

The Campaign to End Statelessness

April-June 2020 Update

#IBelong

Join us in our Campaign to End Statelessness



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Mobilizing governments and civil society

On 11 May, UNHCR issued a paper on [‘The Impact of COVID-19 on Stateless Populations: Policy Recommendations and Good Practices’](#). The paper outlines ways in which stateless persons and persons at risk of statelessness may be disproportionately impacted by the crisis and provides governments and other stakeholders with recommendations and examples of good practices in these areas. It also addresses the risks of statelessness that may arise as a result of disruptions to the full functioning of civil registration and vital statistics systems and other documentation services such as the issuance of national ID cards. A UNHCR press release on the recommendations can be accessed [here](#). UNHCR has also issued a press release on the heightened risk of gender-based violence in the pandemic for displaced and stateless women and girls, which can be found [here](#).

On 21 May, UNHCR issued [guidelines on the loss and deprivation of nationality](#). The new publication is intended to assist governments and policy makers

in interpreting relevant international law. The guidelines contain interpretive guidance on the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and also contain guidance on complementary international human rights law relevant to deprivation of nationality. A UNHCR press release on the guidelines can be found [here](#).

In May, UNHCR published the [outcome document of the High-Level Segment on Statelessness](#) (HLS) convened on 7 October 2019 by UNHCR as part of its 70th Executive Committee meeting. The publication documents and analyzes the results of the HLS, including all 360 pledges received from States, international/regional organizations and civil society organizations.

On 15 July, UNHCR published the [2020 update of the Background Note on Gender Equality, Nationality Laws and Statelessness](#). This Note reflects positive momentum since 2019, including partial reform in Iran and the pledges made on this issue at the High



Georgia is a Liberian citizen. Her children were born in Nigeria to a Nigerian father who passed away. As their births were never registered in Nigeria and local laws prohibit Georgia from passing on her citizenship to them, the children are left stateless. Liberia is one of 25 countries that maintain such provisions. It is currently revising its nationality law, which may eventually allow Georgia to attain citizenship for her children. The 2020 Update of the Background Note on Gender Equality, Nationality Laws, and Statelessness provides further background information. © UNHCR/Diana Diaz

Level Segment on Statelessness. There remain 25 countries where women cannot confer nationality to their children on an equal basis with men.

On 25 June, during a virtual meeting organized by UNHCR and the Statelessness Network Asia Pacific (SNAP) in the **Philippines**, the national civil society organizations participating in the meeting agreed to establish a national statelessness network and develop Terms of Reference to institutionalize the network. Likely initiatives by the new national network include advocacy for law reform and awareness raising activities among persons of concern.

On 27 May, a **joint statement “[In Solidarity with the Stateless](#)”** was issued by 84 civil society actors urging States, donors and other stakeholders to promote and protect the rights of stateless persons in their COVID-19 responses. The statement underlines that stateless persons were already marginalized before the crisis and that they now face even greater,

life-threatening vulnerabilities.

In June, the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion (ISI) issued the **report “[Stateless in a Global Pandemic](#)”**. The report, which draws on the inputs of ISI’s partners from around the world, finds that stateless communities face very serious consequences in relation to health and wellbeing; survival and livelihoods; hate speech, racism and xenophobia; border closures and movement restrictions; insecurity and detention; as well as the knock-on effects of decreasing civil society engagement on statelessness and the right to nationality.

In April and May in **Kazakhstan**, UNHCR and its legal partners conducted a series of online lectures on statelessness matters for students at Kazakh Al Farabi National University in Almaty, Miras University in Shymkent, and the State Universities in Karaganda and Uralsk.

In April and May in **Somalia**, UNHCR undertook consultations with senior government officials of the Ministry of Interior, Federal Affairs and Reconciliation to discuss the implementation of Somalia's High-Level Segment pledges, including accession to both statelessness conventions. This effort resulted in the appointment of a statelessness focal point within the Ministry of Interior who will work with UNHCR to facilitate the development of a national action plan to end statelessness in Somalia by 2024.

