



# Stateless and voiceless in the EU

## UNHCR Statement on the occasion of the European elections

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This week millions of European Union citizens will choose who is in charge in Europe for the next five years. However, hundreds of thousands of stateless persons will not have their voice heard, even though many of them were born and raised in the EU.

Over 400,000 stateless persons live in the European Union. They are found in each of the 28 Member States, with the highest numbers in the Baltic States. As many stateless persons live under the radar, they cannot enjoy their basic rights and face the risk of repeated or prolonged detention and destitution. Conversely, others have permanent residence permits, pay taxes and enjoy higher levels of treatment. None of the stateless persons in the EU, however, have all of the same rights that EU citizens have, including the right to vote in national or EU elections. Acquiring nationality would end their statelessness and would recognize their bond with the country where they were born or where they have lived for years, for decades, their entire lives or even for many generations.

In line with the EU's own pledge made in September 2012, EU Member States should accede to and implement the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons to ensure stateless persons enjoy basic rights while they await the acquisition of a nationality. Today only four EU Member States - Cyprus, Estonia, Malta and Poland - are still not parties to the Convention. Furthermore, EU Member States should accede to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and implement this Convention by adopting legislation that prevents statelessness.

UNHCR calls on the newly elected members of the European Parliament to make sure statelessness is eradicated in Europe. Member States can do so by facilitating the acquisition of a nationality by stateless persons. In addition, Member States can take steps to prevent persons from being born stateless or from becoming stateless later in life.

UNHCR will launch a Global Campaign to eradicate statelessness later in 2014. UNHCR is committed to working with Member States to achieve this goal. Statelessness is a largely man-made problem that in some cases has plagued generations of families but can be solved in our lifetime.

For more information on statelessness in Europe:

UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Mapping Statelessness in The United Kingdom*, 22 November 2011, available at:

<http://www.refworld.org/docid/4ecb6a192.html>

UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Mapping Statelessness in the Netherlands*, November 2011, available at:

<http://www.refworld.org/docid/4eef65da2.html>

UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Mapping Statelessness in Belgium - Summary Report*, October 2012, available at:

<http://www.refworld.org/docid/5100f3412.html>

European Network on Statelessness, *Childhood Statelessness In Europe: Issues, Gaps and Good Practices*, April 2014, available at:

<http://www.refworld.org/docid/5343a45f4.html>

The EUDO CITIZENSHIP/UNHCR Database on Protection Against Statelessness in Europe, <http://eudo-citizenship.eu/databases/protection-against-statelessness>

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