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#I (Still Don't) Belong

A Case Study on Kyrgyzstan: The Sole State to Complete the UN Global Action
Plan to End Statelessness (2014 - 2024)

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Abstract

Citizens form the body of a country, fulfilling duties and responsibilities, while the state, in turn, protects them and grants them access to rights. Statelessness occurs when an individual does not have the citizenship of any country, and is therefore deprived of exercising their fundamental human rights. Due to the invisibility of stateless persons in government registration and data collection, the exact number of affected individuals is unknown; however, estimates range from four to ten million people worldwide. The United Nations' Global Action Plan to End Statelessness (GAP) and the #IBelong campaign were launched in 2014 with the hope of eradicating all known cases of statelessness worldwide by 2024. While the plan has not reached its goal of net zero cases, it has raised awareness and increased efforts amongst various actors to address the issue.

In 2019, Kyrgyzstan became the only state in the world to reduce all known cases of statelessness within its borders to zero. However, in 2020, new cases emerged within the state and persist to this day. This paper examines the reasons behind Kyrgyzstan's initial success, identifies the most effective strategies for ending statelessness, and demonstrates their applicability to other countries facing the same issues. It finds that political will, NGO involvement, and regional organizations have played a critical role in addressing statelessness in Kyrgyzstan. Additionally, the research offers recommendations for the UNHCR as it prepares to launch the forthcoming Global Alliance on Statelessness at the end of 2024, which will replace the Global Action Plan. The thesis concludes by recognizing that statelessness is a unique issue that can only be resolved through collaboration between the UNHCR, states, civil society members, NGOs, and stateless persons themselves. Together, these actors must work to identify, prevent, reduce, and protect stateless individuals worldwide until they finally receive citizenship and can confidently say #IBelong.

Table of Abbreviations

CANS	Central Asian Network on Statelessness
ENS	European Network on Statelessness
GAP	Global Action Plan
ISI	Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion
NAP	National Action Plan
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Understanding Statelessness and its Implications

One of the earliest, widely known cases of statelessness was that of Viktor Navorski, portrayed by Tom Hanks in the 2004 blockbuster film *The Terminal*. Navorski, a middle-aged man with a heavy Eastern European accent, is a citizen of the Republic of Krakozhia (depicted with elements suggestive of the USSR, such as references to the KGB and Cyrillic writing). During his flight to the United States, his country ceased to exist, making him “a citizen of nowhere,” trapped in the airport terminal for months. As Navorski was not afraid to return to the place he called home, the US Department of Homeland Security did not qualify him for asylum, refugee status, temporary protective status, or humanitarian parole; they simply did not know what to do with him. While Tom Hanks portrays a fictional character, his situation reflects the reality faced by thousands of citizens of the USSR following the dissolution of the country in 1991. Although not quite as immediately dramatic as being stranded in an airport terminal, the effects of statelessness on these individuals and others in similar situations are profound.

Millions of people around the globe do not have any nationality, with data estimating approximately 10 million stateless persons found worldwide.¹ A stateless person is defined as an individual who is “not considered as a national by any state under the operation of its law.”² Statelessness occurs for a variety of reasons, including state succession (such as in the case of Navorski and the USSR), disputes over borders or sovereignty, lack of documents or birth registration, discrimination due to gender, ethnicity, or religious beliefs, and conflicting nationality laws.³ The majority of stateless persons have lived this way since birth, as statelessness status can be passed on through generations unknowingly due to gaps in realization of its importance.⁴ This phenomenon is known as inherited statelessness; tens of thousands of children are born without access to citizenship each year.⁵ Most stateless individuals have never traveled through state borders, always residing in their “own country.” This is referred to as *in situ* statelessness, cases where someone had long-term residence or was born in a country in which they do not have citizenship.⁶

¹ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), “Global Action Plan to End Statelessness,” 2.

² “Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons,” September 28, 1954, 136.

³ UNHCR, Global Action Plan, 8.

⁴ UNHCR, Global Action Plan, 15.

⁵ Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion, “Statelessness in Numbers,” 3.

⁶ UNHCR, “Handbook on Protection of Stateless Persons,” 3.

When stateless individuals are poor, uneducated, refugees, live in hard-to-access areas, do not speak the language of the country they reside in, or have no access to support, their capacity to challenge the discrimination they face with being stateless and the negative consequences of their legal status becomes limited.⁷ This combination of factors is problematic as stateless individuals are denied basic human rights over multiple dimensions. Regarding social, economic, and cultural rights, stateless persons often lack access to healthcare, employment, or education.⁸ They commonly encounter limits on property ownership and contract agreements, experience restrictions on freedom of movement, face challenges with getting married, and are at a higher risk for human trafficking, exploitation, and gender or sexual-based violence.⁹ Civil and political ramifications include the inability of stateless individuals to engage in political processes such as voting, their lack of access to identity documents, and their heightened vulnerability to arrest and arbitrary detention.¹⁰

1.2 The Issue of State Sovereignty and International Agreements

Statelessness and nationality are defined in both national and international law. In an international context, citizenship is defined as “denoting full membership in a state or as the sum of legal rights and duties of individuals attached to nationality under domestic law.”¹¹ Presently, it is widely accepted that the granting, deprivation, and transfer of citizenship are within the jurisdiction of states. This means that the definition of citizenship at the national level varies from country to country.

The main debate between states and international bodies such as the United Nations lies in state sovereignty; this does not change when addressing the issue of statelessness. In accordance with global standards, states have considerable flexibility in granting or revoking citizenship; however, it is important to note that countries are not completely unrestricted in their decisions regarding citizenship laws.¹² Throughout the 20th century, regulations on citizenship gradually evolved to prioritize human rights over assertions of state sovereignty.¹³ This led to the creation of international laws on citizenship

⁷ UNHCR, “‘This Is Our Home’ Stateless Minorities and Their Search for Citizenship.”

⁸ UNHCR, Global Action Plan, 9. For refugees, the country to which they have citizenship is incredibly important as it is examined when applications are processed, to see against which state they have a well-founded fear of persecution.

⁹ OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, UNHCR, and OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, “Handbook on Statelessness in the OSCE Area- International Standards and Good Practices,” 74.

¹⁰ UNHCR, “High-Level Segment on Statelessness: Results and Highlights,” 1.

¹¹ Mantu, *Contingent Citizenship*, 2.

¹² UNHCR, “Handbook on Protection of Stateless Persons,” 22.

¹³ UNHCR, “Small Changes - Big Gains: An Action Plan to Prevent and Reduce Statelessness in the Kyrgyz Republic,” 21.

issues, such as the 1930 Hague Convention on Certain Questions Relating to the Conflict of Laws, adopted by the League of Nations, which states in its first article: “It is for each State to determine under its own law who are its nationals. This law shall be recognized by other States in so far as it is consistent with international conventions, international custom, and the principles of law generally recognized with regard to nationality.”¹⁴ The convention was one of the first attempts to bring nationality into the framework of international law, with the aim of ensuring that everyone has citizenship.¹⁵ It emphasized that while countries have the right to determine citizenship laws for their state, there are certain parameters they must abide by. Additional agreements that may limit a state’s sovereignty include specific treaties states are a party to, such as the UN’s 1954 and 1961 Conventions on Statelessness, or customary international law that mentions citizenship or statelessness.

1.3 The 1954 and 1961 Conventions on Statelessness

In the 1954 and 1961 Conventions on Statelessness, the UN carefully treads the line between protecting stateless persons and protecting state interests.¹⁶ This makes creating international, legally binding standards or regulations surrounding the issue of citizenship more difficult, demonstrates why there are no effective enforcement mechanisms for this issue, and illustrates why international standards cannot always protect against statelessness. Instead, the protection is expected to be provided by the country where the stateless individual resides.¹⁷

Initially, stateless persons and refugees were to be addressed within a single legal framework. However, the issue of refugee protection was prioritized and drafted separately in the 1951 Refugee Convention, as the working committee believed it required urgent attention. The problem of statelessness was excluded from this draft, with the committee proposing that it be addressed in a separate protocol.¹⁸ These decisions led to the creation of the first *Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons* in 1954, followed by the adoption of the second *Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness* in 1961.¹⁹ These conventions assist the international community in finding solutions to

¹⁴ “Convention on Certain Questions Relating to the Conflict of Nationality Laws,” April 12, 1930.

¹⁵ UNHCR, “Statelessness and Citizenship,” 7.

¹⁶ Mantu, *Contingent Citizenship*, 9.

¹⁷ Mantu, *Contingent Citizenship*, 6, 10.

¹⁸ Jadali, “The Prominence of Statelessness in the Work of United Nations: From Framing International Regime to Mandating Special Agency,” 150.

¹⁹ Mantu, *Contingent Citizenship*, 17. Critics believed that the omission of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 15 on the right to a nationality in both of the conventions demonstrates a lack of commitment to the eradication of statelessness by the UN.

the identification, protection, and granting of legal identity to stateless individuals and in determining the causes of statelessness.²⁰

The 1954 Convention is known as the “cornerstone of the international protection regime for stateless people.”²¹ It urges states to grant stateless persons social, civil, cultural, and economic rights through legal status and residence and guarantees a basic level of care for stateless individuals.²² Notably, the 1954 Convention was created to address statelessness cases not created by the state in which they reside.²³ The convention divides these rights into various categories in Articles 12-32: juridical status, gainful employment, welfare, and administrative measures. It also provides a universal definition of statelessness and provides states with a foundation on how to treat stateless persons.²⁴ The definition of a stateless person according to the 1954 Convention is commonly referred to as *de jure* statelessness.²⁵ *De facto* statelessness, not formally defined in these treaties, refers to individuals who possess citizenship of a state but cannot fully access their rights as citizens. These persons do not reside in their country of citizenship and are unable or unwilling (due to just reasons) to benefit from the protection of that country.²⁶ Only *de jure* stateless persons are protected by the conventions.

While the 1954 Convention primarily emphasized the protection of stateless individuals, the 1961 Convention focused on the identification, prevention, and reduction of statelessness.²⁷ The first four articles of the 1961 Convention aimed to prevent childhood statelessness, followed by articles 5-7, which address measures to prevent statelessness resulting from the loss or renunciation of citizenship. The next two articles outline limited circumstances in which states may impose deprivation of nationality. The final article of the 1961 Convention deals with statelessness arising from the exchange of territory between countries.²⁸

²⁰ UNHCR, “High-Level Segment,” 5.

²¹ UNHCR, Global Action Plan, 11.

²² Mantu, *Contingent Citizenship*, 19, 37; UNHCR, “Universal Periodic Review,” 5.

²³ Mantu, *Contingent Citizenship*, 25.

²⁴ UNHCR, “Handbook on Protection of Stateless Persons,” 1.

²⁵ UNHCR, “Handbook on Protection of Stateless Persons,” 5.

²⁶ OSCE and UNHCR, “Handbook on Statelessness,” 13.

²⁷ UNHCR, “Conclusion on Identification, Prevention and Reduction of Statelessness and Protection of Stateless Persons.”

²⁸ “Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness,” August 30, 1961; OSCE and UNHCR, “Handbook on Statelessness,” 31.

