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High Commissioner's Programme**

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**Statelessness (including an update on the #Ibelong
campaign)**

Summary

This paper provides an update on efforts by UNHCR, States, and others to address statelessness since the presentation of document EC/72/SC/CRP.11 at the eighty-first meeting of the Standing Committee in July 2021, highlighting significant progress in all regions. It also reviews the work foreseen in the last two years of the #Ibelong campaign to eradicate statelessness.

I. Introduction

1. Some 4.3 million stateless people have been reported in 95 countries at the end of June 2022. As the data only covers approximately half of the countries, and is often incomplete, statelessness remains largely underreported. However, the newly endorsed International Recommendations on Statelessness Statistics¹ at the fifty-fourth session of the United Nations Statistical Commission (Decision 54/121) are expected to help address this data gap overtime.
2. The UNHCR ten-year #IBelong campaign to end statelessness, launched in 2014, has served as a powerful platform to raise awareness and encourage governments to take action. Many States have made efforts to reduce and prevent statelessness, and there has been increased cooperation among governments, non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders to address the root causes of statelessness. Despite these positive developments, statelessness remains a significant challenge in many parts of the world. With less than two years remaining in the #IBelong campaign to end statelessness, a concerted push is required to address legal and policy gaps that continue to leave millions of people stateless.
3. Highlighting the linkages between addressing statelessness and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the leave-no-one-behind principle, the #IBelong campaign to end statelessness will focus on the theme of development during 2023 and 2024. In follow up to the campaign, UNHCR will establish a new multistakeholder global alliance to end statelessness to elevate statelessness as a critical, but solvable, issue across the global human rights, humanitarian, and development agendas, with the strengthened engagement of those affected by statelessness.
4. The Global Refugee Forum in December 2023 will present an opportunity for States and stakeholders to take stock of their existing commitments to prevent and reduce statelessness; to accelerate implementation of existing pledges; and generate new pledges.

II. Progress made by States

5. Since the high-level segment on statelessness held in 2019 and subsequent pledging events, States have made a total of 289 pledges to address statelessness. As of April 2023, at least 55 of these pledges have been fulfilled, and another 103 are in progress. The implemented pledges have greatly contributed to strengthening the prevention and response to statelessness at global and national levels. The lead up to the Global Refugee Forum is a key opportunity to accelerate implementation of the remaining pledges and renew the commitments to end statelessness.
6. In 2021, 81,200 stateless people acquired nationality or had their nationality confirmed. Several countries have taken significant steps to address statelessness. In Kazakhstan, a nationwide identification and documentation campaign resulted in the confirmation of citizenship for a total of 4,868 people who were previously of undetermined nationality. In Kenya, the government made an announcement in December 2022 to recognize the Pemba people as citizens. Uzbekistan reduced the number of stateless cases by half following the adoption of a progressive nationality law in 2020 and further amendments in 2021, with over 62,000 stateless people being granted nationality or having it confirmed.
7. Several States introduced measures to facilitate naturalization for stateless people. Ukraine amended its citizenship law in 2021 to allow recognized stateless individuals to apply for facilitated naturalization after three years of residency instead of seven. The Supreme Court of the Philippines adopted a rule in 2022 to expedite the naturalization process for stateless people and refugees, reduce costs, and ease documentary proof requirements. In Armenia, amendments to the citizenship law were adopted to reduce requirements and extend the deadline for stateless people in a protracted situation to access facilitated naturalization until the end of 2023.

¹ Available at <https://egrisstats.org/recommendations/international-recommendations-on-statelessness-statistics-iross/>.

8. Numerous countries implemented reforms to prevent statelessness from occurring. Liberia amended its aliens and nationality law to eliminate gender-discriminatory provisions that prevented women from conferring nationality to their children on an equal basis as men. However, in 24 countries, women still cannot confer nationality to their children on an equal basis with men, which can lead to childhood statelessness. As an important measure to prevent statelessness, the Philippines introduced a foundling provision in its nationality law, granting Filipino nationality to children of unknown parentage on its territory, in line with the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness from 1961 (the 1961 Convention). Indonesia issued a regulation in 2022 to allow children born to parents of mixed descent to be registered as Indonesian nationals.

9. Important strides towards universal and accessible birth registration were made in several countries. Colombia extended a resolution allowing children born to Venezuelan parents in Colombia to obtain birth certificates which are valid to acquire Colombian nationality. As of April 2023, the resolution has benefitted more than 94,000 children. In Burkina Faso, the implementation of the digital civil registration tool “iCivil” in a municipality in the Nord region where populations at risk of statelessness reside has made it easier for parents to register their child’s birth. Ukraine introduced a simplified process to establish the facts of birth and death, including waiving court fees during martial or emergency law and in areas beyond/not under the control of the Government of Ukraine. Additionally, a new procedure for remote birth registration was implemented, which has benefitted 125 individuals born in areas beyond/not under the control of the Government of Ukraine in 2022.