In March and April in **Italy**, UNHCR organized webinars on statelessness for students of the International Human Rights Law Clinic of Turin's International University College and delivered a comprehensive remote training to law students of the University of Naples. Both trainings, delivered by UNHCR and representatives of Tavolo Apolidia, an NGO network on statelessness in Italy, fit within a broader strategy aimed at establishing statelessness legal clinics in the main Italian cities and increasing outreach and legal support to stateless persons.

On 9 July, the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion, Open Society Justice Initiative and Rights and Security International organized a [webinar](#) entitled "**Citizenship stripping, expulsion and statelessness: Have counter-terrorism measures gone too far?**". The webinar was held as a side event to the [UN Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week](#).

On 1 April, the Swedish Organization Against Statelessness (SOAS) was officially registered as an NGO in **Sweden**. Its main goals are to raise awareness of statelessness issues, empower stateless persons, and work towards ending statelessness in Sweden in line with UNHCR's #IBelong Campaign. As a member organization of the European Network on Statelessness, SOAS will seek to advocate for policy and legislative changes that ensure the protection of stateless persons and the enjoyment of their basic rights, working in consultation with stateless persons themselves as well as recognized experts in relevant fields.

On 4 June in Rabat, **Morocco**, UNHCR organized a webinar on "Statelessness: Causes, Consequences and Prevention Measures" for around 40 students of the Mohamed V University, Faculty of Law and its Legal Clinic. On 10 June, UNHCR also organized a webinar on statelessness prevention and birth registration for approximately 40 NGO members of the Protection Working Group of the Casablanca and Oriental Region. Both trainings aimed to raise awareness of statelessness and strengthen capacity to assist migrants and refugees with birth registration as well as to identify persons at risk of statelessness.

Implementation of the Global Action Plan

In line with **Action 1, Resolve existing major situations of statelessness**, on 24 April, the President of the **Russian Federation** signed [Federal Law No. 134-FZ](#), which simplifies the acquisition of citizenship by naturalization. The new law eliminates the requirement to renounce foreign citizenship before applying for Russian citizenship, thereby avoiding situations of legal limbo and potential statelessness. The law will furthermore allow stateless former citizens of USSR to benefit from simplified conditions when applying for Russian citizenship. As of 24 July, when the new law enters into force, the five-year legal residence and proof of income requirements will be waived for this group.

With regard to **Action 1** and **Action 6, Protect stateless persons and facilitate their naturalization**, UNHCR and the Ministry of Interior of **Tajikistan** signed a joint work plan for the implementation of the recently enacted Amnesty Law legalizing stateless persons and foreign citizens irregularly residing in the country. The work plan includes a national information campaign to inform the affected population of the new legal provisions and urge them to take advantage of the opportunity to regularize their status in the country. A hotline number for free legal counseling will be available as part of the information campaign.

Also in line with **Action 1** and **Action 6**, UNHCR provided legal assistance for the completion of naturalization applications to 321 refugees at risk of statelessness, including 179 children, in the Kayes region of **Mali**. The activities are in support of the Government's effort to resolve the situation of refugees at risk of statelessness who arrived in Mali in the mid-1980s.

With respect to **Action 3, Remove gender discrimination from nationality laws**, on May 25, The **Bahamas'** Supreme Court [indicated its intention to rule](#) that anyone born in The Bahamas is entitled to citizenship at birth if at least one of their parents is a citizen of the country, irrespective of whether the parents are married. Unmarried Bahamian fathers are currently not able to confer nationality on their children at birth. Children born out of wedlock in The Bahamas to a foreign mother and a Bahamian father are thus not granted Bahamian citizenship at birth; they may only apply for Bahamian nationality upon turning 18. The court has adjourned the final ruling in the case until July 2020 because of evidentiary

issues concerning actual paternity. The Government is expected to appeal the ruling.

