

Topic #1: Measures to end statelessness

I. Background

A stateless person by definition is someone who is not considered a citizen of any State under national laws. Most people automatically obtain a nationality at birth based on the nationality of their parents or the state in which they were born, but there are several factors that cause people to become stateless.

One of the most prominent causes of statelessness is discrimination. Laws that limit nationality or citizenship on the basis of factors like ethnicity and religion are responsible for much of the statelessness that occurs in a person's birth country. As a result, most of the world's stateless people are minorities. Additionally, some countries have laws which discriminate based on gender by making it more difficult for women to pass on their nationality to their offspring.

Gaps and weaknesses in existing laws can be an additional source of statelessness. This problem in nationality and citizenship laws continues on an international scale when there is inconsistency between the laws of different countries. Sometimes a person becomes stateless when neither the nationality laws of the country they were born into nor those of the country that their parents are from permit the child to attain nationality. Hence, incomplete or inconsistent laws contribute to statelessness.

The creation of new states and borders is also a process that has a potential to leave people stateless. This is because new states will sometimes leave some groups out when determining the citizenship status of those within their borders.

There are also certain circumstances under which a person can lose their nationality. In some states this happens when a citizen is physically located outside of the country's borders for an extended period of time.

Statelessness is a major problem because it deprives stateless people of essential human rights. Most prominently, the status of a stateless person means that they are denied the right to possess a nationality, a right defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Being stateless also often keeps people from other basic human rights and important functions. Statelessness often bars access to education,

health care, and marriage. Statelessness also keeps many people from having proof of identity, owning properties, opening bank accounts, getting a passport and traveling, and voting.

II. United Nations Involvement

The UNHCR is the UN organization that is tasked with addressing the issue of statelessness. The UNHCR aims to identify instances of statelessness and its causes, prevent statelessness through international legal standards and civil registration, and reduce statelessness by creating opportunities for stateless people to be recognized as nationals. UNHCR has also launched the #IBelong Campaign that aimed to end statelessness by the end of 2024. As part of the #IBelong Campaign, the UNHCR also created the Global Action Plan to assist in solving major statelessness cases and prevent new ones. Other UN agencies also contribute to solving the issue of statelessness. UNICEF, for example, works to increase birth registration and the OHCHR works to monitor the human rights of stateless people. Unfortunately, as of June 2024 the UNHCR's statistical reporting determined that there were still 4.4 million stateless people globally. This means that there is still much to be done to resolve the issue.

III. Questions to Consider

- What are your country's citizenship laws and do they contribute to statelessness?
- What is your country's official stance on the issue of statelessness?
- Has your country done anything to combat statelessness in the past?
- Does your country have a particularly high population of stateless people?
- Has your country supported any UN actions that aim to combat statelessness?
- Does the stance of another country impact your country's stance on this issue?
- What aspects of the statelessness issue are most important to your country?

IV. Additional sources

<https://www.unhcr.org/ibelong/about-statelessness/>

<https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/protect-human-rights/ending-statelessness>