10. Several countries, including Albania, Benin, Colombia, Netherlands (Kingdom of the) and Turkmenistan, adopted legislation to establish statelessness determination procedures. These procedures are an effective means of identifying and providing legal recognition and protection to stateless migrants and for States to adhere to their obligations under the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons from 1954 (1954 Convention).

11. The Philippines became the first country in South-East Asia to accede to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. Togo acceded to both the 1961 and the 1954 conventions in July 2021, in a move that supports its ongoing reform of its nationality law to eliminate discrimination and establish gender equality. The total number of States parties to the 1954 Convention and the 1961 Convention is now 96 and 78, respectively.

III. Improving data on statelessness

12. In line with the global action plan to end statelessness, the guiding framework of the #IBelong campaign, UNHCR collaborates with States and other stakeholders to improve quantitative and qualitative data on stateless populations. The increased focus on data collection has led to a higher reported number of stateless individuals - a total of 4.3 million stateless people in 95 countries as at June 2022. While the identification of stateless people has improved, efforts to confirm or grant nationality need to be intensified.

13. The endorsement of the International Recommendations on Statelessness Statistics by the United Nations Statistical Commission in 2023 was an important milestone. The recommendations aim to facilitate the production of statelessness statistics at the national level and promote greater harmonization of the data regionally and globally.

IV. Partnerships

14. UNHCR and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) signed a strategic collaboration framework in 2023 to advance the inclusion of displaced and stateless children in national systems, plans and budgets. The framework also outlines collaboration to address childhood statelessness. Statelessness is a thematic area of collaboration in the recently established global collaboration framework for inclusion and solutions by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNHCR, which aims to leverage the strength of the two organizations for more effective responses to future crises. Both agencies will jointly build capacity and knowledge, as well as advocate for inclusion in a number of countries.

UNHCR continues to engage with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the empowerment of Women (UN-Women) to address gender discrimination in nationality laws.

15. Collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has focused on raising awareness about discrimination as a cause of statelessness. A joint paper on the issue was produced and a high-level event on statelessness and human rights organized to encourage greater attention by the United Nations human rights mechanisms. In December 2022, a joint roundtable with the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions was held to increase the engagement of national human rights institutions on statelessness. Civil society organizations continue to be important partners for UNHCR, especially the regional civil society networks worldwide.

V. New tools and publications

16. UNHCR provided technical support and guidance to States and other stakeholders through the development of tools and publications on topics such as: i) gender equality, nationality laws and statelessness; ii) discrimination in nationality laws and statelessness; iii) sex discrimination in birth registration; iv) statelessness and climate change; and v) the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on stateless populations. UNHCR and the International Development Law Organization published a brief on addressing statelessness through the rule of law, focusing on the intricate links between statelessness, the rule of law and sustainable development.

VI. Communications

17. As a continuation of the #IBelong campaign, UNHCR intensified efforts to increase public awareness about statelessness through videos and stories, highlighting the positive impact of legal reforms undertaken by States, on its public website and social media platforms. UNHCR-led media coverage emphasized campaign anniversaries, publication launches, and the heightened vulnerability of stateless communities due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The anniversary of the launch of the #IBelong campaign to end statelessness was marked globally on 3 November 2022 with diverse awareness raising and sensitization events that gave voice to stateless persons.

VII. Next steps

18. The High Commissioner has identified statelessness as one of the eight strategic focus areas for UNHCR for the period between 2022 and 2026, to bring about transformative, measurable change in these areas. A strategic focus area plan has been developed to enhance efforts across the organization to address statelessness together with partners. The Plan addresses key recommendations from the evaluation of UNHCR-led initiatives to end statelessness, carried out in 2021. It will also inform the prioritization of resources to operations based on identified opportunities to prevent and reduce statelessness and protect stateless persons. The plan also calls for stronger engagement with stateless-led organizations at global and national levels to amplify the voices of affected communities.

19. The #IBelong campaign to end statelessness will continue in 2023-2024 with "statelessness and development" as the third and final thematic focus, building on earlier themes of "childhood statelessness" and "statelessness as a minority issue." The development focus will guide efforts to deepen the engagement with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to better leverage partnerships with development actors. This will be supported by engagement with the global public to increase solidarity and action to address statelessness and targeted national and regional public advocacy campaigns.

20. To build on the successes generated by the #IBelong campaign and to maintain the momentum towards ending statelessness, UNHCR is working towards establishing a new multistakeholder global alliance to end statelessness. This is also in response to the United Nation Secretary-General's Common Agenda initiative which calls for an end to

statelessness. The alliance will seek to engage Governments, stateless people, United Nations agencies, regional organizations, civil society, parliamentary and faith-based organizations amongst others. It will represent a new phase in UNHCR's efforts to accelerate the prevention and eradication of statelessness and will significantly expand the level of engagement of key global, regional, and national stakeholders, including stateless-led organizations. The alliance will also accelerate the implementation of new and existing pledges to address statelessness by States.
