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I BELONG

No longer invisible.
No longer stateless.

Highlights

- The **United States** granted humanitarian parole to a group of 222 exiled political prisoners from Nicaragua who had been stripped of their citizenship.
- The **Kyrgyz Republic** introduced a safeguard in its nationality law to ensure that children born in the country are granted Kyrgyz citizenship if they would otherwise be stateless.
- UNHCR and partners continue to address statelessness in **Ukraine**, despite the ongoing war.

Implementation of the Global Action Plan

UNHCR and partners continuing to address statelessness in Ukraine

Despite the ongoing war in Ukraine, UNHCR and its partners continue to provide assistance to stateless people and those at risk of statelessness in the country. The NGO called the Tenth of April is helping individuals obtain identification documents. For example, a 17-year-old person from Crimea was able to confirm her Ukrainian nationality with the help of an NGO lawyer and subsequently received an ID in Odesa city. Similarly, a 32-year-old who grew up in an orphanage was able to obtain his first ID thanks to the assistance of attorneys from the Tenth of April. The NGO was able to obtain information from the orphanage and police criminal files to verify his correct date of birth. Now that he has a new ID, the applicant can legally work as a washing machine engine repairman.

Another NGO, NEEKA, continues to provide counseling and legal representation to Roma families in Ukraine to help them access civil and nationality documentation. It also works to ensure that undocumented and stateless individuals have access to humanitarian aid in Ukraine.



A 17-year-old girl from Crimea was able to have her Ukrainian nationality confirmed at the State Migration Service with support from Oleksandra Dombrovska, a lawyer from the NGO, the Tenth of April.
© UNHCR partner the Tenth of April / Diana Zakharuk

Action 1: Resolve existing major situations of statelessness

The **United States of America** granted humanitarian parole to a group of 222 exiled political prisoners from Nicaragua in February. Upon arrival in the United States, the exiles learned that they had been **stripped of their citizenship** by the Nicaraguan government, following amendments to the Nicaraguan Constitution and the adoption of a new law “regulating the loss of Nicaraguan nationality”. These individuals are eligible to apply for asylum which would provide them a pathway to eventual U.S. citizenship, and the right to apply for employment authorization. The U.S. government is working with two NGOs to provide legal aid and mental health and psychosocial support. The

government of Spain, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Colombia have also publicly announced offers of citizenship to the exiles.

The new law on the loss of Nicaraguan nationality has affected 94 other individuals, of which UNHCR has verified the situation of 57 people currently located in **Nicaragua** and abroad. UNHCR is working with partners to monitor and identify possible solutions for these individuals. Of the 33 individuals located in **Costa Rica**, UNHCR and partners are advocating for a fast-track decision for those with pending asylum claims, advising those interested in obtaining Costa Rican nationality, providing support for refugees in need of travel documents, and offering legal assistance to new arrivals seeking asylum in Costa Rica.



Amb. Julius K. Bitok, Principal Secretary State Department for Citizen Services, joins Pemba community women in dance during the launch of the Kenyan citizenship confirmation exercise in Kwale. ©UNHCR/Charity Nzomo

The Government of **Kenya** formally recognized the Pemba as an ethnic community and therefore citizens of Kenya through a [Gazette Notice](#) on 30 January. It instructs authorities to recognize the Pemba community and issue them with the necessary identification documents. As a result of this proclamation, members of the Pemba community will be able to obtain Kenyan IDs, which serves as proof of their nationality and allows them to access public and social services. The proclamation follows a December announcement by the President that their plight needs to be resolved.

The Government organized a gathering with the Pemba community in Kilifi on 1 March to launch the procedure to confirm their nationality and issue proof of Kenyan citizenship. The event was organized in partnership with UNHCR and the NGO Haki Centre. The application process is currently ongoing.

During an annual meeting of the Working Group on Statelessness in **Azerbaijan** in February, the State Migration Service reported that it had confirmed the citizenship of 6,300 persons at risk of statelessness in Azerbaijan since 2015. Working Group members agreed to take further action to reach out to the remaining documented stateless persons and finalize their naturalization by the end of 2023.



