

Central Asian Conference on Ensuring Birth Registration to Prevent Statelessness

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Living in a remote area of Tajikistan, Sanafruz never confirmed her citizenship of the country. Without any documents to prove her identity, her children were born stateless. Through the Government of Tajikistan's commitment to end statelessness, and with the support of UNHCR and its partner, Sanafruz and her family have now been recognised as citizens and received identity documents. (Photo: UNHCR/ Muhammadkhuja Davlyatov)

The **Central Asian Conference on Ensuring Birth Registration to Prevent Statelessness** aimed to address the issue of birth registration as a preventive measure against statelessness in Central Asia. This event brought together senior officials and experts from the region to discuss and share best practices, challenges, and opportunities in establishing effective birth registration systems.

Central Asia has achieved significant progress in reducing statelessness through its commitment to the #IBelong Campaign. As this campaign transitions into the Global Alliance to End Statelessness, the focus will be now on consolidating these gains and addressing the root causes of statelessness. Ensuring universal birth registration is a key preventative measure, as it secures legal identity and access to rights and services. The objective aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 16.9, which targets legal identity for all by 2030, and also supports the Asian and Pacific Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) Decade (2015-2024), committing to strengthen national CRVS systems including integration of birth registration into broader social services.

The Central Asian Conference on Ensuring Birth Registration to Prevent Statelessness was convened by the United Nations Refugee Agency, UNHCR, together with the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the National Center of the Republic of Uzbekistan for Human Rights.

Prepared by the UNHCR Representation to Central Asia, this report outlines the key findings from the event.

Conference Agenda

The conference explored six key topics:

- Integrating birth registration with education, health, and social services
- Establishing universal birth registration systems
- Leveraging technology for efficient birth registration
- Best practices in universal birth registration in the region
- Protecting the rights of stateless children and children of unknown parents
- Exploring opportunities within the global alliance to end statelessness

Integrating birth registration with education, health, and social services

This integration is essential for achieving universal coverage, ensuring policy compliance, and enhancing the accuracy and accessibility of demographic data.

Integrating birth registration with other services helps reach universal coverage, particularly in hard-to-reach populations. This is essential for compliance with international human rights treaties and national policies mandating universal birth registration. Such integration supports maintaining accurate and up-to-date demographic data, which is critical for effective government planning and policy implementation.

Integrated birth registration is foundational for holistic child development, ensuring that every child's education, health, and social welfare needs are formally recognized and met. It promotes social inclusion by counting all children, regardless of their background, and ensuring they have equal opportunities to contribute to society. Furthermore, effective integration aids in better resource allocation, ensuring that health, education, and social services are provided where most needed.

By incorporating birth registration into routine health check-ups, school enrollments, and social service visits, barriers such as distance, cost, and lack of awareness are significantly reduced.

Parents can register their children’s births during routine interactions with these services, enhancing convenience and eliminating the need for additional trips to registration offices. This integration leads to more efficient public service delivery, improving overall community trust and engagement with government programs.

Challenges and Opportunities in Sector Integration:

EDUCATION	
<i>Challenges</i>	<i>Opportunities</i>
Unregistered children face barriers in accessing formal education and receiving certificates upon graduation, limiting their future opportunities.	<p><u>School Enrollment as a Key Integration Point:</u> Conducting registration drives during enrollment and conditional enrollment.</p> <p><u>School-Based Registration Facilities:</u> Providing on-site registration services and incorporating registration into school health programs.</p> <p><u>Education and Awareness Campaigns:</u> Integrating registration awareness into curricula and engaging parents.</p> <p><u>Partnerships and Collaborations:</u> Working with local authorities, health services, NGOs, and civil society.</p> <p><u>Technology and Innovation:</u> Utilizing school databases for birth registration.</p>
HEALTH	
<i>Challenges</i>	<i>Opportunities</i>
Without birth registration, children may not access health insurance, vaccinations, or basic health services under national health programs.	<p><u>Birth Registration at Health Facilities:</u> Registering births at the point of birth and providing support for home births.</p> <p><u>Linking Registration with Maternal and Child Health Services:</u> Integrating birth registration with prenatal and antenatal care, and during vaccination and child health days.</p> <p><u>Mobile and Outreach Health Services:</u> Deploying mobile registration units and organizing health camps.</p> <p><u>Educational Initiatives and Awareness:</u> Educating parents and guardians through informational materials.</p> <p><u>Partnerships and Collaborative Efforts:</u> Strengthening partnerships between health departments and local civil registration offices.</p> <p><u>Technology and Data Integration:</u> Implementing digital registration systems and data-sharing protocols.</p> <p><u>Monitoring and Follow-Up:</u> Following up on unregistered births and tracking performance metrics.</p>

