

The Campaign to End Statelessness

April – June 2019 Update

#IBelong

Join us in our Campaign to End Statelessness



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Mobilizing Governments and Civil Society

In the lead-up to the [High-Level Segment on Statelessness](#) that will be held as part of UNHCR's Executive Committee meeting on 7 October 2019, national and regional preparatory meetings have been organized to support States in highlighting their achievements and preparing pledges.

From 16 to 18 April, a [Ministerial Conference on the Eradication of Statelessness in the Great Lakes Region](#) took place in Nairobi, Kenya. It was organized by the Government of Kenya, the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and UNHCR. The conference gathered representatives from 12 ICGLR Member States, inter-governmental bodies and civil society organizations who collectively reviewed the progress of ICGLR Member States under ICGLR's Action Plan on the Eradication of Statelessness and shared [indicative pledges](#) in relation to the High-Level Segment on

Statelessness. The conference also resulted in the extension of the ICGLR Action Plan to 2024 and the addition of two objectives related to legal identity documentation.

On 23 April, UNHCR and the Government of Tajikistan convened a **National Consultation on the Prevention and Reduction of Statelessness** in Dushanbe. The consultation gathered delegates from ministries, civil society, the diplomatic community and international agencies who reviewed the remaining legislative and procedural gaps in Tajikistan with respect to the prevention and reduction of statelessness. Recommendations were submitted to the Government for further consideration and are intended to support the Government's active participation at the High-Level Segment on Statelessness.

On 25 and 26 April, the [International Conference on Addressing Statelessness in Europe](#) took place in Madrid, organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain and UNHCR. Participants included representatives and national experts from 34 countries, as well as international and regional organizations, academia and civil society. The conference provided an opportunity to conduct a comprehensive analysis of current statelessness issues, to exchange good practices and to elaborate recommendations to identify and protect stateless persons and prevent childhood statelessness in the region.

From 6 to 8 May, the [second regional workshop for the West African region](#) was hosted by UNHCR in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire to prepare for the High-Level Segment on Statelessness. The workshop was attended by delegates from 14 of the 15 Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Member States, ECOWAS and Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa, as well as UNICEF, the World Bank, and representatives from civil society. The meeting resulted in a set of country-specific [indicative pledges](#) which have been submitted to relevant ministries for further consideration. Member States also shared their [achievements](#) to date.



Representatives at the second regional workshop for the West African region in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. © UNHCR

On 30 and 31 May, UNHCR, with the support of the Royal Thai Government, convened a [regional preparatory meeting in Bangkok](#). The meeting gathered 113 participants from 16 States in the Asia Pacific region, including government officials and representatives of UN agencies, national human rights commissions, NGOs, academia and formerly stateless persons. Participants took stock of achievements and remaining challenges, discussed good practices and shared indicative pledges for the High-Level Segment on Statelessness.

On 4 July, UNHCR organized a **regional preparatory meeting for the Middle East and North Africa region** in Casablanca, hosted by Morocco. The meeting encouraged a coordinated regional approach and dialogue on best practices relevant to the ten actions of the [Global Action Plan to End Statelessness](#).

From 26 to 28 June, the [World Conference on Statelessness](#) was held in The Hague, organized by the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion and partners. The conference gathered over 250 activists, academics, NGOs, UN officials and artists to explore and discuss statelessness-related challenges, opportunities, research, policy and advocacy. High-level panel debates were convened on a number of topics including strengthening a unified human rights voice on the Rohingya crisis; opportunities presented by the Sustainable Development Agenda; the use and mis-use of deprivation of nationality; realizing the right of every child to a nationality; and building a global statelessness movement.



