

PRESS RELEASE

Over 20,000 Europeans call on EU member states to review their nationality laws to close the gaps which leave children without a nationality

22 November - Strasbourg

Today the European Network on Statelessness (ENS) which represents over fifty civil society organisations from across Europe will hand over a petition to members of the European Parliament and the Council of Europe calling on European leaders to work to end childhood statelessness.

The petition which received over 21,000 signatures highlights the need to protect thousands of children in Europe from the scourge of statelessness, and is a part of a wider campaign bringing together a broad spectrum of actors mounting pressure on European countries to reform their nationality laws which prevent children from acquiring a nationality. This campaign will see national level events in Italy, Poland, Slovenia, France, UK, Albania, Macedonia and Serbia among other countries.

Childhood statelessness remains an issue across Europe, and thousands of children are left without a nationality due to legal loopholes and states' failure to properly apply relevant safeguards. Fewer than half of all European countries have fully incorporated necessary safeguards into domestic laws to fulfil their international obligation to protect the right of every child to acquire a nationality.

Chris Nash, Director of the European Network on Statelessness said,

"This petition and the work done across Europe as part of our #StatelessKids campaign shows that there is real appetite to end statelessness and the suffering that this causes to children and parents alike. No child chooses to be stateless, yet statelessness continues to exist because European states are failing to ensure that all children born within Europe's borders or to European parents acquire a nationality. The good news is that statelessness is a solvable issue so by working together, civil society actors and governments can put a stop to it once and for all"

Research carried out by ENS revealed that often children born to parents without a nationality are inheriting their statelessness. Abandoned and orphaned children where the parents' nationality is not known can also be at risk, as can children who go through international adoption arrangements and those who have arrived in Europe as refugees.

Stateless children often have limited access to healthcare, education and will experience a lifetime of restrictions when they progress towards adulthood.

Jean Lambert, Green MEP from the UK said:

"No child deserves to suffer the discrimination and hardships which are the inevitable consequence of being unable to acquire a nationality, and the EU has an obligation to do all it can to assist Member States in putting an end to childhood statelessness."

"Given the majority of stateless children in the EU today were born in Europe, it is in Member States' reach to solve this challenge. We need to continue working at all levels to ensure that best practice becomes standard practice in every single Member State, and I will continue to work with colleagues from across the Parliament to do this."

Anna Maria Corazza Bildt, Swedish center-right MEP and Co-Chair of the European Parliament Intergroup on Children's Rights, said:

"We, as intergroup on children ' rights, continue to support ENS and cooperate to end child stateless in Europe. The right to a nationality is a human right no child should be deprived of! We reiterate our call on Member states to speed up procedures and make the necessary reforms to ensure that no child remains stateless in Europe in compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child"

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MEDIA CONTACT

For media enquiries please call ENS Head of Communications Jan Brulc on +44 7522 525673 or email jan.brulc@statelessness.eu. A number of speakers at the event will be available for broadcast interviews.

NOTES TO EDITORS:

- The European Network on Statelessness (ENS) is a network of non-governmental organisations, academic initiatives, and individual experts committed to address statelessness in Europe. Based in London, ENS is a coordinating body and expert resource for organisations across Europe who work with or come into contact with stateless persons. It currently has over 100 members in 39 European countries.
- “Working together to end childhood statelessness in Europe” event hosted by Jean Lambert MEP will take place at the Members salon, European Parliament in Strasbourg (22 November from 5pm). The programme will include address by the Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner Nils Muižnieks. <http://www.statelessness.eu/news-events/news/event-working-together-end-childhood-statelessness-europe-22-nov-strasbourg>
- A stateless person is someone who has no nationality. The UN Refugee Agency has estimated that there are over 10 million stateless persons worldwide. Some 600,000 live in Europe. Yet statelessness remains a relatively hidden and little understood issue. With both government and civil society organisations often unaware of the problem, many stateless persons find themselves stuck in the margins of society without respect for their basic human rights. As part of efforts to tackle this, UNHCR recently launched its [#iBelong](#) initiative seeking the global eradication of statelessness within a decade.
- To find out more about the issue you can read the recent ENS research publication “No child should be Stateless” <http://www.statelessness.eu/resources/no-child-should-be-stateless> You can also read more about the issue on the [#StatelessKids](#) campaign website www.statelesskids.eu
- The petition calling on European states to end childhood statelessness is available online <https://you.wemove.eu/campaigns/end-childhood-statelessness-in-europe> It urges all European states to:
 - Accede to the UN 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness;
 - Address gaps in their laws and practice in order to implement comprehensive safeguards to identify and grant nationality to children born on their territory who would otherwise be stateless, as soon as possible after birth;
 - Ensure access to free and universal birth registration in order to prevent statelessness.