



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
High Commissioner on National Minorities

address by
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to the
Global Alliance to End Statelessness
Knowledge Webinar Series: Solutions to End Childhood Statelessness

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Excellencies,
Distinguished colleagues,

My name is Christophe Kamp and I am the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities.

I am pleased to address you today as part of the Global Alliance's Knowledge Webinar Series on *Ending Childhood Statelessness*, and to share insights from the OSCE's work towards preventing and addressing statelessness.

I would like to start by telling you why, from the perspective of my mandate, addressing and preventing statelessness is important.

My mandate is, in essence, to act as an instrument of conflict prevention at the earliest possible stage. This involves containing and de-escalating tensions involving national minority issues within the OSCE area. In carrying out this mandate, I work primarily through quiet diplomacy – engaging confidentially with OSCE participating States, conducting impartial analysis, providing early warning, and offering practical, expert advice. I review legislation and policies, and, where necessary, propose recommendations to ensure that they promote inclusion, equality and stability in multi-ethnic societies. This approach of dialogue, trust-building and impartiality is central to the work of the HCNM.

For more than 30 years, successive High Commissioners have worked to identify early signs of tensions involving national minorities and develop proactive conflict prevention measures to address factors that may create or exacerbate tensions in diverse societies. Statelessness, especially when it affects people in communities already facing disadvantages or discrimination, can become such a factor. The grievances of persons belonging to national minorities are often linked to unfulfilled rights. Rights which are only accessible to those with a nationality. Rights that stateless people simply do not have access to due to their legal invisibility.

Within the scope of my mandate, I focus on statelessness where it affects persons belonging to national minorities, many of whom are long-established or *in situ* populations. National minorities, including but not limited to Roma and Sinti, have deep historical roots in the countries where they reside, yet may continue to face barriers to nationality and documentation.

Addressing their situation is important to promoting inclusion and stability in multi-ethnic societies.

The right to nationality is what political theorist Hannah Arendt famously called “the right to have rights.” Without citizenship, individuals cannot realize their full potential as members of society, as their access to the most *basic* rights – such as education, health care and employment – is likely to be limited.

Statelessness can lead those affected to question their sense of belonging in society. Feelings of disenfranchisement stemming from the lack of access to nationality can give rise to grievances and resentment, potentially exacerbating already existing tensions in society. In this sense, statelessness is a matter of social cohesion, stability and good governance. When people are unable to participate meaningfully in the life of the State, the conditions for mistrust and marginalization may take hold. This can also create fertile ground for external actors to exploit existing grievances and instrumentalize domestic situations, further fuelling tensions in society.

This affects not only the individuals concerned but also their families and society as a whole. Excluding an entire sector of the population may significantly impair efforts to promote social and economic development, create or exacerbate tensions in society, and even fuel conflict.

Childhood statelessness, in particular, carries long-term consequences. When a child is born without nationality, they begin life excluded from the full protection of the State and may face barriers to accessing education, health care and identity documentation. This exclusion can follow them into adulthood, perpetuating cycles of marginalization and inequality. Preventing statelessness from the very start of life is therefore one of the most effective ways to promote inclusion, strengthen social cohesion, and ensure equal opportunities for future generations.

It is from this perspective that my institution has been working on this topic, highlighting that it is in the *interest of States* to prevent and address statelessness for two main reasons. First, access to citizenship is a precondition to facilitate a sense of belonging in a society. Second, access to the rights that come with citizenship enables members of society *to contribute* socially and economically to the state they live in.

Over the years, my institution has seen in practice that much of the work involved in addressing and preventing statelessness is about awareness-raising and the exchange of knowledge. In many cases, authorities may not be fully aware that statelessness exists within their territories, or why addressing it may be in their national interest. By preventing statelessness, States create the conditions for meaningful contribution to the economic, social and cultural life of the country. This, in turn, helps strengthen integration, trust and a shared sense of belonging.

I am pleased that my institution is part of the Global Alliance to End Statelessness. This platform provides an important opportunity for dialogue and mutual learning – to share experiences from the OSCE region and to draw lessons from other parts of the world. Both perspectives are valuable: understanding what works, and what happens when statelessness is left unaddressed.

At the regional level, my office works closely with the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Together, we have raised awareness, engaged decision-makers and provided opportunities for exchange towards preventing and addressing statelessness. Our joint efforts have focused on facilitating dialogue, fostering exchanges and providing access to knowledge in a non-politicized way. Over the years, these initiatives – such as study visits, regional conferences, online webinars and joint publications – have helped OSCE participating States share experiences, learn from one another and take action. I am pleased to see that, through our collaborative efforts, progress has been achieved in the OSCE region.