Representatives at the regional preparatory meeting for the Asia Pacific region in Bangkok. © UNHCR



Participants at the 2nd Statelessness course in Arabic held at the International Institute of International Humanitarian Law. © International Institute of International Humanitarian Law

A number of **courses on statelessness** were organized to strengthen awareness of international standards among government officials and other stakeholders, while also providing a platform for participants to share experiences and explore solutions. From 16 to 19 April, UNHCR and the International Institute of International Humanitarian Law (IIHL), organized the **2nd Statelessness course in Arabic** in Sanremo, Italy. The training gathered 32 government officials from countries across the Middle East and North Africa. From 17 to 21 June, UNHCR and the IIHL organized the **8th course on Statelessness in English** in Sanremo, which brought together 31 participants from 24 countries across the world. From 12 to 15 June, an **advanced capacity-building session on statelessness** was held in Tunis, organized by UNHCR, the League of Arab States (LAS), the Arab Interior Ministers Council and the IIHL. The training was attended by 45 government officials from 21 LAS Member States from both Ministries of Justice and Interior. Finally, on 2 July, UNHCR conducted an introductory session on statelessness at an annual summer course held at the World Council of Churches Bossey Ecumenical Institute in Switzerland. The theme of this year's summer course was **"Engaging for Just and Participatory Societies – Belongingness**

in Judaism, Christianity and Islam". Participants were young faith leaders from a range of countries including Burkina Faso, Germany, Haiti, India and the USA.

On 3 July, UNHCR and the Americas Network on Nationality and Statelessness (Red ANA) convened a **panel discussion at the 2019 UNHCR Annual Consultations with NGOs on "Statelessness Data and Evidence: The Challenges and the Road Ahead"**. Speakers from Red ANA, UNFPA and Lawyers for Human Rights, South Africa, discussed good practices currently taking place to improve data collection on statelessness.

On May 28, UNHCR organized a workshop in Colombia on **"Statelessness and problems related to nationality documentation in the mixed migration flows from Venezuela"**. The workshop gathered over 50 delegates from civil society organizations, UN agencies and governmental entities of the Inter-Agency Mixed Migration Flows Group and the Protection Cluster in Colombia. The workshop resulted in an agreement to jointly develop a work plan to address the issues at a national level.

On 23 April, the national human rights institutes of Indonesia (Komnas HAM) and Malaysia (SUHAKAM) [signed a Memorandum of Understanding to address the issue of statelessness in Sabah, Malaysia](#). The institutes pledged to work closely with their respective governments to address statelessness in Sabah and conduct a study on the geopolitical and historical context of the issue. The Commission on the Human Rights of the Philippines will act as an observer.

On 13 May, the global law firm **Baker McKenzie** organized a seminar on statelessness for their legal team and partners in Thailand. UNHCR and the National Human Rights Commissioner, Tuenjai Deetes (the regional finalist for Asia for the 2018 UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award), briefed the participants on the statelessness situation in Thailand.

On 15 May, the Philippines took **steps towards acceding to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness (1961 Convention)** by including this topic in the 18th Congress Legislative Agenda proposed by the Council for the Welfare of Children. On 23 May, the Council for the Welfare of Children convened a meeting with UNHCR and key government agencies to discuss collaboration and to identify steps to move forward with accession to the 1961 Convention.

On 6 and 7 June, the National Citizenship Network in Myanmar held a **workshop on childhood statelessness and access to civil documentation for persons with disabilities**. The workshop was facilitated by the Statelessness Network Asia Pacific and the Open Society Foundation and was attended by representatives from national and international NGOs. The workshop provided a platform to discuss strategies to reduce statelessness and improve access to civil documentation for all populations in Myanmar.



The Thai National Human Rights Commissioner, Tuenjai Deetes, and UNHCR at a statelessness seminar organized by Baker McKenzie. © UNHCR

On 3 July, the UNHCR-UNICEF Coalition on Every Child's Right to a Nationality held **national consultations on birth registration and the prevention of childhood statelessness** in Kyrgyzstan. During the event, State entities and the Parliament were encouraged to accelerate civil registration legislative reform and ensure that every child is registered at birth irrespective of the parents' legal status.

On 29 and 30 April, UNHCR and the National Court Administration under the Ministry of Justice of Lithuania organized a **statelessness seminar** in Vilnius. Approximately 50 judges and assistant judges representing the Supreme Administrative Court of Lithuania, regional administrative courts and district courts, as well as a number of foreign judges, attended the event. The discussions focused on international legal standards relating to statelessness, as well as the reduction and prevention of statelessness.

From 22 to 24 May, in Zagreb, UNHCR jointly with the Ministry of Interior of Croatia and the Croatian Red Cross convened the **fifth Annual Conference on International Protection and Statelessness**. The conference was attended by government officials, the Ombudsman's office and civil society. During the event, the State Secretary of the Ministry of Interior, Mr. Žarko Katić, reaffirmed the Government's strong commitment to support UNHCR's [#IBelong Campaign](#) and the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness.

