



Concept note on the side event of the IBC on Large Movement of People, Displacement and Resilience at the UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development

Thursday, 21 March 2019, 13:00-14:30

The International Conference Center Geneva (CICG), room 15

**Leaving no one behind:
Addressing statelessness and enhancing the resilience
of vulnerable groups through the Sustainable Development Goals**

Note about the event

The side-event “Leaving no one behind: Addressing statelessness and enhancing the resilience of vulnerable groups through the Sustainable Development Goals” is organized by the Issue-Based Coalition on Large Movements of People, Displacement and Resilience (IBC LMPDR)¹. It will take place on 21 March 2019 in the margins of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development that follows up on and reviews the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the UNECE region.

Leaving no one behind

Migration and displacement continue to dominate the international political agenda, particularly after the arrival of more than two million refugees and irregular migrants into Europe between 2015 and 2016. The 2030 Agenda fully recognizes migration and displacement as a core development challenge. With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 193 United Nations Member States pledged to ensure “no one will be left behind” and to “endeavour to reach the furthest behind first.”² In practice, this means taking explicit action to end extreme poverty, curb inequalities, confront discrimination and fast-track progress for the furthest behind. In the context of current migration and displacement patterns adhering to this pledge requires a new way of ‘seeing’ who is being left behind. This side event aims to explore this question by exploring how ‘stateless’ persons are not only being left behind but have become a largely forgotten part of a broader discourse on migration and the 2030 Agenda.

By adopting the 2030 Agenda, Member States have committed to leave no one behind in their implementation of the SDGs. Within countries, all people, regardless of their backgrounds, have the rights and responsibilities to fulfil their potential in life, and lead a dignified life in a healthy environment. Those often left behind include refugees, migrants, people living in poverty, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, including amongst host communities. The principle also

¹ The IBC on Large Movement of People, Displacement and Resilience serves as a platform to provide coherent UN support at the country level towards SDGs nationalization inclusive of key issues related to large displacement of refugees, migrants and resilience. The IBC is chaired by UNHCR and UNDP; other members include UNICEF, UNFPA, UNWOMEN, UNOPS, IOM and UNEP.

² “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>.

clearly applies to the millions of ‘stateless’ people who often live invisibly on the lowest rungs of society, including in terms of economic prosperity, political participation and social inclusion. Stateless people are not recognised as citizens of any country and as such often remain unseen and unheard. While statelessness can be linked to displacement, most stateless persons around the world are so-called *in situ* stateless populations, who have lived in the only country they have ever known for decades or generations without acquiring a nationality. Stateless persons are often not allowed to go to school, see a doctor, get a job, open a bank account, travel, buy a house or even get married. Denial of these rights impacts not only the individuals concerned but also society as a whole, in particular because excluding an entire sector of the population can lead to social tensions and significantly impair economic and social development. People are left behind when they lack the choices and opportunities to participate in and benefit from development progress. Stateless persons can thus be considered ‘left behind’, as they are forced to endure disadvantages or deprivations that limit their choices and opportunities relative to others in society. Addressing statelessness therefore enhances the resilience of both vulnerable groups as well as society as a whole.

A variety of circumstances can cause a person to be stateless at birth or wind up stateless later in life. Causes of statelessness include discrimination in nationality laws, conflict between and gaps in nationality laws, state succession and others. The lack of birth registration can put people at risk of statelessness as a birth certificate provides proof of where a person was born and parentage – key information needed to establish entitlement to a nationality. Risks of statelessness can also arise in situations of displacement, as refugees often lose ties with their home country over generations. When migrants or refugees lose their documents, they are unable to prove their nationality, which creates a risk of statelessness.

Addressing Statelessness through the SDGs

The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and its pledge to ‘leave no one behind’ provides for a cross-sectoral complementary framework to end statelessness. The SDGs offer an inclusive, transformative and human rights-based framework that is designed to ‘reach those furthest behind first’ and therefore represents an important organizing tool to put an end to the exclusion of displaced and marginalized populations, such as stateless people. With the necessary political will, public support and cooperation, millions of people around the world could acquire a nationality and their children would not be born into statelessness.

SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) recognizes that sustainable development can only be achieved if all persons, including those who are stateless, have access to justice and a legal identity, including birth registration. SDG Target 16.9, which commits States to achieving ‘legal identity for all, including birth registration’, puts a spotlight on the prevention and reduction of statelessness as a development issue. It requires States to remove obstacles that stateless persons and others face in acquiring legal identity documents, such as birth certificates. In 2015, the United Nations Secretary General in his Report stated that “the arbitrary deprivation of nationality of children is a significant barrier to the realization of this target [SDG 16.9], which will not be fully met unless articles 7 and 8 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child are universally respected and fulfilled and childhood statelessness has been eradicated”³.

³ Report on the impact of the arbitrary deprivation of nationality on the enjoyment of the rights of children concerned, and existing laws and practices on accessibility for children to acquire nationality, inter alia, of the country in which they are born, if they otherwise would be stateless, 2015, available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G15/286/02/PDF/G1528602.pdf?OpenElement>

In case of stateless persons in a migratory or displacement context, the realization of Target 16.9 would contribute to identifying and protecting stateless persons through their formal recognition and documentation until they are able to acquire nationality. IBC LMPDR seeks to support Governments in achieving SDG Target 16.9 in a way that maximizes inclusion of all people so that they enjoy the right to a nationality and are thereby able to pursue their full development potential.

Other SDGs that are relevant to identify and resolve existing cases of statelessness and prevent new ones from occurring, are SDG 5, 10 and 17. Target 5.1, which sets out to “end all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere”, is directly relevant to addressing the issue of gender discrimination in nationality laws, which is a major cause of statelessness globally. Target 10.3 commits States to “ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard”. Instances of denial, loss and deprivation of nationality on discriminatory grounds leading to statelessness continue to occur across the world. The Target is also important to ensuring that stateless persons enjoy their human rights without discrimination due to their lack of citizenship. Finally, Target 17.18 provides an opportunity to advocate for the improvement of statistical data on stateless populations in developing countries, as stateless people are frequently ignored by authorities and may remain uncounted in national administrative registries, databases and population censuses. Improved statistical data on stateless populations allows for better assessment of the scale of the situation and profile of the affected population.

Many of the other SDGs and related Targets are pertinent to improving the living conditions and protection of stateless persons. For example, Target 4.1 commits States to “ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.” Stateless children face significant challenges with respect to accessing education and receiving certifications of school completion. Goals like SDG 4 are important to protecting stateless persons and ensuring that they, like others, have access to basic rights.

The #IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness by 2024

In light of the increasing global recognition of the need to put an end to statelessness, the #IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness by 2024 was launched by UNHCR in 2014. The framework to achieve the objectives of the #IBelong Campaign is set out in a Global Action Plan, which establishes 10 practical Actions to be undertaken by States with the assistance of UNHCR and other stakeholders, many of which relate to the right to a nationality, identity and birth registration and therefore, to Target 16.9. Since 2017, the UNHCR-UNICEF Coalition on Every Child’s Right to a Nationality has expanded and strengthened international cooperation to raise awareness about and combat the hidden problem of childhood statelessness.

A global High-Level Segment on Statelessness will be convened on 7 October 2019 to mark the midpoint of this 10-year Campaign and to review the achievements to-date and what remains to be done to end statelessness by 2024. Faster and more resolute action is required, under the overall framework of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, for an inclusive development that ‘leaves no one behind’ to reach the goal of zero statelessness – bridging urgent, life-saving response with recovery and development needs, and strengthening communities’ resilience and longer-term prospects.

Objectives of the side-event

The objectives of this side event are to sensitize key stakeholders to the phenomenon of statelessness in the context of the 2030 Agenda and finding new ways of responding and collaborating to achieve progress on statelessness through inputs and advice from European and Central Asian UNECE Member

States. The side-event will also raise awareness on the #IBelong Campaign and the High-Level Segment on Statelessness that will be convened on 7 October 2019.

Moderator:

Melanie Khanna, *Head of the Statelessness Section, UNHCR*

Speakers

George Bouma, *Team Leader, Sustainable Development, UNDP*

Joshua Castellino, *Executive Director of the Minority Rights Group International*

Katarzyna Gardapkhadze, *Deputy Director, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights*

Mukhabat Pratova, *Director of the Department for Registration of Population and Civil Acts, State Registration Service, Government of the Kyrgyz Republic*