

Short course: Statelessness and the rights of the child

6 – 7 February 2014, Geneva

There are over 10 million stateless people in the world today and it is estimated that half are children. In fact, in every region, more children are born into statelessness every day. Some inherit this status from their stateless parents, like a genetic disorder. Others simply are not able to acquire their parents' or any other nationality due to discriminatory policies or the lack of simple safeguards in domestic nationality laws which prevent childhood statelessness.

From a child rights perspective, this is a major problem. International law protects the child's right to acquire a nationality, including in article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Yet, this right remains unfulfilled for more than five million stateless children worldwide. Without a nationality, these children are vulnerable to a multitude of other human rights violations. Often related to problems of not being registered at birth, being stateless makes it very hard to go to school, get medical attention, obtain an identity card, inherit property or travel. Statelessness also puts children at risk of exploitation and abuse. Not considered as nationals by any country, stateless children are also branded as outsiders and can struggle to find a sense of belonging.

In view of their shared concern for the issue of childhood statelessness, UNHCR, UNICEF and the Statelessness Programme (Tilburg University) are co-convening a short course on "Statelessness and the rights of the child". A description of the course and related practicalities can be found below.

The short course

Child rights actors have a vital role to play in addressing the issue of childhood statelessness. Already, activities such as promoting birth registration, or facilitating non-discriminatory access to basic services for all children, are helping to prevent statelessness and protect stateless children. This short course is designed to give child rights actors a more detailed understanding of the problem of statelessness and its connection to their work, so as to strengthen engagement and cooperation on this issue. It will be taught by a team of leading child rights and statelessness experts, including:

- Benyam Mezmur, Vice-Chairperson of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and Chairperson of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
- Mark Manly, Senior Legal Coordinator (Statelessness), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- Laura van Waas, Senior Researcher and Manager of the Statelessness Programme, Tilburg University

The teaching will comprise a mix of substantive lectures and interactive exercises. The course will cover:

- core conceptual issues around acquisition of nationality
- the causes of childhood statelessness
- international norms including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and regional treaties
- state practice relating to children's right to a nationality
- the impact of statelessness on children
- measures to protect the rights of stateless children
- linkages between birth registration and prevention of statelessness and
- current developments and opportunities in the area of childhood statelessness.

Practicalities

The course will last two full days and will take place on Thursday 6th and Friday 7th of February 2014, in Geneva. Participation is free of charge, however those based outside Geneva must cover their own costs for travel to and accommodation in Geneva during the course (no scholarships available). A maximum of 26 participants will be admitted to the course and applicants will be selected on the basis of their profile, experience and motivation. The course will be taught in English.

[The application form for the course can be found online here.](#) Please submit the completed application form by **Sunday 15 December 2013** to Statelessness.Programme@tilburguniversity.edu. Applicants will receive notification of whether they have been selected for the course within a week of this closing date.

Further reading

Learn more about the links between child rights and statelessness by accessing the joint UNHCR and Plan publication [Under the radar and under protected: The urgent need to address stateless children's rights.](#)

Details of UNHCR's mandate and activities on statelessness can be found online [here](#). Information on UNICEF's role in relation to birth registration can be found [here](#). Information about the research and training initiatives of Tilburg University's Statelessness Programme is available [here](#).