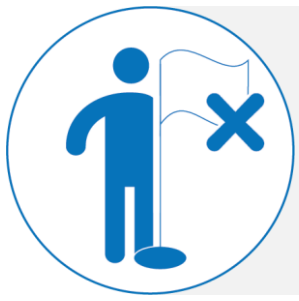
KEY FIGURES



2.62 million **stateless people** within Asia and the Pacific region *as of mid-2025*

1.09 million **non-displaced stateless people** *as of mid-2025*

1.53 million **displaced stateless people** *as of mid-2025*

70% **are Rohingya** *as of mid-2025*

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

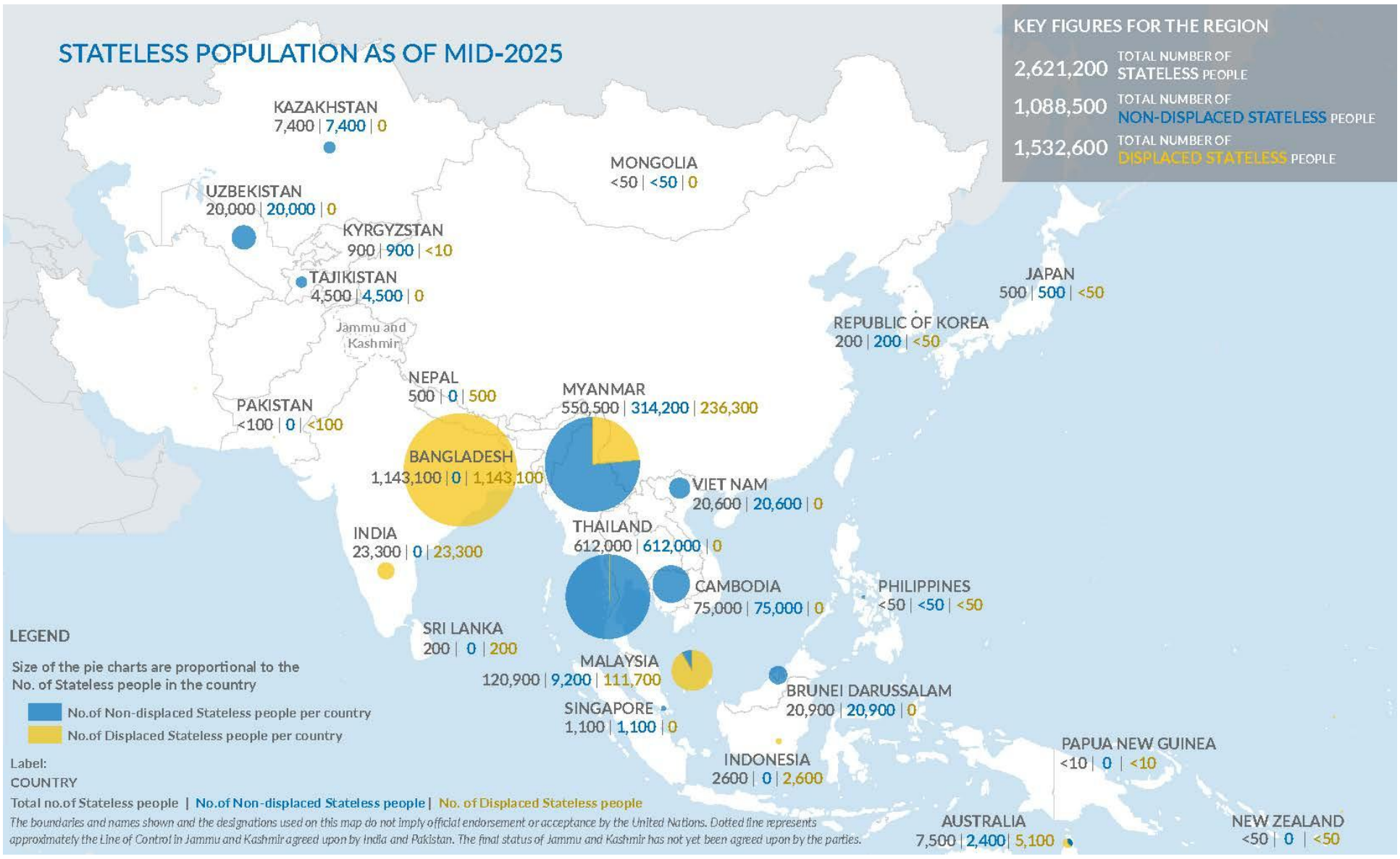
Asia and the Pacific hosts the majority of the world's stateless population, with an estimated 2.62 million people, representing 58 per cent of the global total. This includes around 1.09 million stateless persons who are not displaced and approximately 1.53 million refugees, asylum-seekers, or internally displaced persons (IDPs). The Rohingya account for about 70 per cent of this population. Across the region, statelessness disproportionately affects women and children, with the lack of nationality heightening exposure to risks such as child labour, child marriage, and gender-based violence.

