



European
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WHY CITIZENSHIP IS RELEVANT TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

SDG16 – Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

People without access to any citizenship often have little opportunity to inform and influence the policies which affect them.

Gaps in citizenship and birth registration law, policy and practice mean that children may be born stateless or at risk of statelessness and grow up and become adults without any citizenship.

In some countries, women are still unable to transmit citizenship to their children on the same basis as men, or to register the births of their children themselves.¹ In others, ethnic minorities face difficulties in obtaining recognition of citizenship, whether in law or practice.

People with an irregular migration status may struggle to register the births of their children, creating future difficulties for those children in obtaining recognition of citizenship of the parents' countries or of the State of birth.

Statelessness creates disadvantages for children and adults in accessing school, healthcare and other rights. Where a large number of people living in a country are stateless, peace and security may even be threatened.

SDG target 16.9, *“By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration”*, supports existing commitments in the almost-universally ratified Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and in other international human rights treaties for universal birth registration. States parties to the CRC are also bound to ensure that every child has the right to acquire a nationality.

Programmes to provide ‘legal identity’ to adults should include measures to resolve the status of stateless people and people of undetermined citizenship and to respect the right of everyone to recognition as a person before the law.

WHAT TO CONSIDER:

- (a) Are those affected by statelessness and civil registration difficulties able to participate in and inform policy debates and decision-making processes? Are they consulted in SDG implementation?²
- (b) Are all children registered immediately upon birth and provided with birth certificates, regardless of the status of their parents or which parent is registering the birth?³
- (c) Do birth registration requirements create barriers (for example, documentation requirements, mandatory reporting of irregular migrants to authorities, fees or difficult procedures for late registration)?
- (d) Are minimum protections against statelessness provided for in law for children of unknown parents and children born in the territory who cannot acquire the citizenship of one of their parents?

¹ UNHCR, *Background Note on Gender Equality, Nationality Laws and Statelessness*, 2019, available at <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5c8120847.pdf>.

² Relevant Indicators 16.7.1, 16.7.2; note also UNDP guidelines to support country reporting

³ Relevant Indicator 16.9.1



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- (e) Does gender discrimination affect access to citizenship? For example, can women confer their citizenship on their children and husbands? Does discrimination based on birth in or out of wedlock prevent some children from acquiring citizenship?

EXAMPLE OF GOOD PRACTICE:

All children born in Bosnia and Herzegovina are entitled to birth registration, but documentation requirements, lack of awareness of procedures and discrimination have created barriers for Roma families. Consequently, many Roma were unable to demonstrate their entitlement to citizenship and were at risk of statelessness.

To address this, the Government, UNHCR and civil society, including Roma NGOs and community members identified Roma without documentation, raised awareness of the importance of birth registration and provided legal advice and information. A law change in 2012 allowed parents without documents to register a birth using witness statements and waived administrative fees for minorities and vulnerable individuals. As of June 2017, 53 Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina were known to have undetermined citizenship⁴.

LINKS TO OTHER SDGS:

Access to birth registration, civil registration and citizenship can increase access to all levels of education (**SDG 4**), safe, legal and decent work (**SDG 8**) and healthcare (**SDG 3**), including for women and girls (**SDG 5**). In turn, this can reduce the proportion of people without citizenship living in poverty (**SDG 1**). Alleviating gender discriminatory law, policy and practice related to citizenship and civil registration is key to gender equality (**SDG 5**).

⁴ <https://www.unhcr.org/ke/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/11/Good-Practices-Paper-on-Ensuring-Birth-Registration-for-the-Prevention-of-Statelessness.pdf>