



OSCE-UNHCR Regional Conference on Access to Civil Documentation and Prevention of Statelessness in South-Eastern Europe

Skopje, North Macedonia, 17 October 2023

Final Outcome Document



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Introduction

On 17 October 2023, the **OSCE-UNHCR Regional Conference on Access to Civil Documentation and Prevention of Statelessness in South-Eastern Europe** took place in Skopje, North Macedonia. The Conference was co-organized by UNHCR, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), and the OSCE Mission to Skopje (OMSk), under the auspices of the 2023 OSCE Chairpersonship of North Macedonia.

The high-level event brought together more than 100 participants, with 6 country delegations composed of government officials and civil society representatives from **Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia**. Likewise, representatives of international and regional organizations participated in the Conference, including OSCE Executive Structures and the 2023 Chairpersonship, the UN Resident Coordinators of Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia, a formerly stateless person, as well as representatives of the European Union, Council of Europe, and the European Network on Statelessness. The Conference was opened by OSCE Chairman-in-Office and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of North Macedonia, Bujar Osmani, and keynote speeches were delivered by UNHCR Assistant High Commissioner for Protection, Gillian Triggs, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Kairat Abdrakhmanov, ODIHR Director Matteo Mecacci, and Valentin Rakip, an activist and former stateless person from North Macedonia.

In South-Eastern Europe, UNHCR's [#IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness](#) (2014-2024) has contributed to remarkable progress in addressing issues around statelessness. The Conference was organized to offer the six participating countries an opportunity to take stock of progress made, outline remaining challenges, identify practical solutions and suggest concrete steps to be taken by governments with the support of other key actors including civil society as well as regional and international organizations, in efforts to end statelessness by 2024 in the region. Twelve years after the adoption of the [2011 Zagreb Declaration](#) on the provision of civil status documentation and registration in South-Eastern Europe, the event offered a platform to develop specific regional and bilateral approaches for more strategic engagement in addressing remaining challenges regarding access to civil documentation and statelessness in the region.

The six country delegations presented key actions and achievements since 2019, challenges and lessons learned as well as priorities and opportunities until the end of the #IBelong Campaign in 2024.

Key outcomes

Pledges

At the Conference, **two pledges** were made:

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia agreed to jointly submit the following pledge in the context of the 2023 Global Refugee Forum¹:

“Reaffirming the goals of the #IBelong Campaign, the participating States of the OSCE-UNHCR Regional Conference on Access to Civil Documentation and Prevention of Statelessness in South-Eastern Europe in Skopje, North Macedonia, commit to make all necessary efforts, independently and collectively, to resolve, without delay, all known cases of statelessness within their territories, including by granting citizenship to or confirming the citizenship of existing in situ stateless populations when relevant legally required conditions, as set out by the Statelessness Conventions, are met, and undertake the law reforms, that may be needed, to ensure that no child is born stateless.”

The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities announced the following pledge:

“HCNM and ODIHR pledge to build capacity and exchange good practices on addressing statelessness in OSCE participating States over the next five years by, inter alia, organizing one annual joint activity on addressing statelessness together with UNHCR.”

Agreed actions

The States participating in the Conference agreed on the following 14 key actions:²

On access to and confirmation of civil documentation (including by Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities)

¹ UNHCR Global Compact on Refugees, Pledges and Contributions, available at: <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/pledges-contributions>.

² The causes and number of cases of statelessness vary from country to country, and accordingly each country will implement actions depending on its assessment of the activities that need to be implemented to address statelessness in that country.

1. Facilitate access to civil registration and documentation, for example through removing documentation and lawful stay requirements, waiver of fees, and provision of facilitated and late birth registration.
2. Undertake information campaigns to increase awareness among parents, families, and communities about the importance of civil registration. Field visits should follow campaigns to explain the information in person, verifying that the information was passed through and correctly understood.
3. Raise awareness and build capacity on the right to nationality and the risks of statelessness among civil registry staff, registry offices, medical staff, police officers, social workers, local authorities, NGOs, and others working with affected populations.
4. Promote civil registration among marginalized groups, such as Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities.

On the prevention of childhood statelessness

5. Organize information provision to parents about the nationality rights of children and relevant procedures for the acquisition of nationality for stateless children.
6. Consider removing conditions linked to parents' legal or documentation status for the acquisition of nationality by a child; if otherwise, the child would be stateless.
7. Ensure that children otherwise born stateless acquire the nationality of the country of birth, either automatically or through an application procedure in line with the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.
8. Strengthen the identification of statelessness in asylum and other administrative procedures including through capacity building of relevant government officials.

On joint efforts to end statelessness through cooperation in the region, partnerships, and information-sharing

9. Strengthen cross-border cooperation, bilaterally or regionally, to help people who require documentation to obtain civil registration documents to regularize their stay and confirm or acquire nationality, including by building on existing good practices.
10. Provide proactive support to stateless persons, including through legal, administrative, psychosocial, health, and other services in regularizing their status, as well as in addressing the effects of protracted and intergenerational statelessness.
11. Continue working with UNHCR, OSCE, and civil society organizations on the prevention and reduction of statelessness and the protection of stateless persons.
12. Strengthen cooperation and consultation with representatives from stateless communities, in particular members of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities, to better understand the obstacles they face in accessing civil registration and nationality and use the outcomes of these consultations to develop tailored solutions to resolving statelessness amongst these communities.

13. Revive the regional network of legal aid NGOs (WeBLAN), focusing on access to information, legal aid counseling, and assistance.
14. Exchange good practices among countries, including through the organization of online or in-person meetings and study visits between compatible state institutions and NGOs providing legal aid to persons lacking civil documentation.