

STATELESSNESS

NEWSLETTER

#IBELONG CAMPAIGN

Celebrating its 6th anniversary



UNHCR 2020 Youth With Refugees Art Contest. ©UNHCR/Faida

The #IBelong Campaign marked its 6th year anniversary in November. On this occasion, several activities took place in the region raising awareness about statelessness, the importance of belonging and the role of the UNHCR, governments and civil society in bringing an end to statelessness in the region

IN BRIEF

- Journalists were trained in Madagascar, Eswatini and South Africa
- Open letters were published in South Africa and Zambia
- TV shows and social media video featured statelessness in South Africa and Madagascar
- several interviews were given to TV, radio and print media throughout the region

Awareness and advocacy

Southern Africa



Screen shot of Morning Live TV show

On 11 November, to mark the 6th anniversary of the #IBelong campaign, the Deputy Director of the Regional Bureau for Southern Africa, along with a young stateless man, were interviewed by Ms Leanne Manas, UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador and host of Morning Live, a popular TV programme with a regional viewership. The purpose of the [interview](#) was to raise awareness on the global scourge of statelessness, how it manifests in the region, and the role of UNHCR, Southern African governments and civil society in ending statelessness. The stateless man gave his account on the impact and consequence of being stateless in South Africa, and at the end of the show, the Department of Home Affairs called in promising to intervene.

South Africa

Several anniversary activities followed this interview. An [open letter](#) to South Africans was published in the Mail and Guardian, calling on the government of South Africa and South Africans to ensure universal birth registration for all children born in South Africa, so that they are issued with birth certificates as a means to end statelessness and to enable full enjoyment of rights, such as access to education and health care. The open letter was signed by 24 signatories, including renowned Foundations, academics, high level personalities and civil society organisations. The open letter was further shared by the Trevor Noah Foundation in its [blog](#). A [press statement](#) was also released by UNHCR to mark the campaign anniversary, with several national and international interviews also given on [TV](#), [radio](#) and press.



During the month of November, UNHCR's implementing partner in South Africa, Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR) engaged in various [activities](#) on different media platforms to mark the 6th anniversary of the campaign, highlighting the importance of nationality and the need (for South Africa) to double up efforts to end statelessness, calling on [South Africa](#) to accede to the 1954 and 1961 Conventions, practice universal birth registration and [end childhood statelessness](#).

On 26 and 27 November, Lawyers for Human Rights conducted a two-day workshop [for community journalists](#) under the theme "how to report on statelessness", aimed at orienting journalists on the concept causes and consequences of statelessness in South Africa and to empower them to use media and communication as a platform to raise awareness on statelessness, and inform about the #IBelong campaign and its objective to end statelessness by 2024.



Mpho, stateless, South Africa © UNHCR/Caux

UNHCR produced a [multi-media story](#) on how lack of birth registration is impacting the lives of ordinary South Africans who want to be recognized as citizens and practice their rights. The story features Mpho, a 33-year-old woman who lives with her four children in the North West Province; Mpho never had identity papers as her birth was never recorded, coupled with the fact that she was abandoned as a toddler. She has spent her entire adult life trying to become legally recognized and has endured many hardships.

Madagascar



Madagascar debate on the right to nationality, featuring interventions by singer Jiaby Gasy ©FDA

On 14 November, with the support of UNHCR, Focus Development Association marked the 6th anniversary of the #IBelong campaign in Madagascar, through streaming a [talk show](#) on Facebook, on the topic of "the right to nationality". The talk show, which featured the famous artist Jiaby Gasy, also a High-Level Supporter of the #IBelong campaign in Madagascar, was able to reach over 100, 000 Internet users and generate over 10, 000 interactions.



Statelessness training for female journalists in Toliara, South Madagascar, ©FDA

Since October 2020, FDA has been conducting capacity building sessions for local print, television and radio journalists in three southern cities namely, Mahajanga, Fianarantsoa and Toliara. About sixty journalists have been trained and made aware of the importance of their engagement in the fight against statelessness in Madagascar. Following this training, several articles were published in the media, including the [UN social media](#), [blog's articles](#), [newspaper article](#).

Eswatini



Session with members of the Parliament © Ministry of Home Affairs

On 11-12 November, the Ministry of Home Affairs and UNHCR convened an information session with the two chambers of the Parliament (the Senate and House of Assembly) and the Attorney General. The purpose of the meeting was to raise awareness about the #IBelong campaign and to advocate for the swift implementation of the EXCOM High-Level Segment pledges on gender equality in nationality legislation.

