



18.1.2017 – A baby is born stateless every 10 minutes, and over 500,000 persons remain stateless within Europe alone according to UNHCR estimates.

“Four years ago, statelessness was still largely taboo”, said Vincent Cochetel, Director for UNHCR’s office in Brussels in his opening statement at today’s conference “Addressing Statelessness in the European Union”, hosted by the European Migration Network, UNHCR, the Maltese EU presidency and the European Network on Statelessness. “Thanks to effective advocacy, this has now changed.”

Statelessness is a legal anomaly preventing a person from accessing fundamental civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Stateless persons often live in conditions of protracted marginalization and discrimination, facing numerous difficulties in their everyday lives. Medical assistance, education, acquiring property, obtaining employment or simply having a bank account or an address are some examples that many of us take for granted but remain inaccessible for a stateless person.

The United Nations refugee agency is running a global campaign, [#IBELONG](#), aimed at ending statelessness by 2024 and ending the legal limbo for the more than 10 million people worldwide who lack a nationality and the human rights protections that go with it.



Children at special risk

“The Sustainable Development Goals [contain](#) a very specific target on ending statelessness and providing legal identity for all by 2030”, UNICEF’s Senior Policy Advisor Verena Knaus told UNRIC. “Having a nationality, being registered, is a fundamental right for children, but also fundamental for peace, for access to services, for stability, for the rule of law. The children are at a special risk as legislation is faulty in many countries, and as many as 200 million children are not registered at birth. This leads to a cascade of children not having access to their rights.”

Stateless children are easily exploited, they cannot protect themselves, and their rights are not executable. In situations of displacement or conflict where children get uprooted, these risks multiply.

“We are facing a race”, Knaus emphasizes. “We are working at ending statelessness while the risk is increasing worldwide. From a European perspective, there’s homework to be done. There should not be a Member State that has not acceded to the [Statelessness Conventions](#) . We also must deliver on our commitments and make the right investments in accordance with existing conventions and the Sustainable Development Goals.”

“We need to clearly articulate the close link between statelessness and displacement, and the need to address both. Statelessness sometimes is a root cause for displacement or mobility, but mobility and displacement also causes statelessness”, Knaus states. “Addressing the problem is not very complex: first you need birth registration and civil registration in place. Let’s not forget we need to start building with the right pieces, and that building starts with the child.”