

The Campaign to End Statelessness

April 2017 Update



#IBelong

Join us in our Campaign to End Statelessness



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Mobilizing governments and civil society

On 21 February, delegations from 27 diplomatic missions to the United Nations in Geneva met at the Mexican Permanent Mission for the **fifth meeting** of the group of **Friends of the #IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness**. The Assistant High Commissioner for Protection Volker Türk encouraged the Friends to strategically leverage ongoing multilateral initiatives, such as the Sustainable Development Goals and the Global Refugee Compact, to help address statelessness. The meeting provided an opportunity to take stock of developments since the launch of the Friends group in October 2015, including the adoption of the Human Rights Council Resolution “The Right to Nationality: Women’s Equal Nationality in Law and in Practice” in June 2016 and the approximately 77 recommendations relevant to statelessness made in the course of the 24th and 25th UPR sessions in 2016. Participants discussed important upcoming advocacy opportunities, including the follow up to the New York Declaration of September 2016, and agreed to prepare a work plan to help guide the group’s efforts over the coming two years.

On 18 January, in Brussels, UNHCR, the European Migration Network (EMN) and the European Network on Statelessness (ENS) co-organized a [Conference](#)

[Addressing Statelessness in the European Union: One year on from the adoption of European Council Conclusions](#) that attracted around 70 participants from Permanent Representations in Brussels, EU Institutions, and NGOs.

On 23 January, in Bangladesh, UNHCR and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) jointly launched the [Bengali version of “Nationality and Statelessness: Handbook for Parliamentarians”](#). In the presence of the Standing Committee on the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs and the Standing Committee on Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Women Members of Parliament, the Honourable Speaker of the Bangladesh Parliament, the President of the IPU, and UNHCR all underscored the critical role parliamentarians play when it comes to addressing statelessness. The speakers highlighted the Handbook as an important advocacy and learning tool, noting that it recommends concrete actions that can be taken by parliamentarians and presents information on contemporary statelessness issues, including relevant developments in international law and doctrine as well as good practice examples.

On 6 and 7 February, in Togo, the Global Campaign for

Equal Nationality Rights, of which UNHCR is a Founding Steering Committee member, organized a [workshop on the need to eliminate gender discrimination from nationality legislation](#). The workshop brought together over 60 participants from government, civil society, and academia. The outcomes were discussed at a [press conference that highlighted the event to a Togolese audience](#).

On 15-16 February, in Brussels, UNHCR organized a **training on statelessness in Europe** with the support of the European Network on Statelessness. Some 40 participants working in 25 different countries, including government representatives, NGO staff, OSCE officials, and representatives from ENS and UNHCR, had the opportunity to exchange information and best practices with respect to the prevention of statelessness in the current context in Europe. The meeting also covered developments and best practices with respect to the identification and protection of stateless persons in the region.

On 17 February, in Kazakhstan, over 350 students from five different Universities gathered in Turan University to listen to a UNHCR presentation on the **prevention and reduction of statelessness globally and in Central Asia and to pose questions**. The participants were particularly interested in the rights of stateless persons in Kazakhstan, problems stateless persons face around the world, and how stateless persons may be helped.

On 25 February, in Malaysia, UNHCR and DHRRA Malaysia facilitated a **paralegal roundtable on case management systems for a newly formed coalition of Eastern Sabah-based NGOs**. The roundtable – the first in a series of capacity building initiatives planned in 2017 for NGOs based in Sabah - was attended by 50 participants, including representatives from organisations and community leaders who work with the Bajau Laut, former Filipino refugees and 2nd-3rd generation migrant workers. The roundtable concluded with a decision

to formalize the coalition in order to strengthen the organization of the different communities that may be affected by statelessness. Recommendations adopted by the participants at the roundtable are aligned with UNHCR's planned solutions-focused project in the area. This project aims to build capacity of various actors and to see the development of a mapping/legal identity project targeting the Bajau Laut.

On 2 March, in Austria, UNHCR and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) launched a new **[“Handbook on Statelessness in the OSCE Area: International Standards and Good Practices”](#)** at the OSCE Permanent Council meeting in Vienna. The Handbook is part of ongoing collaboration among UNHCR, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) on statelessness issues. It is intended to be a practical tool for the 57 OSCE participating States, outlining concrete steps that can be undertaken to address statelessness. The launch will be followed by joint ODIHR/HCNM-UNHCR small-scale projects in selected countries or regions in 2017 under the Austrian OSCE Chairmanship, and hopefully beyond.