1.4 Additional International Treaties Addressing Statelessness

The creation of international human rights law means that "the manner in which states treat their citizens within their state borders is no longer an issue excluded from the scrutiny of the international community."²⁹ The two Conventions on Statelessness are not the only international agreements striving to create global standards concerning this issue. Beginning in the 20th century, international laws regarding nationality were created to reduce statelessness, which was viewed as a potential problem for the international community and could cause disruptions to peace.³⁰ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) Article 15 specifically addresses citizenship in two points: "Everyone has the right to a nationality," and "No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality."³¹ The UDHR is considered customary international law, obliging all states to align any changes in their national legislation to this document.³² This underscores the obligation for each state, regardless of whether they are parties to the conventions, to view citizenship as a basic human right.

The conventions and the UDHR are also complemented by the provisions of international human rights treaties that guarantee everyone's enjoyment of basic human rights, regardless of nationality or lack thereof. Such international treaties that include articles on rights to a nationality or prevention, identification, or protection of stateless individuals include:³³

1. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
2. The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
3. The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
4. The Convention on the Rights of the Child
5. The Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families
6. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities³⁴

²⁹ Mantu, *Contingent Citizenship*, 13.

³⁰ Mantu, *Contingent Citizenship*, 38.

³¹ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art.15.

³² Mantu, *Contingent Citizenship*, 15.

³³ Avenir Analytics, "Evaluation of UNHCR Led Initiatives to End Statelessness," 8; OSCE and UNHCR, "Handbook on Statelessness," 30-32.

³⁴ See Appendix A, "Minimum International Standards on Nationality."

1.5 The UNHCR's Role in Addressing Statelessness and The Global Action Plan

The United Nations has been a prominent leader in the fight to end statelessness worldwide. UN General Assembly Resolution 50/152 assigned the full mandate of statelessness to the UNHCR in 1995, which centered on four key actions: identification, prevention, reduction, and protection.³⁵ This marked a significant development as the UNHCR was now fully entrusted with a dual mandate, encompassing refugee and statelessness work.³⁶ It's noteworthy to analyze that within the UNHCR, statelessness has often taken a secondary role in the more widely recognized issue of refugee work. Professionals working in the field of statelessness often highlight examples of this secondary status, such as statelessness being placed in the second pillar for funding within the UNHCR, while refugees are prioritized in the first pillar.³⁷ This secondary role is also evident in the observations of actors working in the field, who note that statelessness is often perceived as the “little sister” of refugee work, and are surprised to discover that certain representatives within the UN have never heard of this problem.³⁸ Like refugees, stateless individuals rely on the international community for assistance; the general lack of awareness of statelessness leaves them to face their challenges alone.

While refugee work has been popular around the globe, with dedicated networks, organizations, and government agencies working in this field for decades, statelessness has only recently begun to gain global attention. Recognizing this, the UNHCR has focused on raising awareness of statelessness, establishing partnerships with regional and national organizations, providing advisory services, and promoting accession to the Conventions on Statelessness.³⁹ The UNHCR has also created global events to help motivate states to eradicate statelessness and increase their commitment to this cause. These awareness-raising efforts are crucial as there is a low level of understanding of statelessness issues among the public, states, and the UNHCR itself.⁴⁰ Increased awareness will lead to more change and solutions for stateless individuals, as others will finally recognize the existence of this issue and understand that solutions are achievable with less effort than other global challenges.

Political sensitivity poses a challenge for the UNHCR and its partner organizations. While NGOs and CSOs are often more vocal and willing to publicly advocate for changes in government

³⁵ UNHCR, “Handbook on Protection of Stateless Persons, 4.

³⁶ Engstrom and Obi, “UNHCR’s Role,” 3.

³⁷ Gaina, *Statelessness In Central Asia*.

³⁸ Ambartsoumian-Clough, *United Statelessness*.

³⁹ Mantu, *Contingent Citizenship*, 34.

⁴⁰ Avenir Analytics, “Evaluation of UNHCR,” iv, 34.

policies and practices, the UNHCR has sometimes adopted a “quieter diplomatic approach out of concerns about political sensitivity.”⁴¹ This cautious approach stems from the consideration that work on statelessness may encroach upon matters of state sovereignty and identity, potentially undermining the UNHCR’s work in other areas, including its support for refugees, asylum seekers, and returnees in the country. This sentiment is echoed by various stakeholders who express concern that the UNHCR’s “ability to protect refugees and asylum seekers in a country might suffer if the organization simultaneously pursues an active role in relation to stateless persons.”⁴² Due to challenges of political sensitivity, lack of awareness of the issue, and the UNHCR’s primary focus on refugees, the statelessness issue has persisted over the years.⁴³ Nonetheless, there is optimism as significantly increased attention and effort has been committed to addressing statelessness over the past two decades.

Since 2001, there has been an increase in discussions and dialogues on statelessness, alongside greater political will across multiple states to take action. During the initial phase of the efforts to end statelessness (2001-2007), the UNHCR began to create political will both within and outside the UNHCR.⁴⁴ The second phase, from 2008-2014, focused on creating international commitment and building operational capacity. The Statelessness Unit received new leadership, and statelessness officers and operations were deployed in specific regions beginning in 2011.⁴⁵ In the same year, the Ministerial Intergovernmental Event on Statelessness was held, a global diplomatic event at which states made various pledges to support ending statelessness in their countries.⁴⁶ Considered a significant breakthrough on the issue of statelessness, 61 states made 105 pledges during the event. This resulted in the creation of several guidelines on statelessness that provided legal guidance to UN staff and agencies, governments, the judiciary, NGOs, decision-makers, and legal practitioners. These guidelines became the blueprint for the UNHCR Handbook on Statelessness.⁴⁷

In 2014, the UNHCR organized the Global Forum on Statelessness at Tilburg University, which brought together 300 participants, including NGOs, government representatives, UN staff, lawyers, journalists, stateless persons, formerly stateless persons, and academics to discuss the issue of

⁴¹ Avenir Analytics, “Evaluation of UNHCR,” 39.

⁴² Engstrom and Obi, “UNHCR’s Role,” 3, 9.

⁴³ Engstrom and Obi, “UNHCR’s Role,” 3.

⁴⁴ Avenir Analytics, “Evaluation of UNHCR,” 9.

⁴⁵ Avenir Analytics, “Evaluation of UNHCR,” 10.

⁴⁶ Avenir Analytics, “Evaluation of UNHCR,” 1.

⁴⁷ Mantu, *Contingent Citizenship*, 35-37.

statelessness.⁴⁸ At this time in 2014, the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion (ISI) estimated that at least 15 million people around the world had no nationality.⁴⁹ Later that year, the UN launched the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness (GAP) to eradicate statelessness worldwide by 2024. The plan focused on “resolving existing situations of statelessness, preventing new cases from emerging, and better protecting and identifying stateless populations.”⁵⁰ It was released to support the #IBelong campaign, also launched in 2014, to raise awareness on the issue of statelessness.⁵¹ The campaign is directly linked to target 9 of Sustainable Development Goal 16 to “provide legal identity for all, including birth registration” by 2030.⁵² The GAP was created through a consultative process that involved civil society groups, governments, and affected populations in the decision-making process to develop the plan.⁵³ While partnerships and collaborations have been established for this initiative, there has never been a global coalition with a membership aspect and no governance structure other than the UNHCR itself.⁵⁴

The GAP was designed as a framework document to enable states to develop their own National Action Plans (NAP) by adapting any relevant components. The process of drafting a NAP is collaborative, with states typically preparing a preliminary draft and the relevant country office of the UNHCR providing feedback. These are suggestions, and states are not bound by a strict plan to follow, as the UNHCR typically encourages and supports any efforts made by countries to implement or develop a NAP and is pleased to see any progress and increase in political will to end statelessness.^{55,56}

Ten actions were developed for this initiative, many of which were interrelated, meaning that working on one action could help resolve the issues of another.⁵⁷

Global Action Plan:

Action 1: Resolve existing major situations of statelessness

⁴⁸ Avenir Analytics, “Evaluation of UNHCR,” 23.

⁴⁹ Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion (ISI), “Statelessness in Numbers: 2020- An Overview and Analysis of Global Statistics,” 4.

⁵⁰ UNHCR, Global Action Plan, 12.

⁵¹ This campaign did not target a specific population, such as stateless persons themselves, but was only a general awareness of statelessness worldwide.

⁵² UNHCR, “Ending Statelessness in Central Asia,” 2.

⁵³ Cherednichenko, UNHCR Headquarters: Statelessness.

⁵⁴ Avenir Analytics, “Evaluation of UNHCR,” 39.

⁵⁵ Cherednichenko, UNHCR Headquarters: Statelessness.

⁵⁶ See Appendix B.

⁵⁷ UNHCR, Global Action Plan, 3.

Action 2: Ensure that no child is born stateless

Action 3: Remove gender discrimination from nationality laws

Action 4: Prevent denial, loss, or deprivation of nationality on discriminatory grounds

Action 5: Prevent statelessness in cases of State succession

Action 6: Grant protection status to stateless migrants and facilitate their naturalization

Action 7: Ensure birth registration for the prevention of statelessness

Action 8: Issue nationality documentation to those with entitlement to it

Action 9: Accede to the UN Statelessness Conventions

Action 10: Improve quantitative and qualitative data on stateless populations

For example, a state working on Action 9, acceding to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, would be required to focus on other actions, such as Action 2, ensuring no children are born stateless.⁵⁸ Since every state has a different statelessness situation, not every action applies to every country; in many cases, only one or two of the points are relevant to each state's statelessness issue.⁵⁹ Giving states the option to choose which actions to pursue instead of having to address all ten is a significant benefit of this plan. It allows governments to select actions based on their capacities and priorities, making the campaign seem less overwhelming and more feasible than attempting to solve all actions simultaneously.

From 2015 to 2017, the third phase was implemented, during which the UNHCR supported countries' efforts to implement the GAP. Regional partnerships were created, three-year plans were implemented to track the progress of the GAP, and the UNHCR developed a new strategy for 2020-2024.⁶⁰ The fourth phase in 2018-2019 included the campaign's midpoint, when the High-Level Segment (HLS) on statelessness was held. At this conference, 360 pledges were made by civil society organizations, states, and regional organizations. The three most popular themes from the pledges were birth registration, stateless migrants, and data on stateless groups.⁶¹ The UNHCR wanted to focus on maintaining the momentum within the movement to end statelessness, using the Global Refugee Forum and the HLS to draw attention to statelessness. In this fourth phase, the UNHCR also decided to move its regional bureaus from headquarters to the field and transform regional offices into multi-country

⁵⁸ Cherednichenko, UNHCR Headquarters: Statelessness.

⁵⁹ UNHCR, Global Action Plan, 13.

⁶⁰ Avenir Analytics, "Evaluation of UNHCR," 10.

⁶¹ UNHCR, "High-Level Segment," 6.

offices.⁶² This allowed their statelessness officers to gain a deeper understanding of the issues specific to their region and develop closer relationships with country offices that could rely on them more due to their close presence.

