



**REDOUBLING OUR  
EFFORTS ON ENDING  
STATELESSNESS**

**UNHCR'S STRATEGIC PLAN 2023-2026**





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**“Deprived of the fundamental right to a nationality, those who have been born or left stateless face a devastating legal limbo. They are prevented from accessing their basic human rights and from fully participating in society. Their lives are marked by exclusion, deprivation, and marginalization.”** – Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees

**“Everyone has the right to a nationality”**  
– Article 15, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

## 1. INTRODUCTION

UNHCR has a mandate to prevent and reduce statelessness and protect stateless persons, and an ambition to eradicate statelessness globally. In Sustainable Development Goal 16.9, the world set a target to provide a legal identity for all by 2030. But progress remains markedly off-track.


At the end of 2022, UNHCR reported that 4.4 million people were stateless or of undetermined nationality, but the real number is widely recognized to be much higher, given the complexities in data collection and the relative invisibility of stateless persons in national statistical exercises.

*Karina Ambartsoumian-Clough, born in Soviet Ukraine and of Armenian descent, arrived in the United States as an asylum-seeker as a child. She has been unable to gain nationality of Ukraine or the United States. She is stateless.*

*Ambartsoumian-Clough is a founding member and the executive director of United Stateless, a national organization led by stateless people whose mission is to build and inspire community among those affected by statelessness and to advocate for their human rights.*

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*In Madagascar, stateless people live on the margins of society due to fear of discrimination and detention.*

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## 2. PROGRESS SINCE THE LAUNCH OF THE #IBELONG CAMPAIGN

The #IBelong campaign has elevated UNHCR’s work on statelessness, increased awareness and visibility on the issue, and generated renewed commitment from States to prevent and respond to statelessness.

The strategy set out in this document builds on the momentum created by the [#IBelong](#) campaign and its supporting “[Global Action Plan to End Statelessness: 2014-2024](#)”. In the past eight years, we have collectively achieved more than in preceding decades:

- There has been a steady increase in **accessions to the [1954 and 1961 Statelessness Conventions](#)**, a result of effective advocacy by UNHCR and partners.
  - There are stronger **legal frameworks** to address statelessness in all regions. Many countries have brought their legislation into closer compliance with international standards on the right to nationality and protection of stateless persons.
  - Several countries have made significant progress in **resolving situations of statelessness**. For example, Kyrgyzstan has resolved all known cases of statelessness in the country. Kenya has granted nationality to several stateless minority groups and is on track to resolve the situation of the remaining groups. Viet Nam has addressed statelessness among former Cambodian refugees and Turkmenistan has resolved the protracted situation of thousands of former USSR citizens with undetermined nationality.
- In total, between 2014 and 2022, **517,500 people without a nationality acquired one**, representing a life-changing moment for these individuals.

There is increased **awareness of statelessness** and the impact it has on people and communities, and stronger engagement to address statelessness. The “Friends of the IBelong Campaign” brought together around 30 Geneva-based Permanent Missions of States from all regions. 21 countries have adopted National Action Plans to address statelessness. Several regional networks of civil society organizations have been established to engage in advocacy and amplify the voice and increase the visibility of stateless persons. The [Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights](#) and the [Coalition on Every Child’s Right to a Nationality](#) were established to advocate for specific aspects of statelessness.

### 3. THE PROBLEM UNHCR SEEKS TO SOLVE

Despite notable progress by many States since the launch of the #IBelong campaign in 2014, statelessness remains a persistent global problem.

Although States, civil society and regional and international organizations made 389 pledges to prevent and reduce statelessness in 2019 (at the Global Refugee Forum and at the [High-Level Segment on Statelessness](#) during UNHCR's Executive Committee meeting), there has been only limited implementation. Only half of UN member States are party to the statelessness conventions, and not all of them have fully domesticated them in their own law. Governments' willingness to act is impeded by a lack of data and limited comprehension of an issue that is often perceived as complex and, in some contexts, politically charged. There is little recognition of the impact of statelessness on the socioeconomic development of States and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, as stateless persons are marginalized and "left behind".

The granting of citizenship to stateless persons is a definitive and far-reaching solution, but progress is slow. While some countries have taken concrete

action to grant nationality to groups of stateless persons, some of the largest situations of statelessness have seen limited solutions. An estimated 85% of the reported 4.4 million stateless people live in just 10 countries where the situation is not significantly improving, and children continue to be born without a nationality. There are also still 24 States that do not allow women to confer nationality upon their biological children on the same basis as men, which can result in statelessness if the child cannot acquire a nationality from their father either.

Statelessness is often seen as a complex legal issue, with less focus on the impact it has on people's ability to exercise their human rights and access services and opportunities, and as such, on development. UNHCR and other actors have not always seized opportunities to frame statelessness as a discrimination, human rights and development issue.