In Kyrgyzstan, a Working Group on citizenship issues comprising the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Interior, the State Registry Service, UNHCR and NGO experts is reviewing the existing nationality law and issues related to its implementation in practice. **[A number of recommendations have been drafted to improve the citizenship legislation and enforce safeguards to prevent statelessness](#)**. These have now been made available to the public for consultation. In addition, the Working Group contributed to a decision by the Kyrgyz government to undertake a mission to Georgia, led by the Minister of Justice, in order to better understand practices in that country with respect to the prevention and reduction of statelessness.

Implementation of the Global Action Plan



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An immigration officer verifies information of a Makonde family during the registration drive.

In line with Action 1 of the Global Action Plan (Resolve existing major situations of statelessness) the President of Kenya has officially proclaimed the Makonde, a long-time stateless group in Kenya, as the 43rd official tribe in the country and as fully belonging and deserving of citizenship. As a result of the President's proclamation, to date 1496 Makonde have received certificates of Nationality, 1731 Makonde born in Kenya have been issued birth certificates, and 1176 Makonde have been issued ID cards.

Also in line with Action 1, on 7 December, the Thai Cabinet approved a resolution on **"Guidance and Measures to Address Legal Status Problems and Problems of Stateless Persons in Thailand"**. It was published on 14 March 2017 in the Royal Gazette. Under this resolution, children are eligible to apply for Thai nationality if: 1) They were born in Thailand to parents from ethnic minority groups, were registered by the Ministry of Interior and have lived in Thailand for not less than 15 years; or 2) They were born in Thailand to other groups of aliens and have graduated from university or the equivalent. If they have not graduated yet, the Ministry of the Interior shall examine the case on an

individual basis. Abandoned children whose parents are unknown can also apply if they are certified as such by the relevant agency under the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security and have lived in Thailand for not less than 10 years. According to the Ministry of the Interior, some 80,000 people are likely to benefit from this resolution, including 61,070 stateless individuals who were not previously included in the Government's statistics on the registered stateless population. This recent regulation builds on measures announced in the past few years by expanding the scope of eligibility and clarifying the criteria and procedures involved.

On 20 February, in Turkmenistan, UNHCR attended the **naturalization ceremony pictured below**. 25 individuals out of 1,381 persons who were naturalized by a Presidential decree in December 2016 received identity documents during the ceremony. A Roundtable discussion on citizenship matters prior to the ceremony enjoyed the participation of some 100 persons including various Consuls and Ambassadors, line Ministry officials, and representatives of UN Agencies based in Turkmenistan.



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Naturalization ceremony in Turkmenistan.

On Action 2 (Ensure that no child is born stateless), UNHCR launched a new [Good Practices Paper](#). Only if statelessness among children is addressed will the objective of the Global Action Plan – to end all statelessness by 2024 – be fully realized. The goal of Action 2 is to ensure that by 2024 all States have provisions in law to grant nationality to (i) children born in their territory who do not acquire another nationality at birth, (ii) children of unknown origin found on their territory, and (iii) children born to their nationals abroad who do not obtain another nationality at birth.

With respect to Action 3 (Remove gender discrimination from nationality laws), on 25 January, the President of the Republic of Madagascar promulgated a historic amendment to the nationality code. The new [law gives men and women equal rights to pass on Madagascan nationality to their children](#). In addition, the loss of Madagascan nationality no longer affects the concerned person's spouse and children.

On 8 February, in Benin, the Council of Ministers approved a new Bill on the nationality code. The Bill aims at removing discriminatory provisions from the nationality legislation to make it gender equal. The review of Benin's existing nationality legislation started in 2005; the new Bill has now reached the National Assembly, where it is yet to be approved.

On Action 6 (Grant protection status to stateless migrants and facilitate their naturalization), on 9 January, Ecuador passed a new [Human Mobility Law](#). Through this legislation stateless persons who are recognized as such will acquire temporary lawful residence status and enjoy the right to work, to health care, and to social security benefits. The Law also mandates the establishment of a statelessness determination procedure and facilitated naturalization for stateless persons.