As the UNHCR reaches its self-imposed deadline for the campaign this year (2024), there are still millions of stateless people worldwide. However, the campaign's impact cannot be dismissed simply because it fell short of its ambitious goal. The GAP has made significant strides in addressing statelessness globally, resulting in the resolution of thousands of cases granting citizenship to many individuals, legislative reforms in dozens of countries, increased state parties to both conventions, and heightened awareness of the issue. In 2014, “few people knew or understood what statelessness did,” and now, after the campaign's conclusion, “governments take it much more seriously and actually understand that this is a big problem.”⁶³ Among the campaign's achievements, there is one standout success story, one state out of hundreds that had managed to bring all known cases of statelessness within their borders to zero— the Kyrgyz Republic.⁶⁴

1.6 The Case of Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan remains the only country in the world that has eliminated all known instances of statelessness during the GAP campaign. The UNHCR's efforts to end statelessness have contributed significantly to its success, but many external factors have also played a role. My work indicates that political will and prior commitment to end statelessness, regional engagement, a focus on data collection, and collaboration with non-governmental organizations enabled this country to resolve all known cases of statelessness.

Through preliminary research, I found that the Kyrgyz Republic completed the campaign in 2019; however, they reported more stateless individuals in 2020 and every year thereafter, making this success seemingly short-lived. Initially, I perceived this as a failure by the Kyrgyz Republic and sought to understand the factors that led to the recurrence of statelessness. However, through further research and interviews with experts in the field, I realized that this slight increase was not indicative of failure at all. It was a natural progression as Kyrgyzstan continued its work on the issue of statelessness and did not simply stop because it had zero cases. The country continued its efforts to identify all stateless

⁶² Avenir Analytics, “Evaluation of UNHCR,” 11.

⁶³ Cherednichenko, UNHCR Headquarters: Statelessness.

⁶⁴ Kyrgyzstan and the Kyrgyz Republic are used interchangeably throughout this paper.

persons within its borders, recognizing that many are not registered and that there may be more unknown cases in their state. In fact, this increase reflected positively on Kyrgyzstan's commitment and will to resolve all cases within its borders, demonstrating its commitment to end statelessness and the success of the campaign.

My initial research question aimed to analyze the successes and challenges in Kyrgyzstan's approach to resolving statelessness, while also exploring how other post-Soviet states could learn from the case of Kyrgyzstan. However, I found that Central Asian states are making remarkable progress in addressing statelessness in their own countries; this realization led me to broaden my focus to Central Asia as a whole. I became intrigued by why this region includes the first and only country to end statelessness during this campaign (Kyrgyzstan), the state that has resolved the most cases of statelessness (Uzbekistan), and why the region as a whole contributed to one-third of all cases solved during this initiative. Since I could not incorporate all of these questions and information into a single thesis, I decided to research the timelines and efforts of other Central Asian countries to see if there were specific initiatives that Kyrgyzstan either influenced, borrowed from, or collaborated on with other countries in the region.⁶⁵ This analysis led me to focus on Kyrgyzstan's best practices that could be shared with other states working to end statelessness worldwide, not just in Central Asia. I also began to explore what the UNHCR could focus on more in its new Global Alliance, which is due to be implemented this year, based on the implementation of the campaign in this country.

⁶⁵ If I had more time and connections in this region, I would have liked to further research the work of other Central Asian States in ending statelessness, due to the overall success in the region compared to other parts of the world. Additionally, I had hoped to have time to study the UNHCR mid-year report, as it would have shown further developments before the plan concludes this year.

Chapter 2: Methodology and Literature Review

2.1 Research Methods

My thesis focused on desk research and qualitative interviews, examining the UNHCR's work on statelessness, and the efforts of civil society and other international organizations to address statelessness (such as the OSCE). This included reviewing past evaluations of the UNHCR's work and data on statelessness over the years. Many reports came from the UN itself, which employs consultants or delegates team members to conduct evaluations on their work. To fully understand the international obligations on citizenship and statelessness, I consulted primary sources such as conventions and international treaties. I also reviewed meeting minutes, testimonies of stateless individuals, GAP updates, and mid-year and annual data reports. Additionally, several secondary sources were utilized, including books on citizenship (although they are limited regarding statelessness), as well as various journal articles and online sources addressing the issue.

Since the Global Action Plan officially concludes at the end of this year, there have not been many articles by academics or scholars outside of the UN on the implementation of the plan as a whole. The UN publishes many updates on the plan and its efforts to end statelessness issues in its Global Reports, Global Trends, and Mid-Year Trends; these reports include the other work of the agency, such as on refugees and internally displaced persons, so the section on statelessness cannot fully show all the work being done in the campaign. Therefore, they publish campaign updates, around four updates per year since 2015, which are briefs of about 5-15 pages explaining any changes that have taken place (last updated in March 2023). These reports share best practices from around the world and detail what actions have been taken by states according to the ten action plans.

Although the UN publishes the work being done on statelessness by its agencies and various countries, there is no analysis of why these changes only occur in certain countries. My research adds to the discussion on statelessness, particularly in light of the new plan, by examining which external factors affect the UNHCR's statelessness campaign. It aims to identify how the practices of states that seem to be excelling in resolving statelessness cases within their borders can be applied to countries where change is stagnant or slow. In addition, the focus on Central Asia provides a non-European perspective on statelessness, in contrast to the predominantly European focus during the drafting of the Statelessness Conventions and the renewed interest in the issue in the 1990s. This analysis can assist

the UNHCR in developing its new plan in the fall and highlight the activities needed to support states in ending statelessness. It can also be of use to other organizations working on statelessness issues. As the current plan concludes this year, more researchers can analyze cases from different countries to determine which specific activities could be shared as best practices and be further developed to help resolve more cases.

Researching this issue makes it clear that statelessness is not a well-known phenomenon. In fact, it is not even a widely discussed concept among human rights activists or organizations working on human rights issues. In my interactions with statelessness professionals, they have often been pleasantly surprised and curious about my research focus on statelessness. They have inquired as to why I chose this topic over the more “lucrative” subject of refugee work, which is more commonly researched by students.⁶⁶ This example underscores the importance of research on this topic to bring it to the forefront of academic discussions on human rights and to encourage more students, activists, and organizations to engage with the issue.

2.2 Reviewing Existing Literature

The issue of statelessness had remained relatively unaddressed until the past century. Historically, some viewed statelessness as an issue that could be solved by straightforward legal changes at the national level, leading to practical solutions, but overall, the international community did not see the complete elimination of statelessness as feasible.⁶⁷ Prior to beginning my research, I shared this former perspective, believing that simply changing a few laws would suffice. More recently, experts and academics began to explore and recognize that addressing statelessness may require more comprehensive approaches. Guy Goodwin-Gill was one of the first contemporary scholars to emphasize that statelessness extends beyond mere legal or technical problems; it is a profound violation of an individual’s human rights.⁶⁸ This is echoed in the work of Hannah Ardent, who noted that statelessness is a condition in which an individual lacks “the right to have rights.”⁶⁹ Viewing nationality laws and issues through a human rights lens represented a significant shift in the discourse surrounding

⁶⁶ Comments like these further emphasize the global precedence given to refugee work over statelessness.

⁶⁷ Mantu, *Contingent Citizenship*, 7.

⁶⁸ Berényi, “Addressing the Anomaly of Statelessness in Europe: An EU Law and Human Rights Perspective”, 31; Goodwin-Gill, “United Nations Treaty-Making.”

⁶⁹ Mantu, *Contingent Citizenship*, 3.

statelessness, as it had not been approached in this manner previously.⁷⁰ Experts discovered that while statelessness may seem solvable with sufficient financial or legal investment, the root causes of statelessness include social, economic, technical, and administrative barriers.⁷¹ These barriers must be addressed and removed in order to end statelessness worldwide.

The issue of statelessness involves conversations about citizenship. In *The Birthright Lottery*, Ayelet Shachar describes how most people acquire citizenship solely through the circumstances of their birth, a lottery in which each person is placed.⁷² Individuals have little control over their citizenship status. Mira Siegelberg builds on this concept as she describes the history of statelessness and citizenship worldwide in her book *Statelessness: A Modern History*. Before World War I, statelessness was considered to be unimaginable and immoral for modern states to impose on their citizens and was generally regarded as disruptive to the legal order.⁷³ However, in the aftermath of the war, an influx of refugees, including those from the USSR who had been deprived of their nationality, began to raise important questions in this field— whose protection were stateless persons under?

The League of Nations was the first organization to attempt to create legal standards regarding statelessness and questions of nationality, prompted by shifting borders of territories and various social and political crises in Europe.⁷⁴ Two remedies were recognized to solve the issue of statelessness: repatriation and naturalization.⁷⁵ The League of Nations High Commissioner of Refugees believed that the solutions to statelessness were only found in these two options rather than in addressing the legal status of stateless individuals directly.⁷⁶ However, challenges arose when a person's country of origin did not recognize them as a citizen, rendering them undeportable. Moreover, naturalization was reserved only for exceptional and individual cases.⁷⁷ Other legal experts initiated a new discourse on statelessness, arguing against merely providing material assistance to stateless individuals, emphasizing the need to provide these individuals with their basic human rights, regardless of the country to which they no longer belong or the country in which they reside.

⁷⁰ Mantu, *Contingent Citizenship*, 12.

⁷¹ Avenir Analytics, "Evaluation of UNHCR," 25.

⁷² Schachar, *The Birthright Lottery*.

⁷³ Gatrell, "Statelessness: A Modern History." This sentiment was seen in the example of the Jewish subjects of Romania, who were deprived of their citizenship. The European states at the Congress of Berlin rejected this decision, with international lawyers and leaders agreeing that maintaining an international order required the absence of statelessness.

⁷⁴ Mantu, *Contingent Citizenship*, 14; UN Economic and Social Council, "A Study of Statelessness," 4.

⁷⁵ Ardent, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 283.

⁷⁶ Gatrell, "Statelessness: A Modern History."

⁷⁷ Ardent, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 248.

The refugee crisis of World War II further spurred the international community into action; experts began to question how to provide protection to stateless persons.⁷⁸ Paul Weis, a key figure in the development of international refugee law, argued that refugees and stateless individuals belong in the same category of protection; however, many disagreed with him.⁷⁹ In his book *Nationality and Statelessness in International Law*, Weis advocated for a legal approach to defining nationality, rather than one based on social or ethnic concepts, because he believed that the solution to statelessness should be based on factual evidence, not on subjective interpretations.⁸⁰ This debate led to the creation of separate conventions on statelessness and refugees. In March of 1948, the UN Economic and Social Council commissioned a study on statelessness, identifying two main issues: eliminating statelessness and improving the status of stateless individuals.⁸¹ This laid the foundation for the UN's current mandate on statelessness, which focuses on the prevention, identification, protection, and reduction of statelessness.

Statelessness was not considered a major problem during the Cold War, a time characterized by a relatively stable arrangement of states. Consequently, the issue received little attention from humanitarian organizations or governments.⁸² Ardent highlighted this neglect noting, “the decision of the statesmen to solve the problem of statelessness by ignoring it is further revealed by the lack of any reliable statistics on the subject.”⁸³ Despite this, some academics and experts continued to work in the field. In 1968, Hersch Lauterpacht, an international human rights lawyer and later a judge in the International Court of Justice, proposed including a specific provision on statelessness in international human rights law. This would ensure every individual's right to nationality in the country of their birth, prohibit deprivation of nationality as a punishment, and permit the loss of nationality only upon acquiring a new one.⁸⁴ In the 1980s, statelessness was included in the UN's agenda for improving security and development, linking the issue to states in need of “democracy building and rule of law

⁷⁸ Mantu, *Contingent Citizenship*, 16.

⁷⁹ Gatrell, “Statelessness: A Modern History.”

