceded to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, as it pledged to do at the High-Level Segment on Statelessness.

In line with **Action 10, Improve quantitative and qualitative data on stateless populations**, the European Network on Statelessness published six new country chapters on as part of its [Statelessness Index](#): Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Greece, Portugal, and Spain. The Index contains comparative data on 24 European countries.

Media impact of the Campaign

The **5th anniversary of the Abidjan Declaration** attracted extensive media attention. A story on statelessness in West Africa was published by the BBC. A [press release](#) was issued by UNHCR, highlighting progress and challenges in the fight against statelessness in the region. In Côte d'Ivoire, UNHCR and the Minister of Justice issued a [joint declaration](#) on progress towards eradication of statelessness in Côte d'Ivoire.

The adoption of the Amnesty Law in **Tajikistan** legalizing the status of irregularly residing stateless persons and foreign nationals was broadly covered by local and international media in December and January. [UNHCR](#) issued a press release and articles appeared in [Asia Plus](#), [Ferghana](#) and [TajWeek](#).

The adoption of the new citizenship law in **Uzbekistan** attracted considerable media coverage. Besides a [UNHCR press release](#), the [International Observatory on Human Rights](#) and the [Uzbekistan National News Agency](#) called attention this significant step towards resolving statelessness in the country.

The important ruling of the **Colombian** Constitutional Court concerning newborns whose parents hold humanitarian temporary permits also generated

significant media attention. Articles were published on [El Tiempo](#) and [El Espectador](#).

UNHCR made a [‘Teaching About Statelessness’ page](#) available, offering materials on statelessness aimed at primary and secondary school students. It contains instruction on statelessness and aims to create inclusive and safe learning environments for displaced learners and stateless children, in line with [UNHCR’s Refugee Education 2030 strategy](#).

In **Thailand**, UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador Praya Lundberg and UNHCR visited stateless communities in Chiang Rai Province, where statelessness reduction and community sensitization activities are being implemented by the NGO the Adventist Development and Relief Agency. The visit was used for [media campaign activities](#) to raise awareness about statelessness.

The particular **vulnerability of stateless persons to COVID-19** and emerging good practice by a number of countries, including Malaysia, has been in the news recently, with initial [stories](#) including a focus on the importance of equal access to testing and treatment for stateless persons. This [Reuters](#) piece was picked up by many news organizations.



UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador Praya Lundberg and UNHCR visited stateless communities in Chiang Rai Province, where statelessness reduction and community sensitization activities are being implemented. © UNHCR

Upcoming events

In light of the COVID-19 crisis, most previously planned events on statelessness are postponed or being reprogrammed as virtual meetings. We will provide additional information as it becomes available.

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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