On Action 7 (Ensure birth registration for the prevention of statelessness), in February, in Senegal, a **Presidential decree ordered the issuance of late birth registration free of charge**. Over 20% of individuals in Senegal, including 30% of children below the age of 5, do not have a birth certificate.

In Kenya, the **government issued a total of 4704 birth certificates** to persons of concern, of which 3978 were issued under late birth registration procedures. Implementing partners supported the mobile registration processes in Kibera, Kilifi and Kwale.

With respect to Action 9 (Accede to the UN Statelessness Conventions), on 9 February, in Luxembourg, a law approving accession to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness was adopted by a large majority of the Luxembourg Parliament. Luxembourg will become party to the Convention when it deposits its instrument of accession. During the same session, the Luxembourg Parliament adopted a law that facilitates the acquisition of nationality for stateless persons and aims at preventing statelessness in relation to attribution, renunciation and deprivation of nationality. On 22 March, Haiti's Parliament voted to have the government of Haiti accede to both Statelessness Conventions. When Haiti deposits its instruments, it will bring the total number of States Parties to the 1954 Convention to 90 and the 1961 Convention to 69.

In line with Action 10 (Improve quantitative and qualitative data on stateless populations) UNHCR launched, on 15 December, in Stockholm, a study [Mapping Statelessness in Sweden](#). The mapping study highlights both positive efforts to prevent and reduce statelessness in Sweden and to protect stateless persons, as well as current gaps and challenges in these areas. The study makes concrete recommendations

designed to help bring Swedish law and practice further in line with the standards of the two UN Statelessness Conventions.

In January 2017, UNHCR published a study [Mapping Statelessness in Austria](#). The study's main recommendations are the establishment of a statelessness determination procedure and an improved safeguard against statelessness at birth in the country. As an immediate follow-up to the publication, UNHCR took steps to enhance the awareness and capacity of legal aid providers in Austria with respect to statelessness by

offering a new training for legal counsellors and solicitors.

On 2 February, in Niger, the joint-project co-led by the government and UNHCR “Recensement Administratif de Développement à Vocation Humanitaire” on **documentation of people forcibly displaced in the Diffa region** was formally presented to local authorities and humanitarian actors during a **validation workshop**. One of the project's aims is to support the identification of persons at risk of statelessness and to support solutions for such persons.

Media Impact of the Campaign

Read our latest [news stories](#) about **persons of Indonesian descent benefitting from late civil registration in Glan**.

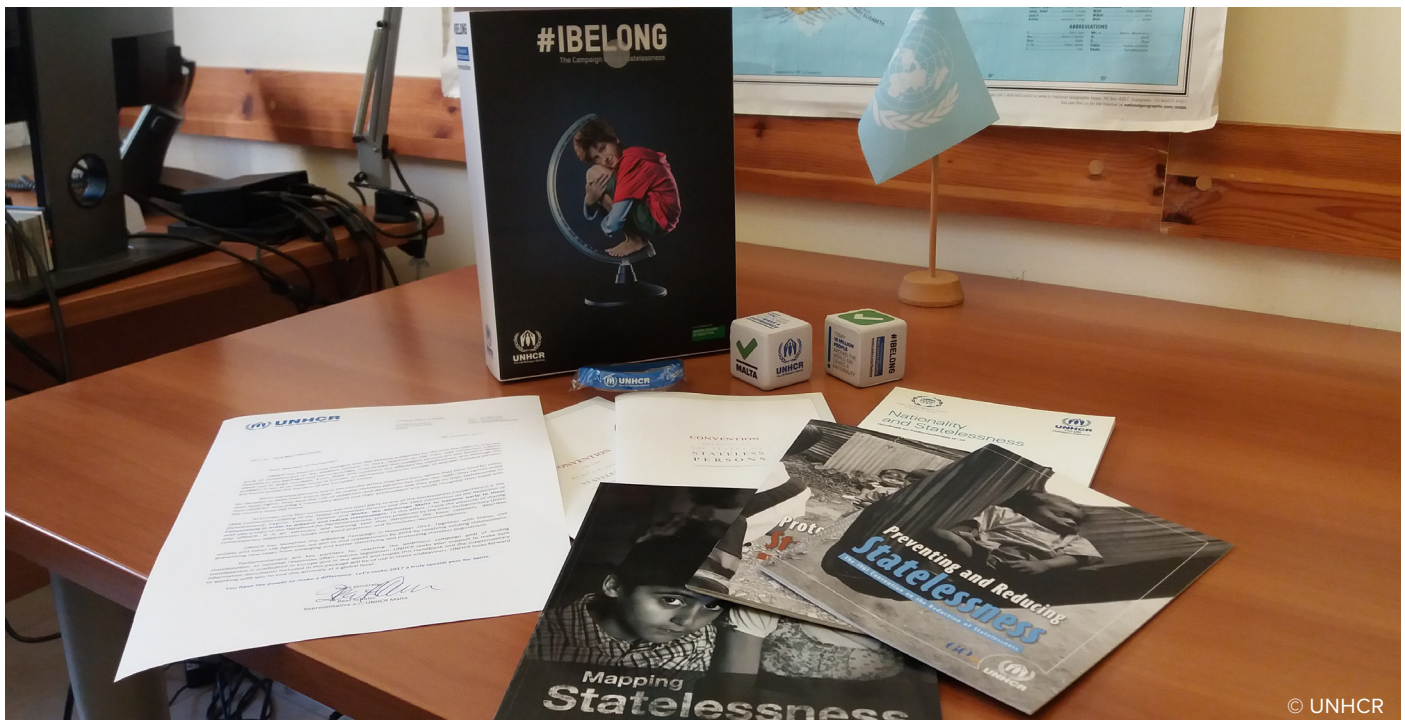
Learn more about DHRRA's mapping and legal aid project in West Malaysia and [watch the story of a family in Perak struggling to acquire legal documentation](#).