A training workshop took place on 13 November directed to print, radio and TV journalists. The event was of great significance, as it coincided with the celebration of the #IBelong Campaign and the anniversary of the adoption of the Eswatini National Action Plan on the Eradication of Statelessness. The workshop aimed at mustering interest and building capacity of journalists, it resulted in several articles on statelessness in Eswatini being published in local media.



News article on statelessness published in the Swazi Observer

Zambia

On 11 November, UNHCR Zambia published an [open letter](#) to the Government of Zambia in the Times of Zambia newspaper and other major media platforms, applauding the efforts taken by the government to eradicate statelessness but also calling for increased efforts, and in particular, urging the government to ensure that safeguards against statelessness are in place to protect children found abandoned across the country.

Strengthening Governmental Policy

Southern Africa



On 3-4 December 2020, SADC convened, in collaboration with UNHCR, a regional meeting for Refugee Commissioners with the aim, among others, to follow up on the implementation of statelessness pledges made by member states and discuss statelessness related challenges in the context of the pandemic. Participants have agreed with some important recommendations, including, designating birth registration as essential service during lockdown, and non-discriminatory and equal access of stateless persons to public health services

including COVID-19 testing and treatment

Democratic Republic of Congo

From 18 November through 3 December, the Interinstitutional Technical Committee for the fight against statelessness in the DRC, with the support of UNHCR, held three meetings on the prevention of statelessness in Bakavu, Bunia and Goma respectively. The objective was to engage local authorities in the fight against statelessness in their respective provinces and to develop a provincial action plan on the eradication of statelessness in the provinces of South Kivu, Ituri and North Kivu. Each meeting was attended by over 25 people, consisting of representatives from provincial government, provincial assembly, administrative authority and civil society and resulted in the adoption of the provincial roadmaps on the eradication of statelessness by 2024. See video on event in Bunia, [Ituri](#).

South Africa

On 20 November, Lawyers for Human Rights submitted a brief to the Department of Home Affairs Portfolio Committee on statelessness in South Africa. The brief highlights the statelessness related pledges South Africa has made and raises various statelessness related challenges including barriers to access birth registration that deprive persons of the right to a nationality in South Africa. The brief

also includes recommendations to South Africa to remove these barriers and to accede to the UN statelessness conventions.

Issuance of Nationality Documentation

South Africa

On 25 November, the Supreme Court of Appeal of South Africa, in [Minister of Home Affairs and Others v Jose and Another](#), upheld the decision of the High Court granting two brothers of Angolan origin, citizenship in terms of sec 4(3) of the Citizenship Act. 88 of 1995. The order, which the Department of Home Affairs is in the process of implementing, has provided clarity on the interpretation of sec 4 (3) which makes provision for the acquisition of citizenship by naturalization for applicants born in the Republic of South Africa, to foreign parents, provided all four requirements are met, ie. been born in South Africa; (ii) been born of parents who are not South African citizens and who have not been admitted into the Republic for permanent residence; (iii) lived in the Republic from the date of his or her birth to the date of becoming a major; and (iv) had his or her birth registered in terms of the Births and Deaths Registration Act 51 of 1992. Applicants who meet the four listed requirements can now apply for naturalization regardless of whether they were born prior to the 2013 Citizenship Act Amendment, or after. Read full story [here](#).

Strengthening Birth Registration

Republic of Congo



Republic of Congo door to door sensitization© UNHCR/Banga

On November 1st, the Republic of Congo launched an awareness-raising campaign on birth registration and the prevention of statelessness in the departments of Brazzaville, Plateaux and Likouala. 50 community relays were trained and deployed to raise awareness among households on the need to register births in order to reduce the risks of statelessness. This campaign, which runs for two months, ending on 31 December 2020, is supported by the local authorities who accompany the community relays in the areas to be covered. 5,000 households have been sensitized in the month of November alone.



Republic of Congo birth register handover ceremony
©UNHCR/Banga

On 11 November in Brazzaville, the UNHCR provided support for 2,000 birth certificates registers to the Ministry of Interior and Decentralization. This support follows a request from the Government which intends to issue birth certificates to people without, identified during the civil status census conducted in 2018. These birth records will be delivered to the 172 civil registration centres.

As a follow up, from 21 November to 2 December, the Republic of Congo, through the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of the Interior, and with UNHCR support, organized an operation to issue birth certificates to indigenous populations in the departments of La Lekoumou, Kouilou and Sangha. 2,000 indigenous people received birth certificates for the first time. These activities took place within the framework of mobile court hearings.