⁸⁰ Siegelberg, *Statelessness: A Modern History*, 214; Weis, *Nationality and Statelessness in International Law*.

⁸¹ Jadali, “Prominence of Statelessness in the UN,” 146.

⁸² Engstrom and Obi, “UNHCR's Role,” 7.

⁸³ Ardent, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 279.

⁸⁴ Berényi, “Addressing the Anomaly of Statelessness in Europe: An EU Law and Human Rights Perspective”, 31; Lauterpacht, *International Law and Human Rights*.

efforts.”⁸⁵ While this perspective is not entirely incorrect, it overlooks states with well-established democracies that still face problems with statelessness.⁸⁶

In the 1990s, there was a renewed interest in statelessness in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly focusing on statelessness resulting from state succession and “arbitrary deprivation of citizenship based on discriminatory grounds.”⁸⁷ The dissolution of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia created smaller states that had to develop their own citizenship policies of inclusion and exclusion.⁸⁸ These developments brought increased attention to statelessness within the human rights world. There was a growing awareness that this issue could result in mass involuntary displacement and heightened regional tensions unless it was addressed urgently and effectively.⁸⁹ This prompted the UN General Assembly to include stateless individuals under the mandate of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.⁹⁰

Contemporary discussions among scholars on statelessness and citizenship examine whether globalization, trends in mass migration, and regional citizenship (such as that of the European Union) will diminish or reduce the significance of national citizenship.⁹¹ Central to these discussions are questions of whether statelessness will continue to be a significant problem, leading to numerous negative consequences for individuals, and whether citizenship will transition toward a more international framework, where protections are ensured by the international community rather than individual states. Additionally, there is a growing recognition among states of the benefits of granting nationality to stateless persons, both for the individuals themselves and for contributing to the cohesion and stability of their country.⁹² However, current scholars also caution that statelessness is adversely affected by global trends of exclusion, nativism, nationalism, xenophobia, racism, ethno-nationalism, and the broader decay of human rights in many states.⁹³

⁸⁵ Mantu, *Contingent Citizenship*, 33.

⁸⁶ Mantu, *Contingent Citizenship*, 33.

⁸⁷ Mantu, *Contingent Citizenship*, 29.

⁸⁸ Jadali, “Prominence of Statelessness in the UN,” 147; Engstrom and Obi, “UNHCR’s Role,” 4.

⁸⁹ Engstrom and Obi, “UNHCR’s Role,” 8.

⁹⁰ Jadali, “Prominence of Statelessness in the UN,” 145

⁹¹ Mantu, *Contingent Citizenship*, 5.

⁹² UNHCR, “Handbook on Protection of Stateless Persons,” 1.

⁹³ Avenir Analytics, “Evaluation of UNHCR,” 12, 41.

2.3 Conducting Interviews

To prepare for the interviews essential to my thesis, I enrolled in a research practice course focused on interviewing techniques. The course required students to recruit participants, conduct interviews, transcribe recordings, and analyze findings to be used in a research project.⁹⁴ Through literature and lectures, I gained insight into the importance of consent and ethical considerations in interviews. Toward the end of the course, students conducted self-evaluations of their interviews to identify any pitfalls, such as leading the interviewee, asking too many questions at once, failing to ask follow-up questions, or not giving the interviewee enough time to respond. This course immensely strengthened my interviewing skills and provided valuable insights for my thesis work.

For my thesis, I conducted semi-structured interviews using a participant-led approach for the order of questions asked.⁹⁵ Prior to conducting the interviews, I extensively researched both the topic of statelessness and the organizations represented by participants. This preparation helped me anticipate discussion topics, understand any acronyms and jargon they might use, and ensured that I was well prepared to ask follow-up questions and effectively engage with each participant.⁹⁶ I conducted eight interviews to gain an understanding of the work of the UNHCR and other organizations addressing statelessness. Although the interviews were not the primary focus of my research, their insights added immense value to my thesis.

2.3.1 Ethical considerations

These interviews were conducted in accordance with the guidelines and rules of the Masaryk University Ethics Committee for Research. Participants were informed that the questions asked would be related to my thesis topic on statelessness, and verbal consent for audio recording was obtained before each interview so that I could use their insights in my research.

⁹⁴ These interviews were used for a Visegrad project sponsored by the Polish Academy, analyzing the reasons for civic engagement among migrants and refugees, with a focus on Ukrainian refugees.

⁹⁵ Roulston and Choi, "Qualitative Interviews," 233. See Appendix for "Sample Interview Questions."

⁹⁶ Roulston and Choi, "Qualitative Interviews," 238.

2.3.2 Recruitment Process and Participants

My research process included eight interviews, all carried out over video conference calls, with the exception of one completed through written correspondence.⁹⁷ I conducted interviews with professionals in the field of statelessness from a variety of backgrounds, including representatives of international organizations such as the UNHCR and OSCE, as well as representatives from national, regional, and stateless-led organizations working on statelessness in order to have a diverse sample. The selection of professionals was based on their expertise in statelessness issues and willingness to participate in an interview. The names and occupations of the interviewees are as follows:

1. Sergiu Gaina: Statelessness Officer and the UNHCR Representative to Central Asia
2. Azibek Ashurov: Director of the Ferghana Lawyers, Nansen Award Winner, Central Asian Network on Statelessness Co-Founder
3. Lola Girard: Migration/Freedom of Movement Advisor (OSCE ODIHR), working with the UNHCR and OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities on several joint initiatives to prevent and end statelessness in the OSCE region
4. Valeriia Cherednichenko: International lawyer who previously worked as a Regional Statelessness Officer and a Statelessness Protection Officer, and is currently an UNHCR Statelessness Consultant
5. Allan Leas: Chairman of the European Network on Statelessness and Trustee for the Afghan and Central Asian Association, helped establish several NGO networks
6. Karina Ambartsoumian-Clough: Executive Director of United Statelessness, a stateless-led NGO in the United States
7. Shuhrat Ganiev: Representative of the Social CMG, an Uzbekistan NGO part of the Central Asian Network on Statelessness
8. Laura Van Waas: Co-Director of the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion

I could not have the same format of questions for each actor I interviewed because they work with different organizations, hold different positions with varying levels of authority, and come from different countries or regions of the world. For this reason, each interview was unique, but all focused on the issue of statelessness.

⁹⁷ This was due to a language barrier.

2.4 Initial Data Analysis

Data collection on stateless persons is paramount, as it can reveal new trends or root causes of the problem. An absence of data can severely limit the UNHCR's capacity to raise awareness and promote advocacy on statelessness, whereas good data can have the potential to raise awareness and create opportunities.⁹⁸ Much work remains to be done on statelessness and data collection; however, there has been some progress in this area over the past twenty years, with the development of the International Recommendations on Statelessness Statistics, more states reporting data than ever before, and new joint mapping efforts with the UNHCR and various states. The UNHCR has recognized a significant gap in reporting and has even dedicated one of the Global Action Plan points to data collection. In 2019, it established the Expert Group on Statelessness Statistics and the Inter-agency Group on Statelessness Estimation to improve statelessness statistics; the group submitted recommendations on statelessness statistics in 2022, endorsed by the United Nations Statistical Commission in March 2023.⁹⁹

The UNHCR is the only organization that compiles and publishes global data on stateless persons.¹⁰⁰ In the past, UNHCR statistics only reported on refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, and "others of concern."¹⁰¹ Stateless individuals were included in all of these categories without a distinct category of their own.¹⁰² This data first became available in 2004, initially with limited reporting from only a few countries, and draws on government, UN, academic, and civil society sources.¹⁰³ The UNHCR organizes this information in its Population Statistics Reference database, with its country offices gathering data and demographic composition twice a year. This information is published by the UNHCR on June 30th in the Mid-Year Statistical Review (MYSR) and on December 31st in the Annual Statistical Reporting (ASR).¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ Avenir Analytics, "Evaluation of UNHCR," vi.

⁹⁹ Cherednichenko, UNHCR Headquarters: Statelessness; UNHCR, "Comparative Legal Analysis," 31.

¹⁰⁰ These numbers include individuals who have undetermined nationality.

¹⁰¹ EGRIS, "Technical Support," 14.

¹⁰² ISI, "Statelessness in Numbers," 8. It is important to note that stateless internally displaced persons (IDPS), refugees, and asylum seekers are still only counted in one data set. For instance, stateless refugees are only counted under the refugee category. The Rohingya in Myanmar are an exception to this rule, as well as stateless persons in Palestine as they are covered by the UNRWA.

¹⁰³ ISI, "Statelessness in Numbers," 6. In contrast, refugee statistics have been available since 1951.

¹⁰⁴ Chen, Nahmias, and Steinmueller, "UNHCR Statistical Reporting on Statelessness," 2

However, due to the nature of statelessness, where individuals often lack registration in any state, they often remain unseen and are not included in surveys or censuses, a phenomenon known as the “invisibility of stateless persons.”¹⁰⁵ Moreover, some stateless individuals may be unaware of their status or reluctant to report it due to fear of persecution.¹⁰⁶ These issues contribute to the difficulty of obtaining accurate data on stateless populations. Currently, only 97 states report data, with more than twenty countries not reporting on their stateless populations despite estimates suggesting significant numbers within their borders.¹⁰⁷ This can be attributed to several challenges, including difficulties conducting surveys, financial constraints, and lack of political will.

Furthermore, it is concerning to note that just because a country has collected data in one year does not guarantee that it will continue to do so in subsequent years. For example, five countries did not submit data in 2019 despite having done so in the previous year.¹⁰⁸ Another issue is that not all data collected is disaggregated by demographic characteristics such as age, gender, or diversity.¹⁰⁹ This additional information would allow for more specific plans or policies to be implemented. Additionally, cases arise where a state submits data, but civil society representatives inform the UNHCR that this data does not accurately reflect the true situation in the country.¹¹⁰ As a result, the UNHCR tries to collaborate with civil society organizations to address data gaps. Inaccurate or incomplete data hinders the planning and implementation of statelessness initiatives for the UNHCR and other organizations working on this issue.

To better understand the reasons behind Kyrgyzstan’s success, I began my research by analyzing UNHCR’s data on statelessness. This was a crucial starting point for my research, as Kyrgyzstan’s achievement of zero known cases of statelessness and the UNHCR’s campaign to eradicate statelessness highlighted the importance of having access to accurate data. Since my initial focus was on the impact of the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness in the Central Asian region, I collected data on the five states, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan, to track the changes in the number of stateless persons in the region after the implementation of the plan

¹⁰⁵ Avenir Analytics, “Evaluation of UNHCR,” 2.

¹⁰⁶ Avenir Analytics, “Evaluation of UNHCR,” 36; OSCE and UNHCR, “Handbook on Statelessness,” 45.

¹⁰⁷ Cherednichenko, UNHCR Headquarters: Statelessness; Avenir Analytics, “Evaluation of UNHCR,” 28.

¹⁰⁸ UNHCR, “Global Trends 2019,” 1.

¹⁰⁹ Avenir Analytics, “Evaluation of UNHCR,” 28; UNHCR, “Global Trends Forced Displacement,” 46. By 2023, only 75% of the data on reported stateless populations were disaggregated by sex, and only 62% were disaggregated by was sex and age.