In line with **Action 6**, on 13 May, **Kazakhstan** adopted amendments to the Migration Law which foresee the establishment of a statelessness determination procedure (SDP). The Ministry of Internal Affairs is currently in the process of developing and approving the new SDP via a by-law. To aid in this process, UNHCR provided recommendations and draft SDP articles conforming with international human rights standards and best practices in the area of statelessness reduction and protection of stateless persons in line with UNHCR's Handbook on the Protection of Stateless Persons and Good Practices Paper on Action 6.

Furthermore on **Action 6**, on 16 June, **Ukraine** adopted a bill on [Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine Concerning Recognition as a Stateless Person](#) to formally establish a statelessness determination procedure. The bill was drafted by members of the Parliament's Human Rights Committee



Askar Khodjiev, a lawyer working for one of UNHCR's partner organizations in Tajikistan, is providing legal counselling to a stateless person and explaining the recently enacted Amnesty Law and legalization procedures in the country. © UNHCR/Nodira Akbaralieva

Also in line with **Action 7**, the Government of **Rwanda** [endorsed civil registration services at health centres](#) during an [extraordinary cabinet meeting](#) on 16 June. To ensure legal identity for all, in line with SDG Target 16.9, this action permits a “one-stop approach”: when the birth occurs, all processes of notification, registration and certification are done at once, thereby increasing the number of persons with birth certificates. This development follows the [amendment](#) of the [2016 Law Governing Persons and Family](#) published in the official gazette in February this year.

Furthermore on **Action 7**, in **Morocco** UNHCR launched a survey with a legal partner to identify and assist children who have not been registered at birth. The ultimate goal is to regularize the civil status situation of all children born to refugees and asylum seekers in the country.

Finally, with respect to **Action 9, Accede to the UN Statelessness Conventions**, the National Assembly in the **Republic of Congo** adopted bills in favour of accession to the two UN Conventions on Statelessness on 26 June.

Media impact of the Campaign

On 25 June, UNHCR and the Governments of **Togo**, **Guinea-Bissau**, and **Guinea** started a virtual awareness campaign on the importance of birth registration and challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The media campaign will be carried out through advertisement spots featuring government officials, artists and influencers on TV, radio, and social media in urban and rural areas. The spots will be translated into various local languages.

Director Michèle Stephenson’s new documentary entitled “[Stateless](#)” follows the grassroots campaign of an activist named Rosa Iris as she fights to protect the right to citizenship for all people in the **Dominican Republic**.

Upcoming events

In July in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan

UNHCR and the Government of Turkmenistan will partner to organize a national roundtable on the implementation of the national action plan to end statelessness in Turkmenistan (2019-2024). A webinar is also scheduled for 21 July to cover statelessness determination procedures and international best practices. This event will be organized in a blended face-to-face/online format, with national participants attending live at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Ashgabat while international and UNHCR experts will connect through videoconferencing.

In August and December in Amman, Jordan

UNHCR will organize two trainings for the Jordanian Civil Status Department on the importance of documentation to prevent statelessness. The trainings will highlight birth registration as an essential human right while also discussing civil documentation in the context of forced displacement.

In the week of 21 September, virtually

The Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights will organize a virtual High-Level Side Event at the 75th UN General Assembly, "Achieving Gender Equality in Nationality Laws," in partnership with a group of champion States and UN agencies, including UNHCR. At the event, panelists will discuss lessons learned from reform processes and highlight the

significant benefits of gender-equal nationality rights to citizens, their families, and society as a whole.

On 24 September, virtually

In place of the annual summer retreat on statelessness, on September 24 the Statelessness Section at UNHCR Headquarters will host a webinar for civil society organizations and others focused on follow-up to the High-Level Segment on Statelessness.

In October in Yaoundé, Cameroon

The Catholic University of Central Africa will host the second session of the nationality and statelessness course for French-speaking practitioners. This year's session will be held through videoconferencing due to COVID-19.

From 17 to 23 February 2021, in Melbourne, Australia

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. More information on the course and the application form can be found [here](#).

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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