Issuance of birth certificates to the indigenous community. ©UNHCR/Banga

In November 2020, the Republic of Congo published a [Ministerial Order n° 14888 of 13 November 2020](#) on the creation, attributions and organization of auxiliary civil status centres in health facilities. These auxiliary civil status centres are created with the aim of registering births at health centres to limit the risks of non-registration of children when they leave hospital. This text follows the various recommendations resulting from consultations, organized with the UNHCR support in various regions, on birth registration and the prevention of statelessness. With these auxiliary centres, each parent will be able to easily declare the birth of their child.

Madagascar

The month of December has seen the continuation of an awareness campaign on birth registration in Madagascar, initiated last September by the Ministry of the Interior and Decentralization, in collaboration with the Focus Development Association. Maximum reach is ensured through the continued use of broadcasting video spots and text messaging, encouraging communities to register births, to reduce the risk of statelessness. See activities [here](#), and [news article](#).

South Africa

In December, LHR contributed to the [South African Child Gauge \(2020\)](#). This is an annual publication of the Children's Institute, University of Cape Town. It aims to report on and monitor the situation of children in South Africa, in particularly the realisation of their right and focuses on a different theme each year. LHR provided commentary on developments in South African law and policy on access to birth registration and the acquisition of citizenship by naturalisation for migrant children.

Legislative Reform

Madagascar



Workshop with Members of Parliament ©FDA

On 3-4 December Focus Development Association, in collaboration with UNHCR, held a two-day training [workshop](#), in Ampefy city (Centre Madagascar) on the right to nationality . It targeted 20 parliamentarians from the National Assembly. This [workshop](#) aims at developing knowledge and understanding of statelessness in Madagascar, as well as the international obligations of Madagascar in preventing and reducing statelessness. Participants also discussed the Nationality Bill that has been adopted by the Senate. Participants adopted a road map, that includes the drafting of a new progressive nationality law that incorporates the provisions already adopted by the Senate.

Botswana

In December, the [parliament](#) of Botswana has adopted a motion requesting the Ministry of Nationality, Immigration and Gender Affairs to amend the Citizenship Act to make it a default position that any person with dual citizenship retains the Botswana citizenship unless she/he specifically renounces it, as opposed to automatically losing it at the age of majority if no declaration of intent to retain the citizenship is made. This welcome move is a safeguard ensuring that no one is rendered stateless.

Protecting stateless people

Mozambique



Mobile clinic ©UNHCR/Buffoni

In December, the university of Pemba has started providing legal aid to undocumented IDPs in the province of Cabo Delgado, with the support of UNHCR. Over 300, 0000 people are displaced in Cabo Delgado province due to on-going conflict and human rights violations in the northern part of the province. Many displaced persons lack identity and nationality documentation, due to a variety of reasons, including loss of documents during flight coupled with the destruction of registries in the places of origin. The university has set up a mobile legal clinic, that reaches out to undocumented IDPs, and assists them in applying for Identity documents, in coordination with relevant ministries. In so doing, the project assists in assessing risks of statelessness and obstacles to documentation.

South Africa

On 2 December, Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR), in collaboration with ProBono.Org, hosted a virtual training on “Access to Nationality and Statelessness in South Africa” directed to over 20 lawyers. The purpose of the training was to capacitate lawyers across South Africa – working in the private sector or civil society – to provide legal assistance to persons affected by statelessness. At the conclusion of the training, all the lawyers were invited to join the national network on statelessness, [South African Network on Statelessness \(“SANS”\)](#).

Measuring Statelessness

Namibia



Data collection through interviews in Kavango Region of Namibia, at the border with Angola.
©LAC

On 16 October, UNHCR’s implementing partner in Namibia, the Legal Assistance Centre (LAC), in collaboration with the Minister of Home Affairs, Immigration, Safety and Security convened a Ministerial meeting in Windhoek on “A Study on Statelessness And Those At Risk of Being Stateless In Namibia.” The meeting resulted in the commissioning of the study on statelessness to be carried out in all regions in Namibia, which builds on the pledges made by Namibia in 2019 to eradicate statelessness. The study, which is being conducted by LAC, with the support of UNHCR and the Ministry of Home Affairs, is now well underway and will be concluded in January 2021, with a final survey in the Omaheke Region, in the eastern part of Namibia. The aim of the study is to collect data on populations affected by statelessness in Namibia.

South Africa

Lawyers for Human Rights, UNHCR implementing partner, is developing a Statelessness Index to analyse risks of statelessness in the SADC region. The pilot index includes content from three countries: South Africa, Eswatini and Botswana. The index is an online tool that provides extensive country by country analysis of law, policy and practice, which has been benchmarked against international norms and good practice and then ranked according to a point system. It allows users to understand which areas of law, policy and practice can be improved by states and which can be looked to as examples of good practice in addressing statelessness.



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