



02 June 2015 – The [United Nations Refugee Agency](#) (UNHCR) said yesterday that addressing the plight for 600,000 stateless people in Europe by 2024 “is doable”.

“In Europe, we take many things for granted such as access to education, health care, employment and travel, but some 600,000 people across the continent still do not enjoy these basic rights,” said Vincent Cochetel, the Director for Europe for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). “They are stateless.”

[Statelessness](#) refers to the condition of someone who is not considered as a national by any country. Someone without a nationality cannot live the same life as someone with a nationality, as they are unable to, e.g., open a bank account, board a flight or enrol in university.

“Making statelessness disappear is a realistic objective in Europe,” Mr Cochetel said, continuing “Reducing statelessness in Europe, to a large extent, is a question of political will.”

The obstacles to ending statelessness in Europe

Mr Cochetel highlights three major obstacles to resolving statelessness in Europe.

The first obstacle is “statelessness at birth among populations living in precarious conditions”, affecting mainly Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian minorities in the Balkans and Central Europe.

Moreover, a couple of countries, like the Russian Federation, are arguing that their domestic legislation provides better guarantees against statelessness than the two international instruments relating to statelessness.

To this, Mr Cochetel says: “We tell them that if their legislation is better, then it should not be a problem to accede to the two conventions.”

Finally, the third obstacle is found in the Baltic countries, where there are stateless people who want to remain stateless, so they can travel easily to the Russian Federation.

An additional risk, flagged by Mr Cochetel, is that there are “more and more non-state entities in Europe controlling territory: “although we may not look at these situations through the lens of statelessness, in the longer term they could give rise to statelessness.”

Addressing statelessness globally: UNHCR’s #IBELONG campaign

The discussion on ending stateless in Europe is part and parcel of UNHCR’s goal to end the suffering of some 10 million stateless people globally by the year 2024.

This is the core tenet of the Agency’s [#IBelong campaign](#) . It asks you to be part of the global movement to end the injustice of statelessness by

[signing the campaign’s open letter](#)

As part of the #IBelong drive, UNHCR also advises governments on how to reduce or prevent statelessness and helps them respect the human rights of these people.

UNHCR reports that non-governmental organizations, as members of the European Network on Statelessness, are a key partner in ensuring that everyone in Europe has a nationality.

More information

UNHCR was mandated in the 1970s to assist stateless people under the [1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness](#) and its role was consolidated in 1995.

The European Network on Statelessness and UNHCR officials are meeting in Budapest today and Wednesday at [a conference focusing on the need to help stateless children](#) .

You can read the full interview with Vincent Cochetel [here](#) .

Do also consult UNHCR’s [archive of documents](#) addressing statelessness.