A member of the Pemba community who was able to access the Kenya Citizenship confirmation process. ©UNHCR/Charity Nzomo

Action 2: Ensure that no child is born stateless

In **Chile**, the Legal Clinic of Alberto Hurtado University's Nationality Project identified and provided legal assistance to 18 children at risk of statelessness, including children born in Chile to migrants with an irregular migratory status. Due to a flawed interpretation of nationality requirements in the Chilean Constitution, children born to migrants with an irregular migratory status are considered "foreigners in transit" which excludes them from Chilean nationality. This has been corrected by a Directive of the Ministry of Interior, but many children remain unrecognized. Chile is in the process of a constitutional review, which is a unique opportunity

to align legal provisions with international standards. Legal assistance was also provided to children born in Colombia to Venezuelan parents who require confirmation of their Venezuelan nationality.

In **Côte d'Ivoire**, the NGO Association des Femmes Juristes de Côte d'Ivoire provided assistance to 36 abandoned children to obtain civil and nationality documentation. A 2019 circular from the Ministry of Justice made it possible for foundlings to be recognized as Ivorians.

Amendments to the Law on Citizenship of the **Kyrgyz Republic** came into effect on 28 February which brought several improvements. These include aligning the definition of a stateless person with international standards, providing guarantees that children born in the country are considered Kyrgyz citizens if they would otherwise be stateless, and removal of obstacles to acquire nationality such as the need to have a permanent residence permit. The adoption of the law is also relevant to Action 6.

Action 3: Remove gender discrimination from nationality laws

The **Nigerian** Minister of Interior reinstated the issuance of Temporary Resident Permits to foreign spouses of Nigerian women in October 2022. This measure is a temporary solution until legal reforms are put in place to ensure that foreign spouses of Nigerian women can acquire citizenship by registration, like foreign spouses of Nigerian men can. Once the 10th Assembly is reconstituted, a bill will be submitted.

Benin's national assembly passed a new nationality law in November that was published in the official gazette in February this year. The law removes gender-discriminatory provisions and introduces *jus soli* as a means to acquire nationality, fulfilling Benin's pledge at the High-Level Segment on statelessness. Benin was not included in the list of 24 countries with discriminatory nationality laws that could potentially result in statelessness.

Action 6: Grant protection status to stateless migrants and facilitate their naturalization

The **Kazakh** Migration Service Office of the Turkestan Region Police Department, in collaboration with UNHCR partner «Sana Sezim», conducted mobile consultations in five districts of the Turkestan region to identify, counsel, and refer 89 individuals with undetermined nationality to statelessness authorities to have their nationality confirmed. This activity is in line with a pledge made at the 2019 High-Level Segment on Statelessness.

The President of **Nigeria** signed into law the “National Commission for Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons Act” on 15 February. The Act aims to protect stateless migrants by establishing statelessness determination procedures, granting them status, and facilitating appropriate solutions, in line with the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons. This step is in line with the National Action Plan to Eradicate Statelessness in Nigeria.

Action 7: Ensure birth registration for the prevention of statelessness

The **Dominican Republic** adopted the Organic Law of Civil Status Acts (Ley orgánica de los Actos del Estado Civil) in January which introduces significant improvements to the country's registry and identity system. Among the most important changes are the creation of the National Civil Status System, which will allow for both in-person and electronic delivery of civil registration services, and the elimination of a confirmation process for birth certificates and late birth registration after 60 days, which had mostly affected people living in rural communities.



A teenager from Mindanao in the south of the Philippines receives a birth certificate during a ceremony organised by UNHCR, UNICEF and the Ministry of Social Services and Development. © UNHCR/Yam Palma

In the **Philippines**, a ceremony to distribute birth certificates to more than 600 unregistered children took place on 22 March. The children were at risk of statelessness due to being forcibly displaced and living in geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas in Mindanao, in the south of the Philippines. The ceremony was organized by UNHCR, UNICEF, the Ministry of Social Services and Development of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, and local government units of Upi and South Upi in Maguindanao. At the event, UNHCR also handed over equipment to support the digitization processes of the Local Civil Registrar's Offices of both municipalities.