Gaps in nationality laws and historical factors are among the main causes of statelessness in the region. Following the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, hundreds of thousands were left stateless across Central Asia, as many people did not obtain the nationality of newly established successor States. Across the wider region, many nationality laws restrict parents from passing on citizenship to their children – particularly those born abroad – and in four countries, women are still denied this right on an equal basis with men.

Significant gaps also persist in birth registration, leaving children without proof of their identity or entitlement to citizenship. In some countries, non-citizen children are legally ineligible for birth registration. In others, universal birth registration laws exist but are hindered by practical barriers such as the remoteness of civil registration services, costs, or difficulties registering out-of-hospital births. Among refugees, the absence of lawful residency status can discourage families from registering births or other vital events, particularly if they fear detention or deportation.

Statelessness affects every stage of life. Infants without birth certificates can be denied vaccinations, children may be turned away from schools, and young people are often excluded from formal employment. Parents struggle to secure stable housing, and many stateless people cannot legally marry. If left unresolved, statelessness exposes people and families to lifelong vulnerability, undermining social cohesion and economic development.

However, statelessness is solvable. Countries across the Asia and the Pacific are demonstrating that it can be eradicated with political will and concrete action. As only States have the authority to grant or confirm nationality, they have an indispensable role to play in solving this problem. Key steps include the better identification and documentation of stateless people through inclusive Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) systems and national census exercises such as mobile outreach to reach isolated communities. UNHCR welcomes opportunities to work with governments to resolve existing cases, prevent new generations from being left without a nationality, and include stateless people in national systems and development plans. Ending statelessness unlocks opportunities, restores dignity, and gives people the chance to fully belong.



WHY DO PEOPLE BECOME STATELESS?

Statelessness in the region arises from several factors:

- **Discrimination** remains a major cause of statelessness worldwide. People may be denied nationality because of their race, ethnicity, language, religion or gender. Discrimination can appear both in laws themselves and in how those laws are applied in practice.
- **Gaps in nationality laws** can also leave people statelessness. For example, without legal safeguards, children may be born without a nationality, or adults may lose their nationality later in life. The 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness sets out key legal safeguards to prevent this.
- **Migration and forced displacement** create additional risks. Children born to migrants and refugees are often never registered and many countries restrict parents' ability to pass on nationality to children born abroad.
- **State succession** refers to the transfer of sovereignty over territory from one State to another, arising from events such as the independence of former colonized countries as well as the dissolution or breakup of States. People are left stateless if they lose the nationality of the old country without automatically acquiring the nationality of the new country.
- **Loss or deprivation of nationality** can also result in statelessness. This may happen when people live abroad for long periods, try to change their nationality, or are stripped of their citizenship without protections that prevent statelessness.

UNHCR works to ensure everyone enjoys their right to legal identity and nationality, in line with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These efforts help protect people from the lifelong disadvantages of statelessness and contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the broader UN Legal Identity Agenda.

PROGRESS ACROSS THE REGION

Despite the scale of the challenge, governments across Asia and the Pacific have made remarkable strides in tackling statelessness. When political will is paired with targeted financial support and cooperation between governments, civil society and stateless communities themselves, it has led to tangible progress – changing lives on the ground and offering promising models for the rest of the world.

The Kyrgyz Republic and Turkmenistan show what is possible, having eradicated statelessness in 2019 and 2024, respectively. Both countries achieved this by amending legislation, introducing procedures to identify stateless people, and promoting universal birth registration. Building on this momentum, Central Asia is on track to become the first sub-region in the world to resolve all known cases of statelessness, with **Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan** jointly adopting the Ashgabat Declaration on Ending Statelessness in Central Asia in 2024.

Elsewhere, important steps are also being taken. In **Thailand**, a landmark Cabinet Resolution in 2024 aims to ensure around half a million stateless people can readily acquire nationality or lawful permanent residency status. In South-East Asia, cooperation between **the Philippines, Japan and Indonesia** is helping to prevent statelessness for thousands more by verifying the nationality status of undocumented migrants.

EMERGING FROM THE SHADOWS: ENDING STATELESSNESS IN CENTRAL ASIA

For the first 34 years of her life, Adolat Shabozova cannot recall a single day when she was truly at peace. "I was always in constant stress. I was worried about where to go and whom to approach," she said.