Essential to these efforts is the need to include the voices of those affected by statelessness. To those who have never encountered it, statelessness might seem like an abstract phenomenon or a technical matter – but it has real and lasting consequences for children, families, communities, and even societies as a whole. My institution has seen that putting stateless people at the centre of discussions helps policymakers understand not only the human impact but also the practical steps that can be taken to resolve the issue.

In July this year, I was pleased to launch, together with our close partners ODIHR and UNHCR, our joint publication “Opening Doors for Children: Prevention of Childhood Statelessness – Good Practices in the OSCE Area.” This publication highlights concrete measures that OSCE

participating States have taken to prevent childhood statelessness – examples that can inspire further progress.

Let me share a few of these good practices with you.

In Albania, the Government amended the Law on Citizenship in 2020 to include legal safeguards in the nationality law ensuring that children born or found on the territory who would otherwise be stateless acquire Albanian citizenship. This provision has an automatic impact once it is proven, upon registering a birth, that the child was born on the territory and “may remain stateless”. The law does not require proof that the child cannot obtain another nationality, nor that the parents are stateless.

In North Macedonia, the authorities undertook significant efforts, in collaboration with international organizations, to facilitate birth registration among marginalized groups. In 2021, following civil society advocacy and litigation, the Parliament adopted amendments to the Law on Citizenship. For the first time, the Law on Citizenship addressed stateless people as part of the regular civil registration and citizenship system. In 2023, the Law on Civil Registry was amended and simplified administrative procedures were introduced to enable access to birth registration, including for children whose parents lack documentation. In July of this year, following targeted reforms and awareness-raising campaigns, North Macedonia became the first country in the region to resolve all known cases of statelessness resulting from the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia.

In Lithuania, amendments to the Law on Citizenship adopted in 2020 introduced important safeguards to prevent childhood statelessness. The changes ensure that children born on the territory who would otherwise be stateless automatically acquire Lithuanian citizenship at birth. The amendments also simplified procedures by removing several previous requirements – such as demonstrating language proficiency, knowledge of the Constitution or proof of income – making it easier for children born without nationality to access citizenship.

In Central Asia, most stateless people were citizens of the former Soviet Union, or are their descendants, who have not yet acquired or confirmed citizenship of the independent States. From 2014 to 2024, Central Asian countries resolved 220,550 cases of statelessness, with roughly 33,000 cases outstanding.

In Kazakhstan, recent reforms have improved access to universal birth registration by simplifying procedures and expanding mobile registration units to reach remote areas. Amendments to the Code on Marriage and Family in 2019 ensure that every child's birth is recorded and that children can obtain documentation vital for acquiring nationality. If a child is born in Kazakhstan to parents who are stateless, birth registration allows the child to acquire citizenship of Kazakhstan automatically, thereby preventing the risk of statelessness.

In 2019, Kyrgyzstan became the first country in the world to resolve all known cases of statelessness on its territory. From 2014 to 2019, collaborative efforts by the Kyrgyzstan Government, UNHCR, Ferghana Valley Lawyers Without Borders and others resulted in the reduction of the number of stateless people from 13,700 to zero, including approximately 2,000 children. This achievement was made possible through co-ordinated national efforts, extensive outreach, and a focus on identifying and registering stateless persons. Furthermore, the citizenship law, last amended in 2023, contains several safeguards that prevent childhood statelessness. The law provides that a child who has at least one parent who is a citizen of Kyrgyzstan acquires citizenship automatically at birth, regardless of whether the child is born in Kyrgyzstan or elsewhere.

In 2024, Turkmenistan became the second country in the world to resolve all known cases of statelessness after granting citizenship to the remaining 1,146 stateless people on its territory.

These examples demonstrate that through practical, targeted measures – from legislative reform to accessible registration – progress is possible, and this can bring a transformative effect on people's lives.

While these achievements are encouraging, statelessness remains an issue and much remains to be done. Preventing statelessness requires constant vigilance, particularly to ensure that no new cases arise. Continued co-operation, awareness and information-sharing are essential to maintain the positive momentum we have built in the OSCE region.

Distinguished colleagues,

The prevention and reduction of statelessness is an investment in cohesive, stable and resilient societies. When children have access to citizenship and all the rights and opportunities that come with it, we strengthen their ability to participate effectively as members of society.

I would like to conclude by emphasizing that while States have the primary responsibility to prevent and address statelessness on their territories, my objective is to provide supportive, practical and collaborative input to participating States, as part of a broader effort to strengthen inclusive, cohesive societies. Preventing childhood statelessness is an important part of this effort – and one where there remains real potential for progress.

I look forward to continuing my institution's work on this topic within the OSCE, and in close co-operation with the Global Alliance to End Statelessness. I look forward to hearing the outcomes of your discussions today.

Thank you very much for your attention.