¹¹⁰ Cherednichenko, UNHCR Headquarters: Statelessness.

and to analyze whether there were any significant trends or changes. Afterwards, I calculated the growth rates to compare the changes over time to see if the increase or decrease was already occurring in the state.¹¹¹

After the 2014 Global Action Plan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan were the only states other than Kyrgyzstan that showed a significant change from previous growth rates. The former, whose stateless population increased from 1,364 (2013) to 19,469 (2014), has seen a decrease in all but one year since.¹¹² This can be attributed to an identification campaign launched in 2014 in collaboration with the UNHCR, which identified 22,000 persons of undetermined nationality, meaning that these individuals were already in the country; they just had yet to be identified.¹¹³ With the change in Uzbekistan's presidency in 2016, there has been a renewed commitment to addressing statelessness issues.¹¹⁴ Together with Uzbekistan's new Law on Citizenship (2020), these factors contributed to a reduction in the number of stateless individuals in the country from 86,524 in 2016 to 25,413 in 2023.¹¹⁵

Since some interviewees shared that states cite fear of security risks and being overwhelmed by stateless persons as reasons for not signing the conventions, I wanted to explore the origins of these concerns. Were they based on observed increases or decreases in statelessness in other states after accession to either convention? It was noteworthy that Kyrgyzstan, despite not being a party to either convention, has made significant progress on statelessness issues.¹¹⁶ To analyze this, I created two data sets: one for the 1954 Convention and the other for the 1961 Convention, including all the state parties to the conventions and the year they acceded. I then examined whether these countries had reported data on stateless persons, excluding those that did not or those that began reporting many years after becoming a treaty party, as the effect of the convention could not be tracked. Countries with very few stateless persons were also excluded, as they showed large rates of change, while in reality, the overall situation of statelessness remained the same.¹¹⁷ Next, I compiled the data on the qualifying states from the year before the state entered the convention and the following ten years. Year-to-year growth rates were calculated to identify any significant increases.¹¹⁸

¹¹¹ See Appendix C, "Statelessness in Numbers - Central Asia."

¹¹² UNHCR, "Refugee Data Finder."

¹¹³ OSCE and UNHCR, "Handbook on Statelessness," 43.

¹¹⁴ Gaina, *Statelessness In Central Asia*.

¹¹⁵ UNHCR, "Refugee Data Finder."

¹¹⁶ Of the Central Asian states, only Tajikistan was a party to either convention.

¹¹⁷ For example, the number of stateless persons in Colombia increased from 9 to 11, an increase of 22%.

¹¹⁸ See Appendices E-I.

After conducting this initial data research, I began to read more literature regarding the available data collected on stateless persons, becoming increasingly aware that there are several problems with data collection and distribution. While the UNHCR's data tells a story of statelessness, it often lacks detailed indicators explaining the underlying reasons. For instance, in Côte d'Ivoire, statelessness increased from 692,000 to 955,399 persons in 2018 and 2019, respectively, a nearly 40% increase which can be attributed to a joint study on statelessness conducted by the government and UNHCR in 2019.¹¹⁹ The increase is a reflection of improved data collection, revealing pre-existing but undocumented stateless populations. This example contrasts with instances where statelessness has increased due to factors such as state succession or discriminatory laws, as in the case of the Dominican Republic, where statelessness increased by 210,000 people from 2012 to 2013 due to a Constitutional Court ruling that retroactively applied new citizenship criteria, and stripped the nationality of people of Haitian descent born in the Dominican Republic since 1929.¹²⁰ Increased cases can also be linked to natural population growth, such as in Bangladesh (+9,400) and Thailand (+8,200), which were reported in mid-2023.¹²¹ States considering acceding to either convention may misinterpret such increases as effects of treaty adoption. Therefore, it is crucial not only to have accurate data but also informative data detailing the reasons behind fluctuations in statelessness data for each reporting country annually.

¹¹⁹ UNHCR, "Global Trends- Forced Displacement in 2019," 2.

¹²⁰ UNHCR, "UNHCR Global Trends 2013- War's Human Cost."

¹²¹ UNHCR, "Comparative Legal Analysis of the National Legislation and Practices of the Republic of Uzbekistan and Other Central Asian States," 31.

Chapter 3: Statelessness in Central Asia and Kyrgyzstan

3.1 An Overview of Statelessness in Central Asia

The 2014 Global Campaign “was an acceleration factor for the solution of statelessness in this area.”¹²² In Central Asia, most cases of statelessness have occurred through state succession due to the dissolution of the USSR into the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) at the end of 1991.¹²³ Border disputes and physical border changes left citizens with undetermined citizenship status, rendering Soviet citizenship meaningless; this affected more than 280 million people, including 60 million in Central Asia.¹²⁴ New states were created and borders were established between them, transforming administrative boundaries and what had once been internal migration into international border crossings.¹²⁵ The primary task for these new states was determining which individuals would be recognized as citizens.¹²⁶

Central Asian states defined a citizen as someone who had been a permanent resident within their borders at the time of the adoption of their constitution or citizenship laws. These laws followed the “zero-option variant,” where any individuals with permanent residence in the new state’s territory were considered citizens, regardless of their ethnicity.¹²⁷ Additionally, states in the region adopted two conventions on citizenship issues: the 1995 CIS Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which affirms in Article 24 that “everyone shall have the right to citizenship and that no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his or her citizenship or of the right to change it,” and the 1993 CIS Convention on Legal Aid and Legal Relations in Civil Family and Criminal Cases, which addresses the rights of stateless individuals in Article 23 and 26.¹²⁸

¹²² Gaina, *Statelessness In Central Asia*.

¹²³ OSCE and UNHCR, “Handbook on Statelessness,” 89. State succession occurs when a state transfers a part of its territory to another state, when a part of a state becomes one or more new states, or when a state breaks apart to form two or more new states.

¹²⁴ Global COVID19 Consortium, “Central Asia Together We Can: The Covid-19 Impact on Stateless People & a Roadmap for Change,” 1; Farquharson, “Statelessness in Central Asia,” 4. Almost all stateless individuals in the Central Asian region had citizenship to the Soviet Union before the dissolution.

¹²⁵ “Kyrgyzstan and the Fight to Eliminate Statelessness in Central Asia,” UNHCR, “High-Level Segment,” 4.

¹²⁶ UNHCR, “Statelessness and Citizenship,” 7.

¹²⁷ UNHCR, “Statelessness and Citizenship,” 7; Tiulegenov, “Comparative Report- Statelessness in Central Asia.” What is unique about this region is that, unlike other new states, when they were forming their new countries in the 1990s, they based citizenship on a territorial basis (who lived within the borders at the time of state formation), rather than worrying about ethnic demographics. This more universal approach later changed to include citizenship policies based on descent.

¹²⁸ OSCE and UNHCR, “Handbook on Statelessness,” 34-35.

In line with many legislative decisions and laws in the CIS states, the definition of statelessness in Central Asia bears the mark of old USSR policies and definitions. According to the 1938 USSR Citizenship Law, statelessness applied to individuals who were permanent residents of the USSR and had no proof of either USSR or foreign citizenship.¹²⁹ Similarly, in Central Asia, a stateless person is defined as someone “without the nationality of the state, who has no proof of affiliation to another country.”¹³⁰ Within the Central Asian region, stateless persons were granted the same rights and responsibilities as citizens, but this only extended to those who had permanent residence in the state where they resided and formal recognition by the state of their statelessness status.¹³¹ In general, Central Asian states did not have systematic, dedicated procedures for granting statelessness status to individuals. Instead, individuals often discovered their stateless status when applying for documents such as citizenship or residence permits.¹³²

The process of obtaining citizenship in Central Asia was straightforward for many former USSR citizens, who could acquire their new citizenship simply by exchanging their old passports. However, a significant number of statelessness cases still arose. While statelessness in Central Asian states primarily stemmed from issues related to state succession, it was compounded by other factors.¹³³ Territorial disputes further intensified challenges in determining nationality, as the successor states could not agree on new borders. Gaps and disparities in nationality laws, administrative barriers, and increased migration in the new states of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan prevented individuals from obtaining citizenship despite proving their connection to the state through birth or residence.¹³⁴ Registration for citizenship required individuals to visit government offices, yet barriers such as travel expenses, time constraints, or lack of transportation often limited their ability to do so. Fines for late registration posed additional barriers for individuals who applied for citizenship after state-imposed deadlines. Many were either unaware of the laws or unable to reach the necessary authorities within the designated time frame, resulting in statelessness.¹³⁵ In other instances, statelessness arose because they preferred to keep their USSR passports, desiring to remain USSR

¹²⁹ Tucker, “Statelessness in Central Asia,” 4.

¹³⁰ Farquharson, “Statelessness in Central Asia,” 7.

¹³¹ Farquharson, “Statelessness in Central Asia,” 46.

¹³² Farquharson, “Statelessness in Central Asia,” 32.

¹³³ UNHCR, “A Place to Call Home, The Situation of Stateless Persons in the Kyrgyz Republic: Findings of Surveys Commissioned by the UNHCR,” 2.

¹³⁴ Farquharson, “Statelessness in Central Asia,” 3; OSCE and UNHCR, “Handbook on Statelessness,” 10.

¹³⁵ Tucker, “Statelessness in Central Asia,” 4, 7.

citizens even though it was no longer possible.¹³⁶ These challenges affected both *de jure* and *de facto* stateless individuals, as well as those lacking established or documented nationality.¹³⁷

Security concerns and political agendas posed additional problems that required international cooperation, such as the registration requirements imposed by certain states on their citizens residing abroad.¹³⁸ This obligation, which remains in effect for Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, stems from the 1990 Law on Citizenship of the USSR, Article 22, which states that citizens may be deprived of citizenship if they fail to register with a consulate within five years of relocation.¹³⁹ Accustomed to unrestricted movement within these territories in the Soviet Union, citizens often remained unaware of the registration requirements.¹⁴⁰

Lack of awareness of the urgency to apply for new citizenship was also a significant issue. Former USSR citizens did not realize the importance of obtaining citizenship until years after the initial citizenship changes, as they could still travel, vote, and use their old documents in various capacities within the new Central Asian states. This lack of urgency can be illustrated by the fact that USSR passports remained valid for travel and identification in former USSR states for many years after they were no longer considered valid. In Kazakhstan, despite the passport exchange deadline being in March 1999, individuals were permitted to use their USSR passports until 2002, then the deadline was pushed back two more times to 2004 and 2005.¹⁴¹ Individuals were not motivated to exchange their passports and receive new citizenship because they were unaware that their old passports would soon become invalid. This illustrates that states can adopt more inclusive citizenship policies after succession, yet still experience high levels of statelessness due to insufficient dissemination of information and awareness regarding the importance of obtaining citizenship and the associated procedures.¹⁴² Consequently, statelessness persisted in the Central Asian region for decades.

¹³⁶ Gaina, *Statelessness In Central Asia*.

¹³⁷ UNHCR, “A Place to Call Home,” 2.

¹³⁸ UNHCR, “Good Practice Papers,” 22.

¹³⁹ “Union of Soviet Socialist Republics,” 1209.

¹⁴⁰ Tucker, “Statelessness in Central Asia,” 5.

¹⁴¹ Tucker, “Statelessness in Central Asia,” 6; UNHCR, “A Place to Call Home,” 12.

¹⁴² Tucker, “Statelessness in Central Asia,” 6.