SOCIAL SERVICES	
Challenges	Opportunities
Children without registered identities struggle to access social welfare benefits, legal protection, and support services, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse.	<p><u>Linking Social Service Visits to Registration:</u> Encouraging home visits and referrals by social workers.</p> <p><u>Incorporating Registration in Social Programs:</u> Integrating birth registration with conditional assistance programs and family support services.</p> <p><u>Outreach and Mobile Services:</u> Deploying mobile registration units and organizing community events.</p> <p><u>Training and Capacity-Building:</u> Training social service professionals in the legal and procedural aspects of birth registration.</p> <p><u>Partnerships and Collaboration:</u> Fostering collaborations between social service agencies and civil registration authorities.</p> <p><u>Use of Technology:</u> Developing joint digital platforms for birth registration.</p> <p><u>Monitoring and Reporting:</u> Tracking birth registration data through social service interactions.</p> <p><u>Policy Advocacy and Frameworks:</u> Developing policies that require and facilitate the integration of BR within all child-related social services.</p>

Kazakhstan

The Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan has implemented several technological advancements to enhance the efficiency of birth registration processes.

The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan ensures the protection of marriage, family, motherhood, fatherhood, and childhood (Article 27). It further stipulates that human rights and freedoms are absolute and inalienable from birth, serving as the foundation for the application of laws and regulatory acts (Article 12).

The basis for state registration of a child's birth is a medical birth certificate or a court decision establishing the fact of birth. Birth registration is free and can be carried out at any registration office in Kazakhstan, according to the parents' preference.

Business process for birth registration

The process begins with the parents or guardians submitting an application. Registration Authority (RAGS) – the registrar – processes the application within two working days. Outcome: The issuance of a birth certificate.

Technological integration

Kazakhstan's birth registration process is supported by several technological systems:

- National register of individual identification numbers: This database stores information about individual identification numbers (IINs) assigned to individuals.
- State database "Individuals": Maintains records of personal data and IINs.
- RAGS information system: Used for State registration of civil status acts, containing personal data.
- Digital archive of RAGS: Over 40 million paper records from 1937 to 2008 have been digitized, and since 2008, registrations are conducted digitally.
- Innovative service delivery
- Mobile applications: Birth certificates can be obtained through banking mobile apps (Kaspi.kz, Halyk Homebank).
- Digital birth certificates: Available alongside traditional paper certificates.

Advantages of technological integration

- Instant registration: Birth records and IINs are automatically registered at birth, even before parents request the child's name.
- Reduced registrar involvement: Minimizes manual intervention in the registration process.
- Efficient service delivery: IINs are sent to government systems for further services, saving time and resources.

Annual birth registration statistics

Kazakhstan registers over 400,000 births annually, with detailed records maintained in both digital and paper formats.

Proactive birth registration service

Kazakhstan has introduced a proactive birth registration service through SMS notifications and mobile applications, improving accessibility and convenience for parents.

Improvements in legislation

Recent legislative improvements have made the birth registration process more efficient and accessible:

- Extraterrestrial services: Services can now be accessed irrespective of residence.
- Proactive registration: Via mobile notifications and banking apps.
- Inclusive registration: Allows for the registration of children born to undocumented mothers.

The Kyrgyz Republic

The Kyrgyz Republic has adopted advanced digital solutions to enhance the efficiency and accessibility of birth registration processes.

National legislative framework

Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic: protects the rights of family, motherhood, fatherhood, and childhood. Family Code (August 30, 2003): outlines family rights and responsibilities. Children's Code (July 10, 2012) ensures the protection of children's rights. Law on Civil Status Acts (August 1, 2020): governs the registration of civil status acts, including births. Instructions on State Registration of Civil Status Acts (March 11, 2021): details the procedure for state registration.

Procedure for Assigning and Changing Personal Identification Numbers (September 28, 2017): establishes the process for managing personal identification numbers.

International legal standards

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (New York, December 16, 1966), Kyrgyzstan ratified on January 12, 1994. Article 24 mandates immediate birth registration and the right to a name and nationality for every child.

Convention on the Rights of the Child (New York, November 20, 1989), Kyrgyzstan ratified on January 12, 1994.

International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (April 15, 2003), Article 7 and Article 29 ensure children's rights to name, birth registration, and nationality.

The principles of international law are integrated into national legislation, ensuring that every child in Kyrgyzstan has the right to a name and nationality and is registered immediately after birth.

Kyrgyzstan committed to aligning its national birth registration laws with international standards and ensuring the registration and issuance of birth certificates for children without prior registration.

The law outlines the legal foundations for state registration of civil status acts, including the birth registration process, even in cases where parents lack personal identification documents. The process includes the issuance of a birth certificate based on a medical birth certificate and a statement of birth.

Automated Information System "ZAGS"

Since 2015, the automated information system "ZAGS" has significantly improved the efficiency of birth registration through the following:

- Automation of business processes: streamlines the registration process, reducing service time for citizens.
- Unified database: maintains a comprehensive database of civil status acts.
- Accessibility: provides access to all types of civil status records for authorized users.
- Prevention of duplicate records: ensures the uniqueness of civil status records.

Digital solutions

- Online application for birth registration: allows parents to submit birth registration applications online.
- Home delivery of birth certificates: provides the convenience of delivering birth certificates directly to parents' homes.

Tajikistan

In 2014, the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan and UNHCR launched a national pilot project as part of the 10-year global campaign to end statelessness by 2024. This initiative aimed to assist people at risk of statelessness and those already stateless in obtaining valid identity documents.

Assistance provided

From 2014 to the present, the Passport and Registration Service (PRS) of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Tajikistan, in collaboration with UNHCR and NGOs "Rights and Prosperity" and "Chashma," has assisted 36,783 individuals (31,007 women and 5,776 men) at risk of statelessness in obtaining Tajik passports. PRS staff, along with NGO representatives, traveled to remote mountainous villages to identify people without passports, provide consultations, and establish identity protocols. After document submission and passport processing, passports were ceremoniously issued to these people.

Amnesty Law

In 2019, President of the country initiated the "Law on Amnesty in Connection with the Legalization of the Legal Status of Foreign Citizens and Stateless Persons Illegally Residing in the Republic of Tajikistan." This law, which was in effect until 25 December 2022, allowed foreign citizens and stateless people from former Soviet states to legalize their stay in Tajikistan without facing administrative or criminal charges.

Residence permits issued

From January 2020 to the present, 1,483 residence permits have been issued to foreign citizens and stateless people, helping them legalize their stay and providing a pathway to Tajik citizenship.

Legislation

Despite not being a party to the 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, Tajikistan's amnesty law has enabled stateless people to obtain residence permits and citizenship through simplified procedures.

Constitutional Law on Citizenship of the Republic of Tajikistan (August 8, 2015): Provides a simplified process for stateless people born in the Tajik SSR to acquire citizenship without obtaining a residence permit first. Others may apply after residing with a residence permit for two and a half years.

Rules of Entry, Stay, and Exit for Foreign Citizens and Stateless Persons: Allows stateless people born in former Soviet states or living in Tajikistan with invalid documents to apply for permanent residence and residence permits.

Human rights documents

In 2023, Tajikistan adopted two significant human rights documents aimed at preventing and reducing statelessness and ensuring universal birth registration:

National Strategy for Human Rights Protection (2023-2038): Includes measures to prevent statelessness, such as ratifying relevant conventions, developing clear procedures for determining statelessness status, and improving birth registration legislation.

National Action Plan for Implementing UN Human Rights Council Recommendations (2023-2026): Focuses on ensuring birth registration for all children.

Joining Statelessness Conventions

Tajikistan is considering joining the 1954 and 1961 statelessness conventions, with support from UNHCR. The experience of post-Soviet countries that have joined these conventions will be studied to inform this decision.

Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan adheres to several international legal documents to protect children's rights:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- Declaration of the Rights of the Child
- Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography
- World Declaration on the Survival, Protection, and Development of Children
- Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction
- Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime
- Convention on the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness

National Legal Framework

Constitution of Turkmenistan: The Constitution guarantees human rights and freedoms according to international norms. Rights and freedoms are inalienable and cannot be restricted except as per the Constitution and laws. The state ensures equality before the law regardless of nationality, race, gender, or other statuses.

Family Code of Turkmenistan: The Family Code mandates the state registration of a child's birth in the ZAGS (Civil Registry Office). It outlines the process for registration and correction of birth records and includes provisions for cases where parents' identification documents are missing.

Code on Social Protection: This code specifies the calculation and allocation of State benefits for childbirth, increasing with each subsequent child.

Social Protection Measures for Orphans and Children Without Parental Care

Turkmenistan provides various social protection measures for orphans and children without parental care, including financial assistance, scholarships, free transportation, priority medical care, and housing support.

Protection of Children with Disabilities

Educational and health authorities must create conditions for the upbringing and rehabilitation of children with disabilities. Specialized institutions are available for those unable to attend general preschools.

Law on State Guarantees of Children's Rights: Defines key terms and ensures that every child, including stateless and refugee children, has the right to a name, nationality, and equal protection under the law. The state provides these children with necessary protections and services.

Law on Citizenship: Outlines the basis for acquiring Turkmen citizenship by birth, naturalization, or other means. Special provisions are made for children whose parents are unknown or stateless.

Role of the Ombudsperson: The Ombudsperson ensures the protection of human rights and freedoms, complementing existing state mechanisms. The Office has the authority to inspect institutions, request information, conduct investigations, and recommend disciplinary or legal actions.

Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan has made significant advancements in its birth registration process, leveraging modern information systems to enhance efficiency and service delivery.

One of the major milestones in Uzbekistan's birth registration system is the development of the "Unified Digital Archive of Civil Registry Offices (ZAGS)." Over 60 million archival documents have been digitized, drastically reducing the average service time to 5-8 minutes.

Through this information system, a unique personal identification number was assigned to more than 700,000 children born between 2005 and 2020. This initiative ensures accurate identification and better management of personal data from birth.

The birth registration process in Uzbekistan involves several key institutions working in tandem:

- Civil Registry Office (ZAGS)
- District (City) Department of Internal Affairs (OVD)
- Ministry of Preschool and School Education
- Ministry of Health
- Territorial Departments of the National Social Protection Agency
- Medical Institution Role

Medical institutions play a crucial role by entering the necessary data into the "Digital Birth and Death Registration System," which includes perinatal deaths. This information is then sent to ZAGS for official recording.

Procedure and Timeline

- **Immediate Data Entry:** Within one day after the child's birth, the medical institution must enter the data into the digital system.
- **ZAGS Verification:** ZAGS verifies the information according to legislative requirements. Upon verification, a birth certificate with a QR code is issued and sent back to the medical institution.
- **Notification of Refusal:** If registration is refused due to non-compliance with legislative acts, a notification with a QR code and reasons for refusal is sent to the medical institution. The institution can correct the issues and resubmit the application.

Once registered, information about the child is shared with various national systems:

- Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD)
- Ministry of Preschool and School Education

- Ministry of Health
- National Social Protection Agency
- This ensures that the child is enrolled in preschool, registered at the parents' permanent residence, receives a one-time birth allowance, and is registered at a local clinic.

Global Alliance to End Statelessness

Key events of 2024:

- 70th Anniversary of the 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons
- 10th Anniversary of the #IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness
- Official Launch of the Global Alliance to End Statelessness
- High-Level Segment on Statelessness (October 14, 2024)

Lessons learned from #IBelong Campaign and current state

- Gap between commitments and actions: there is a significant gap between the voluntary commitments made by states and the actions taken to address statelessness.
- Slow progress: the resolution of statelessness issues has been slower than anticipated.
- Limited engagement: there is limited involvement from various stakeholders and actors.
- Perception as a legal issue: statelessness is often viewed as a complex legal problem.
- Limited data: there is a lack of comprehensive data on statelessness.

Vision and mission of the Global Alliance

Vision: A world free of statelessness where everyone enjoys the right to nationality without discrimination.

Mission: Convene, build capacity among members, catalyze, and accelerate solutions to statelessness.

Membership and governance

Members: States, regional intergovernmental organizations, civil society, organizations led by stateless individuals, and UN agencies.

Governance: Managed by a Secretariat (UNHCR) and an Advisory Committee of 15 members.

Priority Areas

- Solutions program: Focuses on finding solutions for stateless individuals at the national level.
- Advocacy and joint actions: Promotes progress in addressing key issues such as child statelessness, gender discrimination, and the rights of stateless people.
- Engagement of all society: Encourages participation from states, UN, regional organizations, NGOs, and stateless-led organizations.
- Connecting global advocacy with national actions: Links global advocacy efforts with practical actions at the national level.

Key programs and initiatives

1. Solutions Seekers Program: Supports States and regional bodies in accelerating commitments.
2. Regional Networking Labs: Webinars and seminars for sharing best practices and ideas.
3. Online Marketplace: Platform for collaborative project proposals and donor engagement.

4. Knowledge Hub: Interactive map, digital library of tools, and expert directory.
5. Forum on Statelessness: Global roundtable every four years for discussing challenges, commitments, and expanding membership.
6. Thematic Working Groups: Initial focus areas include child statelessness, discrimination in citizenship laws, and stateless people' rights.

Growing momentum of the Global Alliance

At 2023 Global Refugee Forum (GRF), 24 States/organizations committed to joining the Global Alliance.

Current members: Include countries such as Australia, Ecuador, Moldova, Montenegro, Thailand, Spain, Slovenia, the UK, and the USA, as well as organizations like UNICEF, OHCHR, and various civil society groups.

Benefits for States

- Connection with key stakeholders and best practices: Enhances capacity and supports commitment implementation.
- Strengthens Human Rights, Humanitarian Aid, and Development: Contributes to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- International recognition and financial investments: Joint efforts to resolve statelessness attract international support and investment.

Key Considerations

- Accelerate commitment implementation: Focus on urgency to achieve SDGs.
- Ratify statelessness Conventions: Encourage States to join the 1954 and 1961 Conventions.
- Engage stateless people in delegations: Ensure their representation and input.
- Join the Global Alliance: Encourage states to become members and actively participate in its initiatives.

High-Level Segment on Statelessness (14 October 2024)

- Segments: Review of #IBelong campaign achievements and official launch of the Global Alliance.
- Parallel events: Lunchtime activities and open debates.
- Nansen Award ceremony: Celebrates significant contributions to addressing statelessness.

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. **Leadership in resolving statelessness.** Central Asia leads in resolving statelessness with high birth registration rates. Countries in the region should share their practices globally to support other nations in developing effective systems.
2. **Advancing with digitalization solutions.** Implementing digital and online solutions will enhance access, accelerate processes, and improve data handling. Mobile registration teams with internet connectivity are essential for this progress.
3. **Compilation of best practices.** Compile a regional list/repository of best practices in addressing statelessness, including birth registration, to serve as a resource for other regions.

4. **Benefits of sharing experiences.** Sharing experiences among Central Asian countries remains essential. Joint national and regional efforts are necessary for progress.
5. **Inclusive access to public services.** Ensure that birth registration is linked to access to public services and that no one is left behind. Inclusivity should be prioritized to guarantee that all people are registered and have access to necessary services.
6. **Accelerating citizenship confirmation.** Expedite the confirmation of citizenship across Central Asia to minimize periods of uncertainty for individuals.
7. **Implementation of GRF Pledges.** Improve coordination to implement pledges made during the Global Refugee Forum (GRF). Use platforms like the GRF to keep statelessness a priority and include stateless people in major projects and policies.
8. **Ensuring safeguards against child statelessness.** Take more actions to implement comprehensive safeguards against child statelessness. This should be a priority for all Central Asian countries.
9. **Reinforcing national human rights institutions' capacity.** Strengthen the capacity of national human rights institutions to monitor, protect, and promote the rights of stateless children. Enhance regional cooperation among these institutions.
10. **Global Alliance to End Statelessness.** Central Asian countries should join the Global Alliance to End Statelessness, share their successful experiences globally, and actively promote best practices for resolving statelessness. Establish a multi-country fund to accelerate pledge implementation and create a regional coalition as part of the Global Alliance.

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