Born in 1988 to a poor family in the dusty, mountainous city of Kulob, in southern Tajikistan, Adolat was never registered at birth because her parents could not afford the fees for official identity documents. She grew up undocumented and stateless, and when her own children were born, they too were stateless.

Without nationality, Adolat struggled to complete her education, find work or move freely, living in constant anxiety about her children's future. Despite the challenges, she managed to finish primary school, marry and have three children. When her husband was diagnosed with tuberculosis, she became the family's sole breadwinner.

"It was very hard for me to get employed," she said. "I went door-to-door, looking for opportunities." Without legal identity, formal work was impossible, and she eventually found casual work washing dishes at weddings. "Wherever you go, you are asked for documentation," she said. "You feel empty from the inside."

After years of false starts, Adolat was referred to Chashma, a UNHCR partner organization providing free legal support to vulnerable groups, including stateless people. With Chashma's help, she navigated the complex application process and in 2022 received her Tajikistan passport, ending decades of uncertainty.

"Now that I have documents, I can achieve anything," she said. "Both for my children and myself. I am happy."
Read more

After years of uncertainty, Adolat Shabozova finally holds her Tajik passport, securing her identity and future. © UNHCR/Elyor Nemat

CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS

International law establishes that "everyone has the right to recognition as a person before the law". However, millions of people worldwide lack a legal identity. Without it, they have no way to prove who they are or confirm their age or family composition. Without a legal identity, people are often denied access to essential services, excluded from opportunities, and exposed to greater risks of family separation.

For refugees and stateless people, being able to prove their identity and family links is not a formality – it is a lifeline. Inclusive Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) systems make this possible by ensuring every child begins life with an official birth certificate that serves as proof of identity, family relations, and age. This becomes especially important in adolescence, when proof of age is needed to help deter child marriage, child labour, and child recruitment.

Marriage registration is also a fundamental right under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. It is often legally required to register the birth of a child and to protect women's rights to family life and family unity. Registering deaths and divorces also allows widowed and divorced women to lawfully remarry, inherit property and certify sole custody of their children.

Forcibly displaced and stateless people, however, often face significant challenges in registering vital events or obtaining or replacing civil status documents, underscoring the need for CRVS systems that are safe, inclusive, and accessible.

Across Asia and the Pacific, governments are showing that progress is possible. In June, countries in the region endorsed a new Regional Ministerial Declaration extending the CRVS Decade to 2030. The Declaration takes stock of progress made and identifies priority areas that require continued attention. Since the 2021 Declaration and the Regional Action Framework, significant progress has been achieved. From 2012 to 2024, the number of unregistered children under five fell from 135 million to 51 million – meaning 84 million more children now have birth registration, a vital step in securing their rights.

Despite these advances, gaps remain, particularly for people with disabilities, those living in poverty, those with low literacy or those in remote areas. Every year, more than 8 million deaths go unregistered in the region, and 97 million children have never had their births recorded.

Civil status documents – from birth certificates to marriage and death certificates – are far more than pieces of paper. They are tools that protect people, prevent exploitation, and support family and community stability.

Countries in the region are taking bold and innovative steps to ensure legal identity for all:

- **Thailand** has established CRVS procedures guaranteeing that every child born in the country (including stateless and undocumented children) receives an official birth certificate. This not only facilitates access to education, but also helps deter child labour, early marriage, and family separation, laying the foundation for protection and better opportunities.
- **Cambodia's** 2023 CRVS ID Law commits to registering every vital event in the country and ensuring everyone has civil status documentation, opening doors to education, inclusion and opportunity for thousands.
- **The Philippines** has adopted the Foundling Recognition and Protection Act of 2022, which has enabled over 8,000 foundlings (children of unknown parentage) to be registered and confirmed as citizens. The country has also introduced PhilSys, an inclusive digital identity management system that enables refugees, IDPs, and stateless people to obtain a national ID, improving access to healthcare, social protection and financial services. Privacy-by-design safeguards ensure people control their personal data and protect their sensitive information.

Since 2021, **India, Papua New Guinea and Viet Nam** have also updated their CRVS laws to achieve universal coverage. These and other reforms – supported by the Bloomberg Philanthropies Data for Health Initiative – underscores the importance of inclusive CRVS systems in public health efforts such as vaccination campaigns and pandemic response.