The government of **Kazakhstan** made a significant change to the Order of the Minister of Health in November 2022, allowing medical facilities to issue birth certificates that include a "note" acknowledging the mother's identity based on her own statement. This step was taken to implement an amendment to the Code on Marriage and Family, which mandates that all children born in medical facilities must be registered at birth, regardless of their parents' legal status. With this step, the Government fulfills one of its pledges.

In **Ukraine**, as of February, 125 individuals born in the newly occupied regions in 2022 have benefited from a new procedure allowing for distant birth registration which was established by the Ministry of Justice Order n. 3734/5 in September 2022.

In **Yemen**, UNHCR and the Civil Status and Civil Registry Authority in Sana'a (CRA) are working together to implement a joint action plan to improve access to civil status documentation. The action plan aims to 1) ensure timely access to birth registration for refugee and asylum-seeking children, 2) raise awareness of the importance of birth registration among internally displaced persons, 3) build the capacity of personnel of the CRA, and 4) map administrative obstacles linked to the provision of civil documentation for displaced persons. Moreover, UNHCR provided legal assistance to displaced families in Yemen to ensure that their children's births are properly registered. Thanks to this effort, 180 children had their births registered. This activity was carried out in close collaboration with the Civil Status and Civil Registry Authority.

Action 8: Issue nationality documentation to those with entitlement to it

In Iraq, UNHCR and its partner the Legal Clinic Network provided legal assistance to stateless Faili Kurds and Bidoons who were identified through a statelessness study in the central and southern provinces of Iraq in the last quarter of 2022. As a result, 160 persons had their Iraqi nationality confirmed.

The President of **Somalia** signed the National Identification and Registration Authority Bill on 20 March. The law will set up a new National Identity Management System and sets the conditions for legal identity documents to be issued to nationals of the Federal Republic of Somalia. According to the law, every Somali citizen will be able to register their identity and obtain a national ID card. The signed law will be published in the official gazette, after which it will come into effect.

In **Yemen**, UNHCR supported more than 860 persons at risk of statelessness to access national ID cards and other identification documents.

In **Mozambique**, UNHCR and the Catholic University of Mozambique, in collaboration with Government authorities in Pemba, assisted a total of 1,172 people to reacquire birth certificates and national IDs, which have been lost during displacement.

Action 10: Improve quantitative and qualitative data on stateless populations

The **Russian Federation** published the results of the 2020 population census in January, which showed that the number of people who declared themselves stateless had decreased to 95,193 compared to 178,000 in the 2010 census. The census data is [available](#) with a breakdown by age, gender, and region of residence.

Mobilizing governments and civil society

UNHCR, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) held a regional meeting of government statelessness focal points and civil society from **West and Central Africa** from 27 to 30 March in Saly, Senegal. The meeting resulted in the adoption at technical level of a regional model law on statelessness determination, the protection of stateless persons and the facilitation of their naturalization. ECOWAS and ECCAS presented their roadmaps to move the model Law forward in their respective communities. The meeting also included a stocktaking of progress made towards implementing pledges, challenges faced, and opportunities for redoubled efforts to address statelessness.

In **Kazakhstan**, UNHCR and the Migration Service Committee of the Ministry of Internal Affairs signed a joint work plan for 2023 to address statelessness. The plan details various joint activities to enhance the legal framework for the protection of stateless people and to reduce and prevent statelessness. One key action involves harmonizing national legislation with the 1954 and 1961 Statelessness Conventions.

