

## NGO Statement on Statelessness

Dear Chair,

This statement is delivered on behalf of a wide range of NGOs. Importantly, it incorporates the views of groups established and led by activists directly impacted by statelessness, who must be able to fully participate in UNHCR and State-led decision-making processes, and be consulted in matters related to the rights of their communities.

While statistical data remains incomplete, it is estimated that approximately 15 million people worldwide are stateless, with the nationality of tens of millions at risk. Statelessness is mostly caused and perpetuated by discrimination. An estimated 75% of stateless persons belong to minority communities. 25 countries still deny women equal rights to confer nationality on their children. Disabled persons, older people, LGBTQI+ persons and those of migrant heritage are all disproportionately impacted. Many stateless communities endure rights deprivations in all areas, including equality, liberty, security, political participation, movement, health, education and livelihoods.

NGOs acknowledge positive measures taken by States, including implementing some pledges made at the 2019 High-Level Segment on Statelessness.

However, far more urgent and concerted action is needed by UNHCR and States to meet UNHCR's #IBelong campaign target to eradicate statelessness by 2024, protect the rights of stateless persons and promote their right to nationality. While there are many issues of concern, this statement draws attention to COVID-19, childhood statelessness, forced migration, nationality deprivation and UNHCR's role.

### COVID-19

Every-day deprivations now have life and death implications as stateless persons' livelihoods, health and wellbeing have been severely battered, even as many are excluded from relief, emergency healthcare and vaccination schemes. Birth registration, statelessness determination, asylum, nationality acquisition and visa renewal procedures have also been halted or reduced in some countries. NGOs urge UNHCR and States to find solutions for such procedures to continue, even when embassies and consulates are closed.

Stateless persons often live in **densely populated areas** in conditions conducive to the fast spread of the virus, with no possibility to socially distance or utilise PPE. The pandemic has also catalysed **racism, xenophobia, ageism, antigypsism, gender-based violence, and scapegoating**, blaming stateless minorities for spreading the virus.

As articulated in a joint civil society statement issued today, NGOs urge UNHCR and other UN agencies to take all necessary steps to ensure that stateless people are equally included in COVID-19 responses, that their particular contexts are recognised and addressed, their rights are upheld, and that they should not be penalised in any way, due to their lack of documentation or legal status, or any other aspect of their identity. Such steps should be taken regarding, among others, vaccinations, healthcare relief, livelihoods, education, and civil registration.

### Childhood statelessness

Despite strong safeguards protecting the child's right to a nationality, statelessness is mainly perpetuated because children inherit statelessness from their parents or are denied their parents nationality. The Human Rights Committee recently [held](#) that the Netherlands violated the child's right to a nationality by registering 'nationality unknown' in civil records, preventing recognition and protection as a stateless child. NGOs welcome this ruling and remind states of their international law obligations to recognise and protect stateless children and their right to nationality.

NGOs also stress the importance of the UNHCR-UNICEF Coalition on Every Child's Right to a Nationality and urge UNHCR and UNICEF to heighten their engagement with governments and civil society to end childhood statelessness.

### **Forced migration**

The Global Compact on Refugees , CRRF Programme of Action and Global Refugee Forum all recognise the importance of building resilience, solidarity, and solutions and benchmarking progress to address statelessness, but urgent action is needed to effectively mainstream and integrate priorities to protect stateless people and prevent statelessness under the GCR.

NGOs welcome the opportunity to engage with the November GRF stocktaking session, but statelessness must also be fully integrated in the agenda of December's High-Level Officials Meeting, and mainstreamed under the Division of Resilience and Solutions and the World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Centre on Forced Displacement.

NGOs also urge States to implement identification, screening, and determination procedures to recognise stateless persons, guarantee their rights and legal status, and provide facilitated pathways to naturalisation. This is also critical to prevent arbitrary detention of stateless people. States are urged to use community-based alternatives to detention.

### **Arbitrary deprivation of nationality**

NGOs are deeply concerned by the growing (mis)use of citizenship deprivation, affecting minority communities, human rights defenders, dissidents, and suspected terrorists. Under international law, State discretion to deprive nationality is subject to, among others, the prohibition of arbitrary deprivation of nationality, discrimination, and the obligation to avoid statelessness.

NGOs urge States to cease denationalisations and repatriate (former) citizens stranded abroad, in line with international standards as articulated in the Principles on Deprivation of Nationality as a National Security Measure and UNHCR's Guidelines on Statelessness No 5.

### **UNHCR's role**

In conclusion, NGOs recognise the important role UNHCR continues to play in addressing statelessness. Recent external evaluations of UNHCR's statelessness work provide a critical window of opportunity to acknowledge progress but also recognise how much more needs to be done if UNHCR is to even get close to meeting the objective under the #IBelong campaign to eradicate statelessness by 2024.

NGOs urge that evaluation recommendations are acted upon as a priority and their implementation closely monitored, especially, we call for greater resourcing of UNHCR and NGOs working on statelessness, and more concerted efforts to consult affected persons and be directly accountable to them.

Further details are available at [icvanetwork.org](http://icvanetwork.org)

Thank you, Chair.