*Members of the previously stateless Pemba community make baskets and other forms of woven products.*  
© UNHCR/CHARITY NZOMO



## 4. WHAT WE WILL DO DIFFERENTLY: THE SHIFTS NEEDED TO ADDRESS BOTTLENECKS AND ACCELERATE PROGRESS

UNHCR published an [evaluation](#) of two decades of its work on statelessness in 2021. It recommended setting up a multistakeholder platform of actors committed to end statelessness. The [Global Alliance to End Statelessness](#) will be launched as such a platform in 2024, including member States, regional organizations, UN agencies, stateless-led organizations, civil society, faith leaders and academia. The Alliance will support the implementation of the Global Refugee Forum pledges and action at global, regional and national levels. It will also support the goal of ending statelessness under the UN Secretary-General's "[Our Common Agenda](#)".

UNHCR will strive to ensure that statelessness is more clearly positioned as a Sustainable Development issue and mobilize others in this effort. At country level, UNHCR will advocate for statelessness related targets to be included in **national development plans** and the **UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework**. At the regional and global level, UNHCR will strengthen its efforts to include statelessness in partnerships and engagement with development agencies.

Targeted advocacy with governments has proven to be one of UNHCR's most impactful actions to combat statelessness. UNHCR will put more emphasis on **targeted advocacy** to achieve specific high-impact outcomes and on identifying and engaging actors who can influence policies

relating to statelessness. This includes stronger advocacy by UNHCR's senior management and public advocacy messaging with clearly defined objectives, reflecting the local context.

Tackling statelessness is made more difficult due to limited data to measure the scope and scale of it. This is why global and national **population data** needs to systematically include stateless people. The International Recommendations on Statelessness Statistics (IROSS), which were endorsed by the UN Statistical Commission in March 2023, gives national statistical offices a roadmap for the inclusion of statelessness in national censuses and other surveys.

Effective action also requires **amplifying the voices of those affected** and engaging them in advocacy against statelessness. UNHCR will establish a stronger and more institutionalized engagement with people with lived experience of statelessness, to ensure that they feel that their voices are heard in policy decisions that affect them. Organizations led by stateless people will be included as members of the Global Alliance, and UNHCR will set up a consultation group with stateless-led organizations. UNHCR will also ensure its country operations learn from each other's experience of impactful community engagement and advocacy, to ensure that community engagement and empowerment is at the heart of the response to statelessness.

# 5. THE GLOBAL VISION, OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

**UNHCR's vision:** By 2026, there will be a significant increase in the number of people who have a nationality or are no longer at risk of statelessness, and as such enjoy their rights.

To realize its vision, UNHCR has four **objectives** to achieve together with its partners by 2026.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
Increasing numbers of States are <b>demonstrating their commitment</b> to reduce and prevent statelessness	Increasing numbers of stateless persons and persons at risk of statelessness have access to <b>procedures and documents for nationality</b>	Increasing numbers of stateless persons have access to <b>public services and economic opportunities</b> at the same level as nationals	Increasing numbers of stateless persons are <b>empowered to claim their rights</b>

At country level, UNHCR will implement **six key actions** to achieve these objectives. Stepping up of actions 1 and 4 below have been identified as particularly important for achieving transformational change.

- |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  <p><b>1. Policy and public advocacy and communications.</b> UNHCR's country operations will step up context-specific proactive policy and public advocacy and communications, with defined audiences and targeted messages.</p>                                                     |  <p><b>2. Technical assistance to governments</b> to ensure they have the capacity to resolve the issue, and to deepen relationships with relevant government entities.</p>                                                                                                          |
|  <p><b>3. Legal support and community engagement</b> to ensure stateless persons and those at risk are supported in accessing nationality, civil status registration, and identity procedures and documents, and that they are empowered to claim and advocate for their rights.</p> |  <p><b>4. Leveraging the influence of UN Resident Coordinators, UN country teams and development partners</b> to ensure that other UN agencies are supporting advocacy efforts and that their country programmes and budgets are inclusive of stateless and at-risk populations.</p> |
|  <p><b>5. Generation of data</b> to increase the visibility of stateless populations and provide evidence to governments of the extent and impact of statelessness, often a first step to convincing governments to act.</p>                                                         |  <p><b>6. Humanitarian assistance,</b> in exceptional circumstances, to help meet the most critical humanitarian needs of stateless populations.</p>                                                                                                                                 |



To improve prioritization of programmes and activities that are likely to have most impact in each context, the plan also recommends different approaches depending on the profile of the main affected population and the primary bottlenecks and constraints that prevent people from having a nationality and enjoying their rights. Countries can be grouped in three typologies – *reduce*, *prevent* and *protect*:

