BEING INVISIBLE: CHILDREN LIVING IN STATELESSNESS

© UNHCR / N. Akbaralieva

WHAT IS STATELESSNESS?

Millions of people around the world are stateless: they are not considered as nationals by any State under the operation of its law. Many fall into a legal quicksand the day they are born, spend most of their lives battling the inequalities they inherited, and often pass on their heartbreak on to future generations. Statelessness is sometimes referred to as an invisible problem because stateless people often remain unseen and unheard.

HOW DO PEOPLE BECOME STATELESS?

Statelessness can be caused by a number of factors such as: discrimination in nationality laws (e.g. racial, religious or gender discrimination), conflict between and gaps in nationality laws and State succession. Being undocumented is not the same as being stateless. However, individuals become at risk of statelessness if they have difficulties in proving that they have links to a State. Lack of birth registration can create such a risk.

The official registration of birth confirms a child's legal existence and acknowledges its existence as a person before the law. Birth certificates are a key form of proof for a child to confirm or acquire citizenship under a State's domestic legislation because they contain key information to assert the child's right to a nationality. Where national law allows nationality to be acquired on grounds of descent (jus sanguinis), birth certificates provide evidence of who the child's parents are. Where citizenship is acquired on grounds of birth in the territory (jus soli), birth certificates prove the birthplace.

WHERE DO THEY LIVE?

Stateless people are found in all regions of the world. Significant populations live in the countries around the world which do not allow mothers to confer their nationality to their children on an equal basis as fathers. Statelessness due to the dissolution of former states also continues to affect many people.

CHILDHOOD STATELESSNESS

A child without any nationality can face a lifetime of barriers and discrimination. Statelessness can profoundly affect the ability of children to access adequate health care, education and other social and justice services, and to fulfill their plans and dreams for the future. The effects of being born stateless are severe.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

In many countries, children need nationality documentation to receive medical care. In some countries, stateless children cannot be legally vaccinated.

ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Education for stateless children is a particularly thorny issue. Stateless children can face problems with access to schools or higher education and experience stigma from teachers and other pupils alike. In some countries, stateless children are allowed to attend school but unable to sit final exams or receive a school certificate, which is usually a prerequisite for accessing higher education.

LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND AT BIRTH

UNICEF AND UNHCR JOINT ACTIONTO SUPPORT STATELESS CHILDREN

unicef | UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency

© UNICEF / V. Kaliyev

STATELESENESS IN CENTRAL ASIA

Since the start of the #IBelong campaign in 2014, UNHCR's partners in Kazakhstan identified some 5,300 individuals of undetermined nationality, including some 300 children at risk of statelessness due to lack of birth registration; in Kyrgyzstan out of some 13,700 identified - more than 2,300 are children; while in Tajikistan out of some 39,000 identified, some 18,000 are children. The actual number of unregistered children at birth is believed to be higher in Central Asian countries as children continue to be left unregistered due to certain provisions in the national legislation or its practices. The main reasons of statelessness in the region stem from the historical context for the acquisition of independence, gaps in the existing legislation and procedures for its implemen-tation, as well as collisions arising from various approaches to the issue of citizenship in the region.

PREVENTING STATELESSNESS

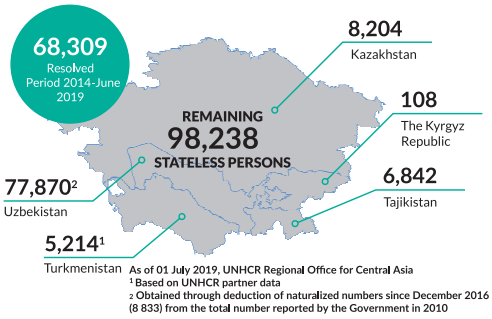
Article 7 (1) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child requires that States ensure that every child is registered immediately after birth and has the right to acquire a nationality. Providing birth registration for all children – regardless of the legal status of their parents – is an essential step towards preventing statelessness. Both UNICEF and UNHCR promote birth registration and access of every child to the right to nationality. UNICEF and UNHCR work together to end childhood statelessness in 20 countries, including Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan.

UNHCR AND UNICEF COALITION ON EVERY CHILD'S RIGHT TO A NATIONALITY

In December 2016, UNHCR and UNICEF launched the Global Coalition on Every Child's Right to a Nationality. The Coalition aims to expand and strengthen international co-operation to raise awareness about and combat childhood statelessness, as well as promote the right of every child to acquire a nationality. In Central Asia UNHCR and UNICEF currently implement Joint Strategies for Addressing Childhood Statelessness in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan for 2018-2020 on improving birth registration to prevent statelessness and to protect stateless children. The strategies aim to:

- Resolve existing major situations of statelessness
- Ensure that no child is born stateless
- Ensure birth registration for the prevention of statelessness
- Accede to the UN Statelessness Conventions

Situation Overview



#IBELONG campaign

In 2014 UNHCR launched #IBelong campaign. Together with States, civil society and other UN Agencies, UNHCR aims to end statelessness by 2024 by resolving existing statelessness, preventing new cases from emerging and better identifying and protecting stateless populations.

http://www.unhcr.org/ibelong/