The Ministry of Interior of **Iraq** and UNHCR jointly organized a Statelessness Conference in Baghdad on 18 January. The conference was attended by high-level officials from the government, donor community, UN agencies, civil society organizations, and affected population. The aim of the conference was to mobilize support to identify solutions to end statelessness for the remaining stateless population, prevent future instances of statelessness through legal reform, and scale up nationwide efforts to enable access to civil documentation. To further engage relevant stakeholders, UNHCR conducted a workshop on statelessness in Erbil on 22 January, involving national and international NGOs, civil society, and academia. A press release on the Statelessness Conference can be found [here](#) and videos in English [here](#) and in Arabic [here](#).

With the deactivation of the Protection Cluster in **Iraq** at the end of 2022, a Protection Platform, co-led by UNHCR and OHCHR, was set up in October 2022. Participants include other UN entities and NGO representatives. The Protection Platform aims to coordinate high-level advocacy and provide guidance to partners, particularly under the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation

Framework, to continue addressing protection issues of vulnerable Iraqis, including stateless persons, persons at risk of statelessness, internally displaced persons, returnees, refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants. One of the Protection Platform's priorities for 2023 is to improve access to civil documentation, recognizing that the lack of proof of nationality and barriers to accessing documentation leave individuals at risk of statelessness and prevent them from accessing their rights.

A **regional consultation on statelessness** was held in Beirut, Lebanon, with the participation of 35 representatives from civil society organizations, NGOs, UN agencies, academic/research institutions, and affected individuals across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region on March 6 and 7. The consultation provided a forum for discussion on the opportunities and priorities for advancing statelessness objectives in the MENA region. During the consultation, several recommendations for multi-stakeholder collaboration were identified, with follow-up activities underway.

The national taskforce on the eradication of statelessness in **Zambia** updated and adopted a National Action Plan to End Statelessness in February. The updated plan recommends that Zambia accedes to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and amends the Citizenship Act No. 33 of 2016 and the National Registration Act Chapter 126, among other measures. The amendments would facilitate the establishment of a statelessness determination procedure and raise the maximum age by which foundlings would be presumed to have Zambian nationality.

A second meeting of the statelessness working group of **Côte d'Ivoire** took place on 26 January, in Abidjan, attended by high-level representatives from state institutions and NGOs involved in implementing the national action plan for eradicating statelessness. During the meeting a roadmap of priority measures for the remaining year of the #IBelong Campaign was adopted. It includes the creation of a government task force on statelessness, improving public awareness on the issue and adopting legislation to create pathways to nationality for stateless person, among other priority measures.

In March, an Expert Commission established to draft a new constitution of Chile commenced its work. UNHCR and UNICEF presented recommendations to the president of the Expert Commission, which focused on inclusion of the right to nationality, eliminating the jus soli exceptions related to parents' legal status, safeguards for the loss of nationality, new facilities for naturalization of stateless persons, and an effective remedy against nationality deprivation. The draft text of the Expert Commission will be reviewed by an elected Constitutional Council.

In the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**, a group of civil society organizations, together with the National Committee on Statelessness, validated the civil society roadmap to advocate for accession to the UN Statelessness Conventions.

UNESCAP, with the support of the **Philippines** Statistics Authority in Manila convened a meeting of South-East Asian Civil Registrars from 7 to 9 February. At this event, UNHCR facilitated discussions on the importance of inequality assessments in civil registration. Inequality assessments evaluate the disparities in access to and coverage of civil registration and vital statistics systems across different population groups. UNHCR encouraged civil registrars to use the [Bali Process Civil Registration Assessment Toolkit](#) to conduct the inequality assessments.

Training and awareness raising

In **Kazakhstan**, UNHCR provided guest lectures at the Law Enforcement Academy under the Prosecutor General's Office to familiarize 30 future prosecutors with international standards for the protection of stateless persons.

In **Algeria**, UNHCR conducted a training for 30 magistrates in the city of Koléa in January focusing on (1) the importance of issuing birth certificates, (2) the need for flexibility in instances where the child's parents may lack supporting documentation, and on (3) procedures for late birth registration. Similar sessions will be conducted with other key interlocutors throughout 2023.