- **REDUCE:** In countries where there are large numbers of stateless people who have long-established ties to the country, and as such considered to be in their own country, UNHCR will prioritize advocacy for and support the government to grant them nationality at an accelerated pace, including to large groups of people at once.
- **PREVENT:** In countries where children and adults are at risk of statelessness due to difficulties accessing birth registration, nationality or identity documentation, or due to discrimination or gaps in nationality laws and policies, UNHCR will focus on working with the UN Resident Coordinator, the UN Country

Team and development actors. Jointly with the partners, UNHCR will strive to ensure the government has the support it needs to change laws and policies and improve processes on civil registration and nationality documentation and advocate for the removal of discriminatory provisions and the inclusion of safeguards for preventing statelessness in nationality laws.

- **PROTECT:** In countries where stateless migrants and refugees lack protection, UNHCR will seek to improve their identification and their enjoyment of rights, setting them up for a pathway to nationality through stronger advocacy with the government. In particular in countries where the government has expressed political will to address the issue.

The objectives and actions outlined in this plan will inform UNHCR's operational priority setting and resource allocation, with a view to accelerate progress and bring about transformational change. In the end of 2024, UNHCR will conduct a strategic moment of reflection which will allow the plan to be adjusted as necessary.

*Meepia was formerly stateless and finally received her Thai nationality with the help of grassroots NGOs after a complex four-year-long process*  
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# ANNEX I

Global Results Framework 2022-2026 for Internal monitoring	
Vision/strategic objectives	Indicator
<p><b>Vision: By 2026, there is a significant increase in the number of people who have a nationality or are no longer at risk of statelessness, and as such enjoy their rights</b></p>	<p>Number of stateless persons for whom nationality is granted or confirmed (core impact indicator 4.3)</p>
	<p>Number of people supported by UNHCR to acquire nationality, long-term residency status or to access naturalization procedures (core output 16.2.1)</p>
<p><b>1. More states are demonstrating commitment to reduce and prevent statelessness</b></p>	<p>1.1 Extent national legal framework is in line with the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness (core outcome 3.2)</p>
	<p>1.2 Number of countries where UNHCR has engaged in legislative and judicial processes or in protection advocacy with partners to strengthen laws and policies for the protection of refugees, IDPs and stateless people and/or the reduction and prevention of statelessness (core output 3.1.1)</p>
	<p>1.3 Number of countries where UNHCR has provided capacity development support to strengthen the national status determination system, in accordance with international standards (core output 2.1.1)</p>
	<p>1.4 Number of States that removed gender discrimination from the nationality law (good practice outcome)</p>
	<p>1.5 UNHCR's work has resulted in concrete steps by the State towards the removal of gender discrimination yes/no (good practice output)</p>
	<p>1.6 Number of States that have acceded to the 1954 and/or 1961 Conventions (good practice outcome)</p>
	<p>1.7 UNHCR's work resulted in concrete steps by the State towards acceding to the 1954 and/or 1961 Conventions (good practice output)</p>
<p><b>Key actions: political and public advocacy + communication, evidence generation + data</b></p>	

2. Increasing numbers of people have access to procedures and documents for nationality	2.1 Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority [SDG 16.19.1] (core outcome 1.2)
	2.2 Number of people supported to obtain civil status, identity or legal status documentation (core output 1.2.1)
	2.3 Proportion of PoC with legally recognized identity documents (core outcome 1.3)
<b>Key actions: political and public advocacy + communication, technical assistance to governments, evidence generation + data</b>	
3. Increasing numbers of stateless people have access to public services & economic opportunities	3.1 Number of countries that have increased data on stateless persons (good practice outcome)
	3.2 UNHCR's work resulted in additional and/or improved data on stateless persons (good practice output)
	3.3 Number of countries that have included statelessness in national development plans (good practice outcome)
	3.4 UNHCR's work resulted in tangible actions by the State to include statelessness in national development plans (good practice output)
<b>Key actions: policy and public advocacy + communication, leveraging the capacity &amp; influence of UNCT &amp; development partners, evidence generation + data</b>	
4. Increasing numbers of stateless people are empowered to claim their rights	4.1 Proportion of persons of concern that have timely access to relevant and clear information to make informed decisions (good practice outcome)
	4.2 Number of participatory assessments conducted with displaced and stateless communities (core output 7.1.1)
<b>Key actions: legal support and community engagement, evidence generation + data</b>	

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**COVER IMAGE**

*A Rohingya girl attends an adolescents' club in Kutupalong camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. These clubs offer access to safe spaces where teenagers can process trauma, build positive relationships with their peers, learn basic literacy, numeracy and life skills, and in some cases, skills training is also offered.*

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