



Global Alliance to End Statelessness

29 August 2025

Joint Statement in support of the Optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the rights to early childhood care and education, free public pre-primary education and free public secondary education

We present this joint statement on behalf of the Thematic Working Group on protecting the rights of stateless persons of the [Global Alliance to End Statelessness](#). The Global Alliance to End Statelessness is a collaborative multistakeholder platform led by UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, with a vision to create “a world free from statelessness where everyone enjoys the right to a nationality without discrimination”. As one of the Alliance’s workstreams, the Thematic Working Groups (TWGs) are the forums to advance solutions to statelessness, primarily through the sharing of best practices by Global Alliance members, and the exploration of strategies and collaborative initiatives. This joint statement has been prepared by the TWG on Protecting the Rights of Stateless Persons, co-led by UNHCR and the Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness. In line with the TWG’s 2025 thematic focus on the right to education for stateless persons, we express our support for the development and eventual adoption of the proposed Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the rights to early childhood education, free pre-primary education and free secondary education.

Education stands both as a fundamental human right and a beacon of hope, offering stateless children the promise of a better future. It equips them with academic knowledge and important life skills, serving as an investment in their future as well as a pathway to employment opportunities. Education can be the gateway out of the poverty and deprivation faced by stateless communities intergenerationally. Nevertheless, stateless children, or children who are not recognised as nationals by any country, experience significant barriers including lack of identity documentation and the necessary financial resources needed to access education. UNICEF reports that [200 million children under age of 5](#) lack birth certificates excluding them from education systems that require proof of legal identity.¹

Stateless children face several challenges when transitioning from primary to secondary education. At the end of primary school, many are unable to sit for final exams or receive diplomas due to the lack of identity documents such as birth certificates and nationality identity cards. Final results are often required to enrol in secondary school. In addition to documentation barriers, stateless children often face significant schooling fees, as they are considered non-nationals and excluded from financial aid or free public schooling which is reserved for nationals. Without the required certifications and qualifications, stateless children are significantly limited in their ability to advance to tertiary level education. [UNHCR’s consultations](#) with stateless children reveal their strong desire to graduate from secondary school and attend university, yet only a small percentage were able to achieve this. The proposed Optional Protocol would therefore ensure stateless children’s access to early childhood education, free pre-primary education and free secondary education, which in turn, would open significant opportunities for them in the future.

We welcome and extend our support to [Resolution \(A/HRC/RES/56/5\)](#) adopted by the United Nations Human Rights Council on 12 July 2024 which establishes an open-ended intergovernmental working

¹The world is home to over 200 million children under 5 without a birth certificate: this includes 150 million unregistered children and 55 million children whose births are reported as registered but lack proof in the form of a birth certificate. For more information, see <https://data.unicef.org/resources/the-right-start-in-life-2024-update/>

group with the mandate to explore the possibility of, elaborating, and submitting to the Human Rights Council a draft optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This is a positive step for stateless children in accessing public education system, with the objectives of:

- Explicitly recognising the **right to early childhood care and education**;
- Ensuring states make **free public pre-primary education**, beginning with at least one year;
- Requiring states to make **free public secondary education** for all children.

It is also important to highlight that the proposed Optional Protocol is in line with the existing legal obligations for State parties, as enshrined in [Article 22 of the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons](#)², which requires states to:

1. Treat stateless persons the same as nationals with respect to **elementary education**;
2. Provide to stateless persons treatment as favourable as possible and, in any event, not less favourable than that accorded to aliens generally in the same circumstances, with respect to education **other than elementary education** and, in particular, as regards access to studies, the recognition of foreign school certificates, diplomas and degrees, the remission of fees and charges and the award of scholarships.

We also support the resolution's commitment to **child participation** and urge the inclusion of **stateless or formally stateless child representatives** to the September meeting, as this opportunity would enable them to share their experiences and contribute to the deliberation of the proposed Optional protocol in the intergovernmental working group meeting in Geneva on 1-4 September 2025.

Sincerely,

Signed (in alphabetical order):

Apatride Network

ASKV / The Netherlands

Centro para la Observación Migratoria y el Desarrollo Social en el Caribe

European Network on Statelessness

Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion

Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law

Migration and Trafficked Persons Law Clinic, Baze University, Abuja, Nigeri

Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR

Peter McMullin Centre on Statelessness

Right to Protection Charitable Foundation

Ruwad alHoukuk (Frontiers Rights) Association, Lebanon

Salam for Democracy and Human Rights (SALAM DHR), Bahrain

Ufuq Organization for Human Development

U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants

Voice of Children Nepal

² There are currently 99 State parties to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless persons: https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetailsII.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=V-3&chapter=5&Temp=mtdsg2&clang=en