When UNHCR met her in 2015, Artee Ma-Yer was a stateless student in northern Thailand. She shared her dreams and challenges in a workshop with stateless youth in Chiang Rai province and was featured in a UNHCR report titled, “[I Am Here, I Belong: The Urgent Need to End Childhood Statelessness](#)”.

Two years later, Artee has acquired Thai nationality with the help of UNHCR and UNHCR's partner, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA).

Artee's case is one of thousands that the Royal Thai Government has solved. These efforts are critical to achieving the goal of the #IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness by 2024.





In January, in Malta, a briefing package prepared by UNHCR for all Maltese European parliamentarians was handed over officially to the President of the Parliament. It encourages, among other things, accession to both Statelessness Conventions.

In February and March, West Africa celebrated the 2nd Anniversary of the Abidjan Declaration to Eradicate Statelessness. Activities have taken place across the region, including a [TV Show](#) hosted by [High Level Supporter Aby Ndour](#) in Senegal and activities with University students in Ghana. Seven countries broadcasted this [TV spot on statelessness](#) to raise awareness of the issue.

2 Years into the Abidjan Declaration:

- 11 States in West Africa are party to the 1961 Statelessness Convention
- 12 States in West Africa are party to the 1954 Statelessness Convention
- 12 States in West Africa have developed national action plans to end statelessness
- 7 States in West Africa have begun a process to revise their nationality legislation
- All governments in West Africa have appointed a statelessness focal point

Also in West Africa, the 6 week-long [Facebook campaign #1minute1million](#) took place in support of [#IBelong Campaign](#). Nine stateless people from five countries in West Africa shared their stories, reaching an audience of more than 30,000 people. Gender discrimination, low rates of birth registration and violence against children were some of the issues discussed on Facebook.

On 3 February, Abidjan hosted the final of the regional competition "[Voix des Jeunes](#)". Students from Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal debated topics related to statelessness and developed solutions to be implemented in their home countries. Innovative ideas were shared, such as sensitization of traditional and religious leaders, as well as the creation of volunteer groups in schools to raise awareness. Radio France Internationale seized the opportunity to record its show '[7 Milliard de Voisins](#)' and invited UNHCR, an Ivorian MP, and young people to share their perspectives.

Upcoming Events

On 4-5 May 2017, the European Network on Statelessness will hold a major conference in Budapest, with UNHCR's support, to launch a new report and kick-start concerted, region-wide advocacy aimed at [protecting stateless persons from arbitrary detention](#).

Also in May, ECOWAS and UNHCR intend to organise a Ministerial level regional conference to validate a regional Plan of Action and timetable with respect to implementation of the Abidjan Declaration on the Eradication of Statelessness.

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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