3.2 An Overview of Statelessness in Kyrgyzstan

On July 4th, 2019, Kyrgyzstan became the first state with no known cases of statelessness within its borders.¹⁴³ However, despite this initial success, the number of stateless persons increased in 2020 and continued to persist in subsequent years.¹⁴⁴ In Kyrgyzstan, the largest stateless populations consisted of undocumented individuals residing in border areas, nomads known as “lyuli,” foreign spouses married to Kyrgyz citizens, and persons with expired USSR passports.¹⁴⁵ Many people did not prioritize obtaining documentation because they did not use it in their daily lives; however, when they reached retirement age or needed medical care, they realized the importance of these documents for accessing services or pensions.¹⁴⁶

A distinct group of stateless individuals in Kyrgyzstan, known as “border brides,” consists of Uzbek women who have married ethnic Uzbek men living in southern Kyrgyzstan. Citizens from Uzbekistan who permanently move abroad are required by law to register their stay with their consulates, typically located far from the border areas.¹⁴⁷ Failure to comply with these regulations results in the loss of citizenship, rendering them stateless.¹⁴⁸ Many of these women lacked a comprehensive understanding of legal requirements and believed that marriage alone would secure their citizenship. Upon attempting to renew their passports or apply for citizenship, they discovered that they were stateless and unable to proceed with their applications due to their expired Uzbek passports.

Cooperation between the UNHCR, the government, and local NGOs has been (and continues to be) crucial in ending statelessness in the country through initiatives such as data collection and awareness-raising campaigns.¹⁴⁹ Kyrgyzstan has established a strong partnership with the UNHCR and its statelessness team, which has been implementing Age, Gender, and Diversity Mainstreaming (AGDM) in the country since 2006. Multi-Functional Teams (MFT)¹⁵⁰ conduct Participatory

¹⁴³ UNHCR, “Good Practice Papers,” 30.

¹⁴⁴ Certain critics believe that the focus on short-term results (instead of long-term solutions), as is seen in the 10-year timeline given to the project, contributed to the short-term success in Kyrgyzstan. (12 x04)

¹⁴⁵ UNHCR, “Universal Periodic Review: Kyrgyzstan,” 2; UNHCR, “Good Practice Papers,” 22.

¹⁴⁶ Gaina, *Statelessness In Central Asia*.

¹⁴⁷ “Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan on Citizenship of the Republic of Uzbekistan,” 4

¹⁴⁸ UNHCR, “A Place to Call Home,” 13. The legacy of Soviet-era laws is evident in this example, as their citizenship laws mandated registration with a Soviet consulate for citizens residing abroad, with the threat of citizenship deprivation if one does not.

¹⁴⁹ Gaina, *Statelessness In Central Asia*.

¹⁵⁰ These consisted of NGO representatives, UNHCR representatives, and governmental and non-governmental partners in the specific regions of North and South Kyrgyzstan where the surveys were taking place.

Assessments (PAs) in the state, engaging stateless individuals in decision-making and empowering them to identify their own solutions.

In 2009, Kyrgyzstan made history by becoming the first state in which the UNHCR commissioned NGOs to conduct surveys utilizing PAs. These assessments facilitated interactive dialogues with stateless individuals by engaging groups separated by age, ethnicity, and gender to gain a deeper understanding of statelessness in Kyrgyzstan. This innovative approach encouraged active participation from stateless individuals in eliminating statelessness, setting a precedent not yet adopted by other states. In October 2010, further focus groups were conducted in northern and southern Kyrgyzstan. Stateless persons led these discussions, selecting topics they deemed most important to address, including “problems with employment, access to medical services, social benefits, and education,” as well as concerns about protection risks due to their status and lack of documentation.¹⁵¹ This initiative significantly enhanced understanding of statelessness in Kyrgyzstan and identified critical areas for the state to address.

The study revealed that stateless men in the North primarily face economic challenges, particularly in accessing pensions upon reaching retirement age. Many previously held USSR passports but either lost them or possessed expired passports. Similarly, stateless women in the North, who also held USSR citizenship in the past, encounter difficulties in receiving pensions or child allowances. They expressed concerns about their inability to protect themselves in civil cases, such as divorce, restrictions on movement within the state, inability to register property, and the requirement to pay medical fees at the same rate as foreigners.¹⁵²

In the south, most stateless persons are married women originally from Uzbekistan. They encounter many of the same challenges as women from the north and were also former citizens of the USSR. Although many have professional training, they often work for local farmers or engage in domestic work due to a lack of documentation.¹⁵³ The closure of the international borders between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in 2013 contributed to an increase in stateless individuals, as these brides found themselves unable to move freely between the borders due to expired documents.¹⁵⁴ Stateless men residing in this region moved here after the dissolution of the USSR and have never renewed their

¹⁵¹ UNHCR, “Small Changes - Big Gains,” 16.

¹⁵² UNHCR, “Small Changes - Big Gains,” 16-17.

¹⁵³ UNHCR, “Small Changes - Big Gains,” 17.

¹⁵⁴ European Network on Statelessness (ENS), “Tackling Statelessness in Kyrgyzstan and the Wider Central Asia Region – the Importance of Networking,” 2.

passports or replaced their identification documents. They rely on non-official employment as they do not have documentation. They expressed dissatisfaction about the “propiska” (residency proof) and de-registration processes.¹⁵⁵

Kyrgyzstan, recognizing its substantial *in situ* population of stateless persons, undertook targeted nationality campaigns to resolve statelessness by granting citizenship directly to stateless individuals rather than requiring them to first apply for statelessness documents and then for citizenship.¹⁵⁶ This approach was adopted due to the recognition of many individuals’ long-established ties to Kyrgyzstan, such as long-term residence or residency in the state during the time of state succession.¹⁵⁷ In most cases, statelessness issues are “solved at an administration level and do not require significant interventions,” only assistance from a lawyer or counselor to prepare application documents. However, some cases may require more complicated tasks, such as sending letters to foreign embassies to verify an individual’s non-citizenship status.¹⁵⁸

While the elimination of statelessness in 2019 marked a significant milestone in Kyrgyzstan’s work, the country is now intensifying its focus on prevention by implementing additional legal reforms. These changes aim to ensure that no one is born stateless in the country and ensure effective statelessness determination procedures are in place.¹⁵⁹ The resurgence of stateless cases has not hindered Kyrgyzstan’s determination to achieve zero cases again, driven by the government’s unwavering political will to end statelessness within its borders— a commitment that predates the start of the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness.

¹⁵⁵ UNHCR, “Small Changes - Big Gains,” 17; Ashurov, Fergana Lawyers Without Borders. The *propiska* system was inspired by the Soviet administrative control system, which regulated internal migration and required citizens to report changes in their residence.

¹⁵⁶ UNHCR, “Handbook on Protection of Stateless Persons,” 26.

¹⁵⁷ UNHCR, “Handbook on Protection of Stateless Persons,” 26.

¹⁵⁸ Gaina, *Statelessness In Central Asia*.

¹⁵⁹ Ashurov, Fergana Lawyers Without Borders.

Chapter 4: Kyrgyzstan's Political Will to End Statelessness

Discussions on statelessness highlight that effective legal protections and solutions lie at the heart of resolving statelessness, but without the willingness of states to cooperate and fulfill their obligations, resolving statelessness on a global scale will remain extremely challenging.¹⁶⁰ The Helsinki Commission and the US Department of State have recognized Kyrgyzstan for having the “best record on human rights and respect for ethnic minorities in Central Asia.” They highlighted that during the dissolution of the USSR and the formation of states in Central Asia, leaders in the Kyrgyz Republic demonstrated a “real commitment to the protection of human, ethnic, and religious rights.”¹⁶¹ This underscores Kyrgyzstan’s consistent dedication to human rights issues since its inception and positions the country as a regional leader on these critical issues.

Although Kyrgyzstan successfully resolved all known cases of statelessness within the ten-year timeframe of the GAP, it is crucial to acknowledge that its efforts to end statelessness began long before the campaign. It would be inaccurate to attribute their success solely to the GAP without acknowledging UNHCR’s earlier initiatives in the country and the region. Work on statelessness in Kyrgyzstan and the Central Asian Region began in the early 2000s, indicating a strong political will to address statelessness before the campaign's inception. A UNHCR officer currently working on statelessness in Central Asia, who has previously worked with other post-USSR states (Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan), noted that while these countries had similar projects and approaches to addressing statelessness, they did not achieve the same success as Kyrgyzstan due to a lack of political will.¹⁶²

Kyrgyzstan’s political will was evident through its collaboration with the UNHCR, local NGOs, and civil society on advocacy and data collection. While various groups can undertake efforts to end statelessness, legislative changes are exclusive to the state, which holds sovereignty over citizenship laws and regulations. In Kyrgyzstan, significant progress was made in addressing statelessness through the swift and flexible implementation of legislative changes. Without such actions, cases of statelessness would remain unsolved.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Mantu, *Contingent Citizenship*, 31.

¹⁶¹ United States Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, “Kyrgyzstan- Political Conditions in the Post-Soviet Era,” 2.

¹⁶² Gaina, *Statelessness In Central Asia*.

¹⁶³ Ashurov, *Fergana Lawyers Without Borders*.

4.1 The Impact of Legislative Reforms

Kyrgyzstan's understanding of citizenship is shaped by the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, international treaties ratified by the country, and the Law on Citizenship.¹⁶⁴ Citizenship in the state holds significant importance as it serves as the foundation for individuals to enjoy their fundamental human rights in the Kyrgyz Republic, as most of the rights, freedoms, and duties outlined in the constitution are directly linked to citizenship.¹⁶⁵ Due to the research of the Kyrgyz Inter-Agency Working Group, which identified gaps in laws and regulations concerning stateless individuals in Kyrgyzstan, significant legal reforms were implemented across various areas. These reforms impacted laws such as the civil registry, the Law on the Legal Status of Aliens in the Kyrgyz Republic, and the Law on Civil Acts.¹⁶⁶ Notably, at the time of these legal reforms, Kyrgyzstan was the only country in the Central Asian region that took on a comprehensive reform of its citizenship laws and policies since gaining independence.¹⁶⁷

The 2007 law was introduced to address some of the problems caused by the original 1993 Law on Citizenship, allowing for new ways to reduce statelessness. Kyrgyzstan recognized that many people had not replaced their old passports and needed an easier way to obtain citizenship, leading to new legislation to facilitate these changes. These simplified procedures for foreigners and stateless persons were considered “an innovation at this time.”¹⁶⁸ The law allowed for a large number of stateless persons who resided in the territory after February 18th, 1994, to obtain Kyrgyz citizenship and did not establish a deadline for when an old USSR passport could be exchanged for a new Kyrgyz passport.¹⁶⁹

Article 5, paragraph 2, of the law automatically recognizes all stateless individuals who have previously held USSR citizenship, did not apply for citizenship of another state, and have resided within Kyrgyzstan for over five years as citizens, provided they submit an application with a citizenship determination commission within their local territory.¹⁷⁰ Additionally, Article 14 provides access to a simplified naturalization procedure for certain groups.¹⁷¹ Although Soviet passport holders

¹⁶⁴ ISI and Central Asian Network on Statelessness (CANS), “Joint Submission to the Human Rights Council at the 35th Session of the Universal Periodic Review,” 4.