CIVIL REGISTRATION: A Foundation for Enjoying Rights in the Asia and the Pacific Region

18 countries require a birth certificate for **IMMUNIZATION/ VACCINATION**

36 countries require a birth certificate for **SCHOOL ENROLLMENT**

39 countries require a birth certificate to obtain a **NATIONAL ID**

35 countries require a birth certification to obtain a **PASSPORT**

20 countries require a birth certification to access free **HEALTH CARE**

BIRTH — MARRIAGE — DEATH - - - - - - CAUSE OF DEATH

BANKING ELECTIONS DEEDS PENSIONS/ RETIREMENT

22 countries require a death certification to issue a **BURIAL PERMIT** or equivalent

43 countries require a death certificate for surviving family members to **INHERIT PROPERTY**

UNHCR'S ROLE AND KEY PARTNERSHIPS

UNHCR works with governments to promote international standards and secure durable solutions for stateless people. While UNHCR has a mandate to address statelessness, it cannot resolve the issue alone. Collaboration with a broad spectrum of stakeholders across Asia and the Pacific is essential, including stateless communities, civil society organizations and regional bodies such as ESCAP, the Bali Process and ASEAN. UNHCR's approach focuses on four key areas:

Identify: We work with governments, researchers and universities to identify who is stateless and why. Reliable data provides the foundation for targeted action to resolve statelessness.

Reduce: We support government initiatives to help stateless people acquire nationality. We also partner with legal aid organizations to provide stateless people with the legal information and assistance they need to successfully apply for nationality and identity documentation.

Prevent: The best way to end statelessness is to stop it from happening. We support governments in aligning nationality and civil registration laws with international standards so that every child's birth is registered, and no child is born stateless.

Protect: We help governments recognize and protect stateless people, in line with the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and other applicable human rights instruments. We also promote the leadership of stateless people, recognizing the crucial role they play in resolving this issue and exercising their right to participate fully in all aspects of life.

INVESTING IN SOLUTIONS FOR STATELESS PEOPLE

Sustained donor support is essential to translate commitments to end statelessness into concrete, scalable results. Targeted investments enable UNHCR and partners to address the legal, technical, and practical barriers that prevent stateless people from acquiring nationality, while supporting governments to prevent new cases of statelessness. Donor contributions directly support the following priority areas:

- **Community-led solutions:** Invest in mentorship initiatives that cultivate stateless people as leaders and experts in national dialogues on resolving statelessness. Systematically engage stateless communities in the design and implementation of relevant projects to ensure they are grounded in the expertise, needs and priorities of impacted people.
- **Government capacity and reform:** Give governments the technical advice and resources they need to solve statelessness at scale through innovative measures like targeted naturalization campaigns. Help States to harmonize their national laws with international standards so they have the legal foundation to prevent new cases of statelessness going forward.
- **Legal advice and representation:** Equip stateless people with the legal information and representation they need to obtain a nationality and secure documentation of their identities – procedures which are often long, opaque and complex.
- **Regional and global learning:** Enable the exchange of good practices among States, civil society experts, and other stakeholders to accelerate progress and scale successful approaches.

SPOTLIGHT ON STATELESSNESS: ARSO'S FOOTBALL DREAM

Arso, 25, a stateless youth, volunteers as an assistant coach at a local football school, sharing his passion for the game with children while chasing his dream of playing professionally for Thailand. © UNHCR/Norapoompipat

Arso, 25, a stateless person, volunteers as an assistant coach at a football school, teaching children aged 3–14. Passionate about football since childhood, he trained on his own and competed in local tournaments to support his family. His talent and dedication led a football school founder to invite him to coach young players.

Arso dreams of becoming a professional footballer representing Thailand, but his stateless status puts that dream at risk. UNHCR is supporting Thailand in addressing statelessness for some 500,000 registered people.

Through legal assistance, community engagement, and reforms in civil registration and nationality laws, UNHCR and its partners are helping people like Arso secure legal status, apply for nationality, and build a future. Stories like his highlight the life-changing impact of having a nationality. Statelessness shouldn't stand in the way of ambition. Everyone deserves a chance to belong.

FUNDING SITUATION

Across the Asia and the Pacific region, UNHCR has been forced to reprioritize programmes due to constrained humanitarian funding. Many refugees, stateless people, and other forcibly displaced populations face reduced access to critical assistance, with women and children among the most affected.

UNHCR is deeply grateful to the following donors who have stepped forward with earmarked contributions and those providing flexible funding, enabling life-saving assistance and protection to reach those most in need. These contributions are vital to sustaining operations and supporting the most vulnerable across the region.

Austria | Australia | Belgium | Canada | China | Denmark | European Union | France | Germany | Ireland | Islamic Development Bank | Italy | Japan | Republic of Korea | Luxembourg | the Netherlands (Kingdom of) | Norway | Poland | Sweden | Switzerland | United Kingdom | United States of America | UN Central Emergency Response Fund | UN Country-based Pooled Funds | UN Joint Programmes | UN Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan

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