In **Jordan**, UNHCR conducted a training with the Sharia Judge Department and Civil Status Department covering, amongst other topics, statelessness and the role of the two entities in ensuring that people have access to civil status documentation. The training was inaugurated by the Ministry of Interior.

In **Niger**, UNHCR organized three trainings on risk of statelessness and the acquisition of nationality for civil registrars, staff from relevant administrative bodies, security forces, traditional rulers, judges, and heads of line ministries. The trainings took place in Tahoua, Tillabéri and Niamey.

In **Algeria**, UNHCR conducted sensitization sessions on the importance of birth registration to address risks of statelessness during refugee registration and reception activities in the first quarter of 2023. Several individuals were identified and referred for legal aid for late birth registration and/or correction of birth certificates.

In Côte d'Ivoire, UNHCR and its partners carried out awareness-raising initiatives to emphasize the importance of civil registration in preventing statelessness. They also informed the public about the available procedures for late birth registration in the country and statelessness determination procedures. Throughout the reporting period, more than 900 people participated in awareness campaigns conducted across the country. Furthermore, 15 radio broadcasts were aired, emphasizing the importance of civil documentation and the risks associated with statelessness.

In **Iran**, UNHCR continued its awareness campaign on the importance of birth registration and possibilities for stateless people and children born to an Iranian mother and non-Iranian father to naturalize under a law adopted in 2020.

In **Angola**, UNHCR conducted a training on statelessness and UNHCR's Digital Learning Platform for partner organizations and government authorities on 15 February. A total of 112 people attended, including legal practitioners and academics and officials from various ministries and municipalities.

Media impact of the Campaign

In the **Philippines**, UNHCR participated in a radio program to raise awareness of the importance of birth registration in the province of Tawi-Tawi. The program, which was hosted by the youth-led organization "Tau-Social Peace Advocate of Real Tawi-Tawian Active Network, Inc (Tau Spartan)", has a potential reach of over 300,000 listeners across 11 municipalities.

In **North Macedonia**, a journalist who took part in a Media Mentorship Programme for Young Journalists, organized by UNHCR and the Young Education Forum in 2022, produced a [video story](#) about a stateless man who had tried to address his plight for 30 years. After the video story was released, the stateless individual's case was finally resolved, leading to the journalist publishing a [news article](#) celebrating the person's victory over statelessness.

In **Côte d'Ivoire**, UNHCR and the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights released a press statement in the newspaper "*Fraternité Matin*" titled "*Everyone has the right to a nationality*" in commemoration of the 8th anniversary of the Abidjan Declaration on 25 February. The article highlights achievements since the launch of the #IBelong Campaign to eradicate statelessness and outlines the remaining actions to be taken in the next two years. One of the actions mentioned is the renewal of a special law for the acquisition of nationality by declaration, which aims to address the situation of individuals of migratory descent who are the largest group of individuals with undetermined nationality in the country. The special Law will also include stateless persons recognized through the established statelessness determination procedure.

The Country Representative of UNHCR **Liberia** and the Executive Director of the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission participated in a live talk show on 18 February hosted by the ECOWAS Radio to discuss statelessness issues, the #IBelong Campaign and its objectives.

UNHCR in the **Philippines** posted a [human interest story](#) of a volunteer who is helping fellow Sama Bajau community members, a minority group at risk of statelessness, in getting their births registered.

Upcoming events

On 27-29 July, in Nizhniy Novgorod, the Russian Federation

UNHCR, the Centre for the Development of Legal Clinics and the Higher School of Economics in Nizhniy Novgorod will organize a Summer School for Legal Clinics on Statelessness. The summer school will enhance the students' knowledge and legal skills on statelessness, to allow them to provide legal assistance to stateless people.

Campaign Resources

Want to support the Campaign? Take a look at our [#IBelong website](#) and post a digital banner on your website, mobilize your social media contacts by sharing one of our posts, download and post our

Twitter cards or embed a short video that explains statelessness. Videos, photo essays and web stories can be found on our [#IBelong stories page](#). Legal resources are available on [Refworld](#).