¹⁶⁵ UNHCR, “Small Changes - Big Gains,” 20.

¹⁶⁶ UNHCR, “UNHCR Submission for the Universal Periodic Review - Kyrgyzstan,” 3.

¹⁶⁷ UNHCR, “Small Changes - Big Gains,” 11.

¹⁶⁸ UNHCR, “Good Practice Papers,” 23.

¹⁶⁹ UNHCR, “A Place to Call Home,” 13.

¹⁷⁰ ISI and CANS, “Joint Submission,” 6.

¹⁷¹ OSCE and UNHCR, “Handbook on Statelessness,” 67.

are eligible for these simplified procedures, they must still fulfill specific requirements, including five years of continuous residence, basic proficiency in the official language, a stable income, and adherence to the laws and constitution.¹⁷² Ethnic Kyrgyz individuals benefit from a reduced residency requirement of only one year.¹⁷³ In 2012, an amendment to the law specifically addressed women who are permanent residents of Kyrgyzstan married to a Kyrgyz citizen, as well as former citizens who wish to return to Kyrgyzstan permanently. These individuals are exempt from the residency requirement and language proficiency criteria.¹⁷⁴

The Citizenship Law of 2007 also introduced several measures to prevent statelessness. It ended the practice of revoking citizenship for failing to register with a consulate abroad within a certain time period, and it grants citizenship to children born to stateless parents (once parental status is confirmed and proper documentation is provided) or if they are foundlings.¹⁷⁵ Under the new law, dual citizenship with other states is permitted, except with its neighboring states: China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan. However, to prevent statelessness, a safeguard is in place for applicants from these countries; the state will send the old passports and renunciation of citizenship only after the new acquisition of citizenship is confirmed.¹⁷⁶ This prevents applicants from experiencing a period of statelessness while awaiting citizenship decisions and, in some cases, from remaining stateless if their citizenship application is rejected. It also relieves these individuals from the burden of application fees required to renounce their current citizenship.¹⁷⁷

Presidential Decree No. 437, also issued in 2007, gave new authority to “Conflict Commissions” in the provincial Departments for Passport and Visa Control (DPVCs) of the Ministry of Interior of Kyrgyzstan to assess applications for Kyrgyz citizenship. This decree also allowed for more flexible proof of residence for former USSR passport holders, replacing the *propiska* requirement with proof of habitual residence of Kyrgyzstan.¹⁷⁸ This change enabled more stateless persons to qualify for

¹⁷² UNHCR, “Good Practice Papers,” 23.

¹⁷³ “Kyrgyz Republic: Powerful neighbors imperil protection and create statelessness.”

¹⁷⁴ UNHCR, “Good Practice Papers,” 24.

¹⁷⁵ “Law of the Kyrgyz Republic on Citizenship of the Kyrgyz Republic,” 2007.

¹⁷⁶ UNHCR, “Good Practice Papers,” 25.

¹⁷⁷ UNHCR, “A Place to Call Home,” 13.

¹⁷⁸ UNHCR, “Good Practice Papers,” 27; CESF Consortium, “Together We Can,” 34. Documents of possible forms for evidence listed in the 2013 regulation include: “a passport with a registration stamp or a registration document, a military service book (*voennaia kniga*), certificates from places of work (*trudovaia kniga*), diplomas from educational institutions, and certificates from the place of residence. Testimony from a residence committee or village chief, with the participation of a district police officer and three neighbors of the individual concerned.”

citizenship, as the previous 1993 mandated *propiska* for citizenship eligibility.¹⁷⁹ This change allowed many cases to be resolved; from 2009 to 2012, 2,000 stateless individuals were granted citizenship, and 45,000 people exchanged their USSR passports for Kyrgyz passports.¹⁸⁰ In 2013, the Citizenship Regulation replaced the “Conflict Commissions” with “Commissions for Citizenship Determination.” These commissions were now authorized to determine whether an individual is a Kyrgyz citizen, a citizen of another country, or stateless.¹⁸¹ This marked a significant change from the highly centralized citizenship determination procedures typical in the Central Asian region and CIS states, where naturalization procedures were often made by the president.¹⁸² This new system allowed for faster processing of applications and resolution of more cases.

These legislative changes established that Kyrgyzstan now offered the “best procedural guarantees in the region for applicants for citizenship and persons seeking to confirm whether they are Kyrgyz citizens.”¹⁸³ Individuals who apply for citizenship are ensured written and dated confirmation that their application has been received and can request relevant information about their application, such as its location and processing dates. In case of denial, the applicant can request a written explanation.¹⁸⁴ This process was unique in this region, as other Central Asian countries did not offer similar opportunities to request information during the citizenship application process, highlighting Kyrgyzstan’s pioneering efforts once again.

Kyrgyzstan did not only focus its legal reforms on updating existing citizenship laws, but also on creating new procedures. During this period, the country began to implement changes to its statelessness determination procedures.¹⁸⁵ Proper determination procedures are crucial so that a state can “identify and document stateless persons properly, and it enables stateless individuals to access rights and freedoms due to them under national law.”¹⁸⁶ Statelessness determination procedures were first introduced in Kyrgyzstan in August of 2013, and initially applied only to former USSR citizens, excluding recently arrived stateless individuals or those from non-CIS states. Stateless individuals

¹⁷⁹ UNHCR, “Good Practice Papers,” 27.

¹⁸⁰ UNHCR, “Statelessness in the Kyrgyz Republic: Analysis of National Legislation,” 3.

¹⁸¹ UNHCR, “Good Practice Papers,” 25-26.

¹⁸² UNHCR, “Good Practice Papers,” 23.

¹⁸³ Farquharson, “Statelessness in Central Asia,” 29.

¹⁸⁴ Farquharson, “Statelessness in Central Asia,” 29.

¹⁸⁵ Farquharson, “Statelessness in Central Asia,” 32. These efforts were interrupted for a period of time because of violence in the state starting in May 2010.

¹⁸⁶ Farquharson, “Statelessness in Central Asia,” 32.

received a slip of paper indicating their status, but it was not considered an official document.¹⁸⁷ In 2021, Kyrgyzstan drafted new, improved statelessness determination procedures, which were implemented two years later.¹⁸⁸ Finally, through its latest citizenship legislation change in 2023, Kyrgyzstan adopted a new law mandating “universal birth registration of every child, including those born to undocumented or stateless parents who were previously not able to obtain a birth certificate.”¹⁸⁹ These examples demonstrate Kyrgyzstan’s ongoing efforts to improve its legislation impacting stateless individuals, showcasing its consistent political commitment over the past two decades to end statelessness.

4.2 Collaboration with the UNHCR: Surveys, National Action Plan, and Pledges

The Kyrgyz Government sought UNHCR’s support in determining the best approach to address statelessness in the country following the 2007 legislation reforms.¹⁹⁰ From 2007-2008, the UNHCR conducted pilot surveys in cooperation with NGOs in Kyrgyzstan.¹⁹¹ These efforts highlight the government’s willingness to collaborate with external organizations and share responsibility in addressing statelessness. The surveys were conducted through three field studies commissioned by the UNHCR, conducted by the Center for International Protection, Counterpart-She Riktesh, and Ferghana Valley Lawyers Without Borders.

The results of the surveys were presented to the government at a roundtable meeting in 2008. In the subsequent year, the inaugural High-Level Steering Meeting on the Prevention and Reduction of Statelessness in the Kyrgyz Republic, co-chaired by the UNHCR and the State Registration Service, led to the development of a National Action Plan to Prevent and Reduce Statelessness (NAP).¹⁹² Kyrgyzstan’s NAP consisted of nine points, covering issues related to former USSR citizens, data collection, ongoing naturalization of stateless individuals, awareness raising among stateless persons about their “rights, duties, relevant legislation and procedures,” amendments to the Kyrgyz Citizenship Law, universal birth registration, and accession to the statelessness conventions.¹⁹³ In 2011, a second High-Level Steering Committee convened to revise and update the NAP. Additional meetings in 2012

¹⁸⁷ UNHCR, “Universal Periodic Review: Kyrgyzstan,” 5.

¹⁸⁸ Farquharson, “Statelessness in Central Asia,” 32.

¹⁸⁹ UNHCR, “Analysis of National Legislation,” 6.

¹⁹⁰ UNHCR, “Good Practice Papers,” 28.

¹⁹¹ UNHCR, “A Place to Call Home,” 4.

¹⁹² UNHCR, “Good Practice Papers,” 28.

¹⁹³ UNHCR, “Small Changes - Big Gains,” 8. See Appendix B, “Kyrgyzstan's National Action Plan.”

and 2013 involved continuous revisions of the NAP and monitoring of its progress. Following these efforts, the Kyrgyz Republic established a Citizenship Working Group in collaboration with the UNHCR, composed of UN agencies, civil society members, and government officials.¹⁹⁴ This group regularly convenes to advance various law reform initiatives listed in the NAP, highlighting the government's commitment to addressing statelessness with the UNHCR.

Kyrgyzstan reaffirmed its strong political will to resolve statelessness by pledging further action on statelessness issues at the October 2019 High-Level Segment on Statelessness. During this event, which marked the campaign's midpoint, Kyrgyzstan made four new pledges, three of which were time-bound.¹⁹⁵ The pledges included ensuring universal birth registration, updating national legislation, and establishing a statelessness determination procedure. In the non-time-bound pledge, Kyrgyzstan committed to “studying the experience of other state parties to the UN Conventions of 1954 and 1961 on statelessness.”¹⁹⁶ Kyrgyzstan's strong commitment to end statelessness is further evident in its efforts to fulfill these pledges. In 2022, authorities from Kyrgyzstan visited Georgia to study its experience acceding to the statelessness conventions.¹⁹⁷ By 2023, Kyrgyzstan ensured birth registration for every child in its national legislation, including those with stateless parents, and established statelessness determination procedures.¹⁹⁸

4.3 Best Practices in Strengthening Political Will

Statelessness in Central Asia faced less resistance regarding political will than in other regions, primarily because many stateless individuals were not foreigners but former USSR citizens who had failed to register for new citizenship and were left without proper documents. Even so, Kyrgyzstan had to gradually build strong political will. Initially, “the government did not give status [to stateless individuals] despite existing norms and ratified international obligations because it was afraid of the influx of refugees and the growth of radicalism and separatism in the country.”¹⁹⁹ This demonstrates the potential for countries with initially low political will to evolve and commit to resolving statelessness

¹⁹⁴ UNHCR, “Good Practice Papers,” 29.

¹⁹⁵ UNHCR, “High-Level Segment,” 8. EGRIS, “Statistical Inclusion Pledge,” 2. A pledge is a “commitment made by a Government or any other stakeholder.” They should be “specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, timebound.”

¹⁹⁶ UNHCR, “High-Level Segment,” 8.

¹⁹⁷ UNHCR, “Analysis of National Legislation,” 7.

¹⁹⁸ UNHCR, “Analysis of National Legislation,” 7.

¹⁹⁹ Ganiev, Central Asian Network on Statelessness.

issues, as demonstrated by Kyrgyzstan. Such commitment is essential for the success of the campaign to end statelessness.

This raises the question of how to measure a country's political will and whether external entities such as the UNHCR can influence it, thereby replicating the positive progress on statelessness seen in Kyrgyzstan in other states. The Avenir Analytics report of UNHCR-led statelessness initiatives found that examining “advances in data, knowledge and awareness, capacity, procedures, national laws, national action plans, coordinating mechanisms, HLS pledges, and convention accessions” can inform governments, NGOs, and civil society about a state's political will and its action plans to address statelessness.²⁰⁰ Through this analysis, the UNHCR can assess how many conventions a state has ratified, if it has created a NAP, how many pledges it has made, and whether it has reported data on stateless populations. Additionally, actions such as requesting UNHCR assistance, as Kyrgyzstan did, can indicate political will to end statelessness. This information is straightforward to analyze as much of it is generated or organized by the UNHCR itself. Consequently, the UNHCR can evaluate these commitments and prioritize efforts in countries demonstrating strong political will.

It is important to emphasize that the UNHCR must use a variety of factors to assess political will, as each country's situation is unique. Relying on a single factor will not provide a comprehensive understanding of political will in a state. For instance, Kyrgyzstan has not yet signed either of the conventions, citing security reasons and a focus on implementing existing international agreements before committing to new ones.²⁰¹ This decision does not necessarily indicate a lack of political will to address statelessness; rather, it underscores other priorities the state would like to address first. By examining additional factors such as the development of a NAP, legislation changes, and pledges, it becomes evident that political will is indeed present in the state.

In the case of Kyrgyzstan, political will is also evident in the time spent working on the issue of statelessness. The state has consistently reported data, fulfilled pledges, sought UNHCR assistance for projects, amended its legislation, participated in roundtable discussions, studied best practices from other countries, and collaborated with NGOs to conduct surveys for the last two decades. This demonstrates that the UNHCR can also measure political will by considering the duration and intensity of a country's engagement in statelessness activities over the years.

²⁰⁰ Avenir Analytics, “Evaluation of UNHCR,” 24.

²⁰¹ Ashurov, Fergana Lawyers Without Borders.

Kyrgyzstan has also consistently pledged actions to address statelessness, which is another positive indicator of political will. However, pledges themselves are not necessarily binding. A country may make a pledge and fail to follow through, or it could lack measurable, specific, and time-bound components, as was the case with Kyrgyzstan when it stated it would explore signing the statelessness conventions without committing to a specific timeline. This vague wording and the absence of a time limit in a pledge do not demonstrate a strong commitment to ending statelessness, even if a pledge has been made. Therefore, the focus should be on the actual implementation efforts by a state to fulfill its pledges rather than on the number of pledges made.

External factors, such as conflicts, global events, or political shifts within a country, can also greatly influence political will. In some cases, political will can be assessed by examining the political climate of the government, including the platforms of politicians, the results of elections, and the actions of leaders. The UNHCR must consider these dynamics when determining the most opportune moments to approach the issue of statelessness with a government.

Other external effects, such as the impact of violence and natural disasters, can hinder the efforts of numerous states to eradicate statelessness, as is seen in the case of Kyrgyzstan. The eruption of violence in 2010 and the subsequent unrest that settled within the Kyrgyz Republic led to a setback in resolving statelessness. Thousands of individuals could not retain their identification documents, which had been either lost or destroyed in the turmoil.²⁰² Despite previous efforts to address statelessness, the state's initiatives were halted as it "struggled to restore a sense of stability to the country following violent unrest and ethnic violence."²⁰³ This resulted in an increase in statelessness and further exacerbated problems for those who had already faced citizenship problems. The global pandemic also impacted the #IBelong campaign and its milestones. Civil registration procedures, including birth registrations and issuance of identification documents, statelessness determination procedures, and other related services, were disrupted due to the pandemic.²⁰⁴ Stateless persons faced additional challenges in accessing relief measures, particularly as the Central Asian states prioritized assistance for their citizens.²⁰⁵

²⁰² UNHCR, "Small Changes - Big Gains," 4.

²⁰³ "Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan: Stateless 'Border Brides' Caught in Between."

²⁰⁴ Global COVID19 Consortium, "Central Asia Together We Can," 4-5.

²⁰⁵ CESF CONSORTIUM, "Together We Can," 41.

The states in which the UNHCR is working need to be assessed for their level of political will so that various projects can be launched alongside the new plan at the end of this year. The UNHCR should engage states that have already demonstrated political will to address statelessness through initiatives such as statelessness mapping, data collection, or policy changes. For states lacking political will, the UNHCR can draw on examples of other nations that have already undertaken reforms and made significant progress in addressing statelessness issues. These examples can then be disseminated to countries concerned about implementing similar initiatives. The primary objective in such states would be to raise awareness, which can be achieved by presenting state-specific data and creating opportunities for exchanges with other countries. For example, if a country is concerned about implications for state sovereignty regarding the choosing not to allow dual citizenship, the UNHCR can present the example of Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyzstan has chosen to deny citizenship to individuals already holding another citizenship from a neighboring state. However, to align with international legislation, rather than mandating citizens to renounce their nationality before applying for citizenship, Kyrgyzstan began allowing applicants to first confirm they would receive citizenship before being required to give up their previous citizenship.²⁰⁶ This solution avoids temporary and permanent statelessness for applicants yet still allows Kyrgyzstan to maintain its distinctive citizenship policy.

Determining the level of political will should not imply that the UNHCR will only work where their efforts will be readily accepted. While it could be most efficient for the organization to concentrate its efforts in areas where there is a willingness to act, the UNHCR and its partners have a responsibility to advocate on behalf of stateless individuals in areas where there is no political will.²⁰⁷ Focusing knowledge, resources, and efforts on politically willing states may inadvertently result in the neglect of other countries that require more assistance. This is evidenced by data indicating that 85% of the known cases of statelessness, 4.4 million individuals worldwide, are concentrated in only ten states where the statelessness situation is “not significantly improving.”²⁰⁸ Therefore, addressing statelessness in all countries is needed, regardless of the level of political will. The UNHCR must employ varied approaches based on each country’s readiness to take action.

²⁰⁶ Gaina, *Statelessness In Central Asia*.

²⁰⁷ Avenir Analytics, “Evaluation of UNHCR,” 52.

²⁰⁸ UNHCR, “Redoubling Our Efforts on Ending Statelessness- UNHCR’s Strategic Plan 2023-2026,” 1.

Political will is crucial in the fight to end statelessness.²⁰⁹ Ensuring that governments recognize the importance of these issues and are inspired to take action is an important but challenging part of the UNHCR's work. While international organizations or NGOs working on statelessness can advocate for statelessness issues, they cannot force legislative changes or political will—these must come from the government itself. State efforts are essential as the UNHCR cannot find permanent solutions to statelessness issues without their active participation and commitment.²¹⁰ The legislative changes and collaboration with other organizations highlighted in this chapter exemplify Kyrgyzstan's political will to end statelessness and how this played an important role in its success in the GAP. While the UNHCR cannot force political will, it can support civil society actors with resources and knowledge across diverse fields and regions to promote public commitment to ending statelessness. NGOs collaborating with the UNHCR have been pivotal in advocating for legislative changes and implementing progressive practices on statelessness issues.²¹¹ The significance of this collaboration in advancing the efforts of the UNHCR will be discussed in the next chapter on NGOs and their role in ending statelessness in Kyrgyzstan.

²⁰⁹ Cherednichenko, UNHCR Headquarters: Statelessness.

²¹⁰ Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, "New Approaches to Solutions," 6.

²¹¹ UNDP, "The Long Way to Citizenship Recognition," 8.

Chapter 5: The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations in Addressing Statelessness in Kyrgyzstan

Prior to the #IBelong campaign, few organizations worked specifically on statelessness; instead, human rights organizations had dedicated divisions addressing the issue, but it was not their main focus.²¹² Even today, few organizations work exclusively on statelessness.²¹³ However, as a result of the campaign, the issue has become more visible, and more organizations have emerged that either focus exclusively on statelessness or include it among the various issues they address. NGOs no longer have to concentrate their efforts on convincing people to work on statelessness. Instead, they can focus on “responding to people who are becoming engaged, helping to steer them towards collaboration or feed them information or build their knowledge and capacity.” They no longer feel that they are “shouting in the dark.”²¹⁴

Cooperation between governments, NGOs, civil society, and the UNHCR is crucial in the work to end statelessness for several reasons. Outreach to stateless populations, which may include conducting surveys for advocacy and policy development or collecting personal stories to raise awareness, is most effective when carried out by organizations that already understand the local context and are familiar with the stateless populations. These organizations are more trusted and known by stateless individuals, as they are a part of their communities. Furthermore, local civil society organizations have more direct access to stateless individuals and at-risk populations than the UNHCR. This is particularly evident in “remote areas where distance and security concerns limit direct UNHCR engagement.”²¹⁵ Such groups typically include community-based or grassroots organizations operating within the region of concern, as they usually have the closest and least restricted access to stateless populations.²¹⁶ Given these factors, NGOs play a significant role in data collection, solving statelessness-related problems, and advising stateless groups.²¹⁷

The production of data, which enhances the visibility of stateless individuals in a country, also provides governments with evidence regarding the situation of statelessness in a country. This data

²¹² Cherednichenko, UNHCR Headquarters: Statelessness.

²¹³ Ambartsoumian-Clough, United Statelessness.

²¹⁴ van Waas, Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion.

²¹⁵ Avenir Analytics, “Evaluation of UNHCR,” 38.

²¹⁶ OSCE and UNHCR, “Handbook on Statelessness,” 79.

²¹⁷ Engstrom and Obi, “UNHCR’s Role,” 5.

often serves as the initial basis for persuading states to take action.²¹⁸ Identifying stateless populations and the underlying causes of their statelessness serve as the foundation for developing effective solutions.²¹⁹ In Kyrgyzstan, much of the data collection, surveying, analysis, and advocacy were carried out by the Ferghana Valley Lawyers Without Borders.

5.1 The Ferghana Valley Lawyers Without Borders

It is difficult to imagine Kyrgyzstan becoming the first state to eradicate statelessness within its borders without the contributions of Azizbek Ashurov, the director and founder of Ferghana Valley Lawyers Without Borders. Ashurov has been instrumental in supporting the Kyrgyz government to end all known cases of statelessness in the country.²²⁰ The Ferghana Lawyers Without Borders was formed in 2003 to unify the efforts of lawyers working on human rights issues and foster regional and international collaboration on these matters.²²¹ Since its inception, the organization has evolved into a “leading organization in assisting the most vulnerable groups and working in a volatile region of unsettled borders and major incidents of violence.”²²²

Ashurov was born in Uzbekistan, and his family went through the process of determining citizenship when they moved to Kyrgyzstan; for about five years, he and his family had undetermined citizenship. After graduating from law school, Ashurov was employed at a clinic supported by the American Bar Association, where he began to focus on immigration cases due to his personal background and experience. When he initially established the NGO, it consisted of only two members, the minimum number required to register an organization. The Ferghana Lawyers now comprises over 100 individuals, including practicing attorneys, former judges, notaries, and academics.²²³

The NGO initially commenced operations with its own resources and casework. After lobbying for the 2007 amendment on Kyrgyzstan’s Law on Citizenship, they realized their efforts were insufficient to determine how to end statelessness in the country because they only worked in one area. Upon discovering the UNHCR’s additional mandate on statelessness, the organization contacted the UN while also seeking the attention of their government and other donor organizations. After receiving

²¹⁸ UNHCR, “Plan 2023-2026,” 4.

²