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International Conference on Addressing Statelessness in Europe Madrid, 25-26 April

Final Document

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation of Spain and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (hereinafter – UNHCR) Representation in the Kingdom of Spain jointly organized the International Conference on Addressing Statelessness in Europe on 25-26 of April 2019 in Madrid, Spain.

National experts from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey attended the event. Likewise, representatives of the Embassies of Albania, Croatia, Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Hungary, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine and the United Kingdom participated in the Conference. International and regional organizations, such as the OSCE, UNICEF and the European Network on Statelessness, as well as members of academia actively took part in the two-day event. UNHCR HQ was represented by Ms. Carol Batchelor, UN High Commissioner for Refugees Special Advisor on Statelessness and Ms. Angela Li Rosi, UNHCR Deputy Director of the Regional Bureau for Europe.

The Conference built upon past initiatives, including:

- [2015 EU Justice and Home Affairs Council Conclusions on Statelessness](#) and the subsequent launch of the [Statelessness Platform](#) of the European Migration Network;
- UNHCR-OSCE cooperation on statelessness, including the launch of the [Handbook on Statelessness in the OSCE Area](#), joint study visits and practical seminars organized in 2017 and 2018, respectively;
- 2014 Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly [Recommendation 2042](#) “On access to nationality and the effective implementation of the European Convention on Nationality” and,
- 2016 Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly [Resolution 2099](#) on “The need to eradicate statelessness of children”.

The Conference was held in light of the upcoming High-Level Segment on Statelessness of UNHCR's Executive Committee that will convene in Geneva on 7 October 2019 to mark the mid-point of the [#IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness](#) launched by the UNHCR in 2014. The Conference provided an opportunity for a comprehensive analysis of the current situation in the sphere of statelessness in the region and facilitated exchange of good practices among participating States.

As a result of the Conference, the participants formulated recommendations which are outlined below and can also be found on the [website](#) of the High-Level Segment on Statelessness.

Recommendations

Participants were divided into the following three groups and have discussed and elaborated recommendations accordingly: identification and protection of stateless persons; addressing childhood statelessness; and joint efforts to end statelessness.

These recommendations could be translated into pledges aimed at addressing statelessness to be presented at the High-Level Segment on Statelessness in October 2019.

1. Identification and protection of stateless persons:

- Improve data collection on statelessness in accordance with Action 10 of the [UNHCR Global Action Plan to End Statelessness](#) (hereinafter - Global Action Plan). Among others, the upcoming population censuses in 2020-2021 should be used as a tool to identify stateless persons: specific statelessness-related questions should be elaborated and included into the census questionnaires. Where possible, this exercise should also be used to provide stateless persons with relevant information on how to solve their situation.
- Introduce a dedicated statelessness determination procedure that leads to a legal status of stateless persons who are found to be stateless. This will facilitate access to and enjoyment of fundamental rights and freedoms of these persons. Moreover, to the extent possible, refugee status and statelessness determinations should be coordinated. Relevant procedural guarantees should be observed throughout the procedure(s).

2. Addressing childhood statelessness:

- Adopt and implement safeguards in nationality laws to ensure that no child is born stateless in Europe in line with Action 2 of the Global Action Plan.
- In accordance with Action 7 of the Global Action Plan, and the [Sustainable Development Goal 16.9](#) (“By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration”), ensure that all children born in Europe are registered at birth, so that every child’s legal identity is established and some of the serious consequences related to their statelessness are addressed (e.g. no access to education).
- Facilitate information-sharing between States on cases related to children’s identity, for example through standardizing and facilitating relevant procedures to prevent and avoid statelessness.
- Make sure that the existing relevant procedures are simple and realistic, and key information thereto is available and accessible to stateless persons.
- Build the capacity of relevant governmental and administrative bodies to proactively identify and address situations of childhood statelessness.

3. Joint efforts to end statelessness:

- Prioritize statelessness-related issues in the existing national programmes, notably through:
 - Setting mid- and long-term objectives related to statelessness in the existing national programmes;

- Developing specific National Action Plans on addressing statelessness, including through elaborating concrete activities and setting realistic timeframes;
 - Establishing a periodical reporting system lead by Public Defenders' or Ombudspersons' offices in order to assure the implementation of the above mentioned Action Plans;
 - Showing leadership in the above process, including through promotion of regional and sub-regional follow-up encounters.
- Define concrete and specific pledges to be adopted, in line with the obligations under the relevant International Conventions, taking into consideration the region's and States' particularities. As political will is crucial for this, work towards political agreement can be developed at multiple levels, including:
 - At International organizations' level: by suggesting specific actions on addressing statelessness that can be achieved through joint efforts;
 - At national level: by increasing public awareness and political interest in statelessness-related issues;
 - At inter-institutional State cooperation level: by addressing the lack of communication and coordination in relation to statelessness and therefore obtaining aligned national mechanisms in the region.
- Identify fundraising opportunities for statelessness-related projects:
 - Increase public awareness about statelessness with a special emphasis on the human dimension of the phenomenon;
 - Conduct national mapping exercises in order to improve quantitative and qualitative data on stateless populations;
 - Promote States' proactive approach for identifying fundraising opportunities within the EU funds, UN-SDG and other related funds.