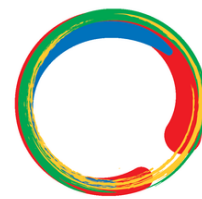


THEMATIC ADVOCACY BRIEF

Solutions to Ending **Childhood Statelessness**



Global Alliance to
End Statelessness

Executive Summary

Childhood statelessness affects millions, depriving children of their right to nationality and access to basic services. Statelessness is often inherited, locking generations out of nationality and trapping both adults and children in a cycle of exclusion and discrimination. Discriminatory laws, policies and/or practices include whenever a child cannot acquire nationality through either of their parents and lack of recognition of family relations. Statelessness can also arise due to migration, displacement, conflict, derived deprivation of nationality and with re-drawing of borders. Issues such as lack of birth registration, child separation or abandonment, can also contribute to a child not having a nationality.

Solutions exist and should be implemented so that no child is born or becomes stateless. States have a legal and moral duty to ensure safeguards are in place so that children can acquire nationality at birth or as early as possible thereafter. Political will and practical measures should be reinforced so that no child is left without a nationality.

Background

At the end of 2025, UNHCR statistical reporting included 4.5 million stateless persons and persons with undetermined nationality, covering 100 countries – although the actual global figure is expected to be significantly higher(i). Moreover, while lack of legal identity or documentation does not necessarily mean a person is stateless, these realities can create or exacerbate risks of statelessness. As of 2024, UNICEF notes that 200 million children under 5 years of age lack a birth certificate. World Bank 2025 statistics indicate that 850 million people lack proof of legal identity(ii).

4.5M+

Stateless & undetermined nationality:
UNHCR year-end 2025 statistics across 100 countries, actual global figures are significantly higher.



Co-funded by
the European Union

When children cannot acquire nationality through either parent or their State of birth, they may be left stateless(iii). Statelessness among children can also result from discriminatory laws, policies, and practices that aim to exclude or have the effect of excluding certain groups, including minorities. A significant proportion of the world's stateless populations are members of minority groups(iv). Migration, displacement, conflict, the re-drawing of borders, lack of birth registration, child separation or abandonment, and lack of recognition of family relations are all factors that can expose children to a heightened risk of statelessness. Moreover, statelessness is often inherited and can lock generations out of having a nationality.

Who Is Affected

Specific groups of children face barriers to obtaining a full identity, including a nationality, such as those living in poverty, those in street-connected situations, those separated from their families, and those belonging to minority or nomadic communities. Children on the move or living in protracted displacement contexts are also at risk of being stateless. Children affected by emergencies, or in situations where family relations are difficult to establish or be legally recognized, may face greater risks of statelessness. Statelessness is often passed on from generation to generation, trapping both adults and children in a cycle of exclusion and discrimination.

Children and families living in remote or isolated locations also face barriers in accessing birth registration and nationality services. Barriers may be compounded in cross-border contexts, where issues of jurisdiction and applicable law can affect children's access to birth registration and nationality. This is because civil registration systems are generally not set up to ensure the automatic recognition of civil status across borders(v), despite conventions existing to safeguard against this(vi). These challenges are further exacerbated in emergency contexts where services may be disrupted and records lost or destroyed. Without a legal identity, children are at greater risk of violations such as being sold, trafficked, early recruitment into armed groups, and child marriage.

In all these situations, States have obligations under international law to ensure access to birth registration, acquisition or confirmation of nationality and preservation of child's identity in family relations. Whenever these identity elements are missing, States have a responsibility to speedily re-establish them(vii).

Legal & Policy Framework

[Article 15 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) affirms that:

- (1) Everyone has the right to a nationality; and
- (2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of their nationality nor denied the right to change their nationality.

200M

Children under 5
years of age who do not
possess a birth certificate
globally (UNICEF, 2024)

Relevant international instruments include:

- [Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, 1954](#)
- [Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, 1961](#)
- [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966](#) [Article 24 (2) and (3)]
- [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 1965](#) [Article 5 (d) (iii)]
- [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979](#) [Article 9]
- [Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989](#) [Article 7 & 8]
- [Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families 1990](#), [Article 29]
- [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006](#) [Article 18]
- Relevant regional instruments

Policy & Legal Reform Recommendations

- Accede to and fully implement the 1954 and 1961 Statelessness Conventions.
- Ensure universal birth registration so that every child is registered immediately after birth.
- Promote birth registration accelerators including decentralization (i.e. services that should be closer to the community), cross-sectoral engagement and digitalization that is safe, inclusive, innovative and cost-effective.
- Ensure that birth registration, nationality determination and civil registration systems are accessible, inclusive and interoperable.
- Engage communities and civil society to support raising awareness on the importance of birth registration among communities and help families access registration and nationality procedures.
- Guarantee nationality for children born in the territory who would otherwise be stateless in law and practice.
- Remove discriminatory provisions in nationality laws and practices by eradicating exclusions based on ethnicity, religion, or status of parents. Children of migrants, refugees, and stateless parents should be protected. Mothers and fathers should have equal rights to confer nationality to their children.
- Timely issuance of nationality documentation by ensuring that children can prove their nationality early to avoid marginalization.
- Strengthen cross-border cooperation so it is effective between States on issues of civil registration, proof of identity and nationality.

850M

Individuals
worldwide
living without proof
of legal identity
(World Bank, 2025).

Advocacy messaging

- “No child should be left without a nationality – States should take concrete steps to prevent and reduce statelessness.”
- “A nationality opens doors to education, healthcare, and dignity – statelessness closes them.”
- “Ending childhood statelessness is achievable through political will, legal reform and effective implementation.”
- “Inclusive nationality laws strengthen social cohesion and reduce future exclusion.”

Call to Action

“A nationality opens doors to education, healthcare, and dignity statelessness closes them.”

States should urgently act to ensure that:

- Every child is enabled to enjoy the right to a nationality – a fundamental human right recognized by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and other international standards.
- No child should be born or end up stateless – governments have a legal and moral duty to ensure children acquire a nationality at birth or as early as possible, particularly where they would otherwise be stateless.
- Statelessness is preventable – with political will, legal safeguards and practical measures, States can prevent and reduce childhood statelessness in line with international standards.

(i) UNHCR, Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2025. [Global Trends report 2025 | UNHCR](#)

(ii) [World Bank, Global progress in identification: 3 findings from the latest data](#)

(iii) [UNHCR/UN Women. Background note on Gender Equality, Nationality Laws and Statelessness 2025](#)

(iv) UN Human Rights Council, Impact of the arbitrary deprivation of nationality on the enjoyment of the rights of children concerned, and existing laws and practices on accessibility for children to acquire nationality, inter alia, of the country in which they are born, if they otherwise would be stateless, 16 December 2015, A/HRC/31/29.

(v) [Michaels, R., Ruiz Abou-Nigm, V., and van Loon, H. \(eds\). \(2021\). The Private Side of Transforming our World – UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030 and the Role of Private International Law, Intersentia Online](#)

(vi) See Conventions from the International Commission on Civil Status

(vii) Art. 8(2) CRC