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High Commissioner's Programme**

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**Update on statelessness, including the Global
Alliance**

Summary

This paper provides an update on the work of UNHCR, States and other actors to address statelessness since the presentation of EC/75/SC/CRP.14 to the Standing Committee in June 2024. The paper focuses on efforts to solve statelessness situations, sets out measures to accelerate progress, and calls for renewed multistakeholder action, including through the Global Alliance to End Statelessness.

I. Introduction

1. Statelessness deprives individuals of their right to nationality and entails serious and far-reaching consequences. As nationality underpins access to a broad range of fundamental rights, stateless persons encounter significant barriers to education, healthcare, employment, freedom of movement and access to other essential services. Beyond its impact on individuals and communities, statelessness also has adverse implications for social cohesion and economic development.¹ Conversely, the grant of nationality has been shown to significantly enhance the enjoyment of rights leading to transformative outcomes for individuals, communities and societies. This can be evidenced, inter alia, by the UNHCR-World Bank socio-economic study examining the impact of the grant of citizenship to the previously stateless Shona community in Kenya in 2020.²

2. Notable progress in addressing statelessness has been achieved globally, with more than 600,000 individuals who were granted nationality or had their nationality confirmed, since 2014. Notwithstanding these achievements, 4.5 million people are known to be stateless or of undetermined nationality, with millions more being affected but not recorded in any existing data. Many situations remain protracted, and children continue to be born into statelessness. Without sustained efforts to resolve existing statelessness situations and prevent new cases, statelessness risks the marginalization of both the current and future generations. Marking the 65th anniversary of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness in 2026, the paper reviews the developments since the ninetieth meeting of the Standing Committee in June 2024 and highlights measures undertaken to address statelessness, including through the Global Alliance to End Statelessness,³ which was launched in October 2024.

II. Initiatives to solve existing situations of statelessness

3. The most effective means of resolving protracted statelessness situations is through targeted measures addressing specific groups, particularly, legal and policy reforms that enable provision of nationality to individuals belonging to these groups. At the same time, measures to prevent new cases of statelessness, enabling solutions over a longer period are equally essential. These include universal birth registration as well as adoption and implementation of legal provisions to ensure that no child is born stateless regardless of the nationality or legal status of the child or their parents. They also include granting stateless persons legal status that enables the enjoyment of rights and a provides a pathway to nationality. A combination of targeted measures and long-term approaches are therefore required for the eradication of statelessness.

A. Targeted measures to resolve existing statelessness situations

4. Since 2024, many countries have made significant progress in resolving protracted statelessness in their territories. In Thailand, a landmark Cabinet Resolution adopted in 2024 introduced accelerated procedures for nationality (from 180 days to 5 days) and for permanent residency status (from 270 days to 5 days), alongside measures to address language barriers and strengthen capacity to process applications. Following the issuance of implementing regulations in June 2025, over 116,000 stateless persons have obtained legal status, including 17,000 persons who acquired Thai nationality and 99,000 persons who obtained permanent residency with a pathway to citizenship in five years.

5. In Turkmenistan, sustained national efforts have resulted in a Presidential decree in September 2024, granting citizenship to the remaining 1,146 stateless persons in the country and resolving all known cases of statelessness in its territory.

¹ See <https://www.refworld.org/reference/reports/unhcr/2025/en/151191>

² See <https://www.refworld.org/reference/research/bm/2024/en/149711>

³ See <https://statelessnessalliance.org/>

6. Following amendments to its Law on Citizenship adopted in 2021, North Macedonia enabled citizens of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia who were residing in the country at the time of its independence, to acquire nationality. Through the effective implementation of these and related amendments, in 2025, the country became the first in the Western Balkans region to resolve all known cases of statelessness linked to the dissolution of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

7. In the Syrian Arab Republic, a Presidential decree issued in January 2026 annulled the 1962 Al-Hasakah census measures that had deprived an estimated 120,000 Kurds of nationality and provides for the granting of Syrian nationality to this population. Approximately 9,000 applications have been submitted since the start of the implementation of the decree in April 2026.

8. The Gambia is making progress towards granting nationality to members of the Ghana Town stateless community, who lack both Gambian and Ghanaian citizenship. Approximately 1,000 individuals have been registered, and the Ministry of Justice has completed its review in favour of granting nationality to them by presidential prerogative. Key procedural steps, including a formal presidential decision and official publication are expected to take place in 2026.

9. The Dominican Republic has further enhanced inter-institutional coordination to implement its legal framework for documenting persons with undetermined nationality status. As a result of streamlined administrative processes for applicants, a significant milestone was reached in 2025 when a total of 448 beneficiaries of the Special Law 169-14 who had been naturalized were issued with transcribed birth certificates and identity cards, thereby completing their documentation as Dominican nationals.

10. In certain contexts, even if legal frameworks to resolve statelessness exist, procedures can be complex or difficult to access. In these situations, legal aid has proven essential to bring about solutions for affected individuals. Since 2024, legal aid provided by UNHCR and its partners has supported the resolution of thousands of protracted cases of statelessness or of undetermined nationality across multiple countries, including the Dominican Republic, Lebanon and Nepal.

B. Long-term measures supporting gradual resolution and prevention of new cases of statelessness

11. The most effective way of preventing the transmission of statelessness from one generation to the next is to put in place and implement legal safeguards at birth, in line with the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. A key safeguard is set in Article 1 of the 1961 Convention, which provides for the grant of nationality to children born on the territory who would otherwise be stateless. Approximately 94 countries have incorporated this safeguard to varying degrees into their nationality laws, including several countries with significant stateless populations. During the #IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness (2014-2024), Albania, Armenia, Austria, Chile, Cuba, Estonia, Iceland, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Luxembourg, Republic of Moldova, the Philippines and Tajikistan incorporated this provision into their respective legal frameworks. Despite these advances, a number of States parties to the 1961 Convention have yet to incorporate this safeguard in their nationality laws, and where it exists in law, implementation often remains limited. This undermines the right of children to acquire nationality and weakens the effectiveness of the safeguard to prevent new cases of statelessness. The establishment of clear procedures to identify eligible individuals and coordination between relevant authorities, particularly those responsible for civil registration and nationality, are essential for effective implementation.

12. Civil registration, and in particular birth registration, is an important measure for the prevention of statelessness, and in most contexts, is also critical to address existing statelessness situations. Birth registration is a key means to establish legal identity. It records parentage and place of birth, which are important components of resolving statelessness immediately or later in their lives. Lack of a birth certificate can complicate confirmation or

grant of nationality even when a legal framework to do so is already in place at the time of birth or when it is introduced later.

13. In 2025, Tajikistan adopted a new Law on the State Registration of Civil Status Act. The law establishes a unified framework for registering births, marriages, and deaths, and strengthens the framework to achieve universal birth registration. It introduces flexibility for late birth registration on the basis of requests from medical or guardianship authorities, allowing for registration when parents or applicants lack identity documents which is a situation frequently encountered by stateless persons.

14. The Court of Appeal of Malaysia affirmed, in 2025, that stateless persons could lawfully marry and register their marriages despite the absence of a national identity card. This landmark judgment clarified that the lack of such documentation did not constitute a legal impediment to marriage registration. It represents the first explicit judicial recognition in Malaysia of the right of stateless persons to marry and removes a significant legal barrier that has contributed to intergenerational statelessness. The ruling has direct implications for children of Malaysian fathers and stateless or undocumented mothers to acquire nationality, as it enables the registration of these marriages, thereby facilitating the transmission of Malaysian nationality to their children, which would not be possible outside of a legally recognized marriage.

15. While targeted measures, such as those adopted by Kenya and Thailand for specific populations, are often necessary to resolve known situations of statelessness efficiently and at scale, it is equally important to ensure that any individual cases of statelessness not covered by such measures, or identified subsequently, can also be addressed. This requires the establishment of legal provisions and procedures enabling the grant of nationality in both existing and future cases of statelessness.

16. A good example is the proposed 2025 amendment bill to the Citizenship and Immigration Act of Kenya. If adopted, the amendments would support sustained and systemic solutions to statelessness. Specifically, they would recognize stateless persons habitually resident in Kenya since 1963, as well as their descendants, as meeting the lawful residency requirement for citizenship, and would remove existing time limitations on their registration as Kenyan citizens.

17. Lastly, the availability of sufficient and reliable data on affected populations is a cornerstone of effective and accelerated solutions to statelessness. In Thailand, stateless persons, having been previously identified and registered by the Government could benefit from the new measures put in place following the adoption of the Cabinet Resolution in 2024. In Kenya, community self-registration followed by verification by the authorities has been a critical step towards the grant of nationality for several groups. Uganda, which has pledged to ensure that communities present in the country before 1926 are recognized as citizens, introduced a specific coding for six ethnic minority groups in the 2024 census, thereby facilitating the identification of potentially stateless persons. This is an important step towards resolving their situation.

III. Multistakeholder approach

18. Experience demonstrates that resolving statelessness requires sustained multistakeholder engagement, including by national authorities, affected communities and civil society. In certain contexts, cross-border cooperation is essential to address documentation gaps, establish links to nationality, and ensure that solutions are accessible to individuals who have lived in or have family heritage in more than one country.

19. In the Philippines, long-standing bilateral cooperation has played a central role in resolving nationality cases of persons of Japanese descent. The ongoing collaboration between the Governments of the Philippines and Japan has led to the resolution of 1,600 cases. Furthermore, a birth registration initiative in the Bangsamoro Region in Muslim Mindanao and the Province of Sulu, funded by Japan has enabled 25,000 individuals to be confirmed as citizens, primarily through late birth registration for elderly people who had previously lacked proof of identity or citizenship.

20. In Malaysia, following a request from the State Government of Sabah, the United Nations Country Team and the University Malaysia Sabah conducted a study on the situation of undocumented persons. The study analyses challenges in accessing specific forms of identity documentation and provides concrete recommendations to relevant stakeholders to address barriers to legal identity and improve the enjoyment of socio-economic rights for undocumented persons in Sabah State.⁴

21. Since its launch in October 2024, the Global Alliance to End Statelessness has strengthened multistakeholder action by bringing together over 190 members, including 28 States, 12 regional intergovernmental organizations, five United Nations agencies, and a wide range of civil society and stateless-led groups, academia and faith-based organizations. Through its convening, capacity-building and catalytic functions the Global Alliance has fostered new partnerships, peer exchanges and implementation of solutions. Its three thematic working groups on ending childhood statelessness, addressing discrimination in nationality laws, and protecting the rights of stateless persons have identified good practices, highlighted persistent gaps and advanced advocacy and legal reforms.

22. Several members of the Global Alliance have demonstrated leadership in advancing solutions to statelessness at the national level, while at the regional level, initiatives such as the 2025 civil registration week organized by the Latin American and Caribbean Council of Civil Registry, Identity and Vital Statistics (CLARCIEV) has facilitated more than 32,000 birth registrations across 11 countries, contributing to prevention of childhood statelessness.

IV. Way forward

23. Statelessness is both preventable and can be resolved. Addressing it brings significant social and economic benefits, including stronger social cohesion, improved access to education, health care and formal employment, and advances sustainable development.

24. While progress has been made to address statelessness, the overall pace remains insufficient to break intergenerational cycles of exclusion. Evidence presented in this paper shows that accelerated progress is possible when States translate political commitment into decisive action and implementation, ensuring that prevention and resolution are pursued together. Such leadership, combined with strengthened partnerships with affected communities, civil society, development actors and other States, can extend solutions to populations that have long remained excluded.

25. The lack of reliable and disaggregated data remains a major impediment to resolving statelessness, as affected populations often remain invisible in national statistical and administrative systems. These gaps can be addressed through more systematic and inclusive approaches to identifying and recording stateless populations. The International Recommendations on Statelessness Statistics (IROSS)⁵ provides practical guidance to strengthen national statistical systems, including through the standardization of definitions, the integration of stateless persons in censuses, surveys and administrative data, and improved coordination between institutions, thereby supporting evidence-based policymaking and monitoring of progress. The IROSS has also informed the latest United Nations Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses⁶ which will facilitate integration of statelessness considerations in the upcoming 2030 census round.

26. The accelerated development of the digital public infrastructure by countries, including integrated foundational identity systems, presents both opportunities and risks in the context of statelessness. While such systems have the potential to facilitate the resolution of statelessness, they may also exacerbate exclusion if not designed inclusively. A recent World Bank Identification for Development (ID4D) report⁷ provides guidance on designing

⁴ See <https://malaysia.un.org/sites/default/files/2025-12/Research%20Paper%20Series%20on%20the%20Undocumented%20Population%20in%20Sabah-%20Synthesis%20Paper%20and%20Policy%20Recommendations.pdf>

⁵ See <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-manuals-and-guidelines/w/ks-01-25-038>

⁶ See https://unstats.un.org/unsd/publication/SeriesM/Series_M67Rev4en.pdf

⁷ See <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099022626224014785/pdf/P505739-7107d32c-e673-4613-841a-a985b430f3f4.pdf>

identification systems that are inclusive of stateless persons and those at risk of statelessness. It highlights that expanding digital identification systems may exacerbate exclusion due to legal, administrative and documentation barriers, and therefore calls for statelessness-sensitive approaches from the outset. The report further highlights the role of identification systems in supporting pathways to nationality by facilitating referrals to competent authorities for determination or acquisition of nationality.

27. UNHCR will continue to support State-led efforts to address statelessness, primarily through raising global awareness on statelessness, developing legal and operational guidance, provision of technical and legal advice and by facilitating coordination among relevant stakeholders, including through the Global Alliance to End Statelessness. However, reduced financial resources severely constrain UNHCR and the operational capacity of its partners for this work. Adequate financial support and political will is therefore essential to maintain progress, accelerate definitive solutions and end cycles of marginalization for current and future generations caused by statelessness.