On 11 and 12 June, the **European Committee on Legal Co-operation of the Council of Europe held an ad-hoc meeting on statelessness** in Strasbourg to discuss statelessness determination procedures in select Council of Europe Member States and reflect on possible activities to be carried out to prevent childhood statelessness. UNHCR presented the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness and the #IBelong Campaign, and suggested, *inter alia*, that the Council of Europe consider adopting its own regional action plan similar to the plans and declarations in other regions of the world.

On 15 and 16 April, UNHCR and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) organized the **bi-annual retreat of UNHCR and ECOWAS Ambassadors** in Uyo, Nigeria. During

the meeting, UNHCR sought support from the Ambassadors in advancing the regional agenda to end statelessness, including through concrete pledges to be made at the High-Level Segment on Statelessness.

On 9 and 10 May, the first **workshop on statelessness determination procedures (SDPs)** in Africa was held in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. The event was attended by representatives from Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire. Participants agreed on country-specific roadmaps towards the establishment of SDPs that will help identify and protect stateless persons in line with obligations set out in the 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons.

During its plenary session from 6 to 17 May, **the Pan-African Parliament adopted a resolution on the eradication of statelessness in Africa**. The resolution calls on States to reform nationality laws to ensure that every child born or found on a State's territory will acquire the nationality of that State if the child would otherwise be stateless; to eliminate all forms of discrimination in nationality laws; to improve access to birth registration; and to adopt legislation that facilitates the recognition and documentation of nationality through simplified naturalization procedures. The Pan-African Parliament also urged States to coordinate actions to develop comprehensive regional strategies to address statelessness.

From 21 to 24 May, a **national task force in Eswatini developed a National Action Plan to end statelessness**, under the leadership of the Ministry of Interior and with UNHCR's support. The plan foresees the removal of gender discriminatory provisions and granting nationality to children born on the territory who would otherwise be stateless. The action plan was submitted to the Government for adoption.

Similarly, in May, a **multifunctional task force established by the Ministry of Interior of Namibia developed a National Action Plan to end statelessness** in the country. Based on the action plan, consultations on accession to the UN conventions on statelessness have been initiated.

Implementation of the Global Action Plan

With respect to **Action 1, Resolve existing major situations of statelessness**, [Kyrgyzstan became the first country to end statelessness on its territory](#) by granting nationality to the last 50 known stateless persons during a ceremony on 4 July. In the five years since the #IBelong Campaign was launched, Kyrgyzstan resolved a total of 13,700 cases of statelessness, becoming the first country to meet the deadline of the #IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness by 2024.

Also in line with **Action 1**, Uzbekistan published a new draft Law on Citizenship for public consultations on 17 May. The draft law introduces a number of provisions including an explicit stipulation of the fundamental right to a nationality; the general

prohibition of citizenship deprivation; the principle of statelessness reduction; the introduction of a citizenship confirmation procedure; and the recognition as citizens of all stateless persons permanently residing in Uzbekistan as of January 1995. Many of the 80,000 stateless persons officially registered in Uzbekistan are likely to be able to have their situation resolved once the law is enacted.

Finally, with respect to **Action 1**, the Governments of the Philippines and Indonesia conducted a review of the remaining statelessness cases among persons of Indonesian descent. As a result, 165 persons were recently provided with certificates confirming their Indonesian citizenship.



Kojomberdi obtained a birth certificate after his mother had her Kyrgyz citizenship confirmed. © UNHCR Kyrgyzstan

With respect to **Action 2, Ensure that no child is born stateless**, UNHCR and the Ministry of Justice of Côte d'Ivoire organized a workshop on 11 and 12 April to prepare a circular instructing judges on the application of the 1961 Convention provision regarding foundlings. This follows a 2018 landmark court decision which granted Ivorian nationality to five foundlings. In June it was confirmed that an additional 28 foundlings were granted Ivorian nationality following a sensitization campaign carried out with judges from the cities of Katiola, Daloa and Abengourou.

In line with **Action 2** and **Action 7, Ensure birth registration for the prevention of statelessness**, on 17 April, the Parliament of Kazakhstan convened a high-level meeting to discuss the issues of birth registration, childhood statelessness and renunciation and loss of nationality. Following proposals by the Human Rights and Children's Rights Ombudspersons, UNHCR and UNICEF, the Ministry of Justice submitted a proposal to amend 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. The proposed revision is currently under consideration by the Parliament.

With regard to **Action 3, Remove gender discrimination from nationality laws**, from 23 to 25 April Togo organized a validation workshop concerning draft amendments of the country's nationality law. The main objective of the reform is to remove gender discrimination with regard to the conferral of nationality to children and foreign spouses. The anticipated reform also foresees statelessness safeguards related to the renunciation, loss and deprivation of nationality.

In line with **Action 6, Grant protection status to stateless migrants and facilitate their naturalization**, on 21 May, the Ministry of Interior of the Czech Republic issued for the first time a document confirming that an application for determination of a person's statelessness had been lodged. This followed a judgment of the [Supreme Administrative Court](#) stating that in the absence of a statelessness determination procedure, the Ministry of Interior must apply by analogy provisions governing asylum proceedings.

There continues to be significant activity in relation to **Action 7, Ensure birth registration for the prevention of statelessness**. On 15 May, UNHCR and the Government of Sudan signed a partnership agreement in relation to a project to promote access to birth registration for refugees, IDPs and persons at risk of statelessness. The project aims to issue birth certificates for 18,000 children and will include mobile registration campaigns for newborns, late birth registration, training and capacity building for civil registry offices, as well as support in the construction of a birth registration center in White Nile State.

On 29 May, the Government of Moldova adopted an "Instruction on the certification of civil status facts occurred and recorded in the localities on the left bank of Nistru and in Bender municipality" (available in [Romanian](#) and [Russian](#)) that will simplify the procedure of recognizing and registering births recorded in these non-government controlled areas, and thus help prevent statelessness.

Since June, refugee children born in Mauritania and living in urban centres can obtain birth certificates. In February 2018, the Government of Mauritania had already begun issuing birth certificates to Malian refugee children born in Mberra camp. The Government of Mauritania is now taking concrete steps to reduce the risk of statelessness through the delivery of birth certificates to all refugee children born in Mauritania.



Aime, a Congolese refugee child in Mauritania, receiving his birth certificate. © UNHCR

From April to May, UNHCR supported the Government of Burkina Faso in holding mobile court hearings which issued 22,000 birth certificates to persons at risk of statelessness, with a focus on areas hosting forcibly displaced populations. In June, UNHCR started supporting the Government in issuing 34,000 birth certificates to populations at risk of statelessness in the central-eastern and central-southern regions. In May, UNHCR handed over equipment to the Ministry of Home Affairs to support birth registration in border regions.

Myanmar is advancing a new Child Rights Bill which is expected to include language guaranteeing the universal right to birth registration, which the Government plans to provide free of charge.

With respect to **Action 8, Issue nationality documentation to those with entitlement to it**, UNHCR supported the governments of the Philippines and Indonesia in [recording close to 3,000 persons of Indonesian descent in Davao City and General Santos City in the Philippines](#), whose relatives are qualified to apply for a special non-immigrant visa. The recording exercise follows the Department of Justice Circular No. 26 Series of 2018 which granted Special Non-Immigrant Visas to registered Indonesian nationals. The Circular aims to protect their basic rights.

In line with **Action 10, Improve quantitative and qualitative data on stateless populations, the Kenyan government**, UNHCR and partner organizations started preparations for the upcoming 2019 Kenya Population and Housing Census with trainings for enumerators and sensitization campaigns. The census is expected to improve the identification of stateless persons in Kenya. Similarly, in Mali, the National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT) organized a workshop to present the questionnaire for the upcoming census to relevant stakeholders. UNHCR is currently working with INSTAT to include questions on nationality and statelessness.

Finally, with regard to **Action 10**, workshops to validate studies on statelessness were conducted in a number of countries. On 10 April, a workshop was held in Abidjan to validate the country-wide statelessness mapping report for Côte d'Ivoire. The report is expected to be published after formal endorsement at the ministerial level. On 30 April, UNHCR and the Ministry of Home Affairs of Zambia organized a workshop validating a study on statelessness and issues relating to nationality in Zambia. On 26 June, the qualitative study on risks of statelessness in Mali was validated during a workshop in Bamako organized by UNHCR.

Media impact of the campaign

UNHCR published a [photobook](#) on the progress in the Americas towards the eradication of statelessness and the way forward.

On 25 April and 2 May, UNHCR organized information sessions on statelessness in Khartoum, Sudan for journalists and media professionals to raise awareness on the need for law reform and accession to the statelessness conventions. A number of the participants have since written articles related to statelessness, including on the gender discriminatory provisions in Sudan's nationality law.

From 20 to 25 May, the [UN High Commissioner for Refugees visited Myanmar](#). A primary focus of the mission was addressing statelessness in Myanmar and providing a pathway to citizenship for the stateless Rohingya in line with the [recommendations of the Rakhine Advisory Commission](#). The visit generated significant national and international media coverage.



The UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, visiting Myanmar. © UNHCR

On 23 May, building on media coverage of high-profile stateless persons and ahead of the Asia Pacific regional preparatory meeting for the High-Level Segment on Statelessness, UNHCR organized a media luncheon with key national media agencies in Thailand. UNHCR provided updates on the statelessness situation in Thailand, shared information on what the Thai Government and UNHCR are doing to help stateless people and exchanged ideas on what more can be done as part of the collective effort to address statelessness.

The World Conference on Statelessness and Inclusion that was held in The Hague from 26 to 28 June generated significant media coverage on the conference itself as well as on statelessness in general. Reuters published a number of articles, including on [developments in Iran to scrap the ban on women passing nationality to children](#), an [interview with Member of the UN Fact-Finding Mission on Myanmar, Radhika Coomaraswamy](#), and [Kyrgyzstan's efforts to end statelessness in its territory](#). Other recent Reuter's articles on statelessness can be found [here](#).

Upcoming events

On 18 July in New York, United States of America

UNHCR and the Inter-Parliamentary Union will hold a side-event on the critical role of law reform in ending statelessness on the margins of the [2019 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development](#) (HLPF). The HLPF is the UN's central platform for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals and provides for the full and effective participation of all Members States of the UN and States which are members of specialized agencies. The event is open to the public and will be held at the UN Church Center from 2:30 to 4:30pm.

From 29 July to 2 August in Tilburg, The Netherlands

The Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion will convene its annual [statelessness summer course in Tilburg, The Netherlands](#). The course is designed for professionals working on citizenship and statelessness issues and is global in scope, drawing participants from all regions of the world. It provides participants with new knowledge, tools and skills to address statelessness and realize the right to nationality. The curriculum is taught by lecturers from a variety of backgrounds.

On 3 and 4 September in Bangkok, Thailand

UNHCR and the [Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness](#) will convene a roundtable meeting to involve universities and academics from South-East Asia in supporting the #IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness by 2024.

On 5 and 6 September in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan

UNHCR, in partnership with UNICEF and the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, will hold the 2nd Regional Conference on the Right to Legal Identity and Prevention of Statelessness. Participants at the ministerial level from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are expected to review progress in terms of ensuring universal birth registration and preventing childhood statelessness since the first regional conference was held last year.

From 9 to 11 September in Santiago, Chile

The XV Annual Meeting of the Latin America and Caribbean Council of Civil Registry, Identity and Vital Statistics (CLARCIEV) will be held to discuss an ongoing comparative study on statelessness, late birth registration and the issuance of documentation among countries in the region, as well as good practices for ensuring birth registration in emergency contexts.

On 7 October in Geneva, Switzerland

UNHCR will convene a global High-Level Segment on Statelessness as part of UNHCR's Executive Committee meeting to mark the mid-point of the #IBelong Campaign. The purpose of the event will be to assess achievements to date, showcase good practices, and encourage concrete pledges by States and others (regional organizations, international organizations, the private sector, civil society, etc.) to take action to address statelessness in the remaining five years of the Campaign. More information can be found at www.unhcr.org/ibelong/high-level-segment-statelessness/

On 23 October in Hofburg, Vienna

UNHCR, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights will organize the third Practical Seminar on Sharing Good Practices on Birth Registration and Childhood Statelessness among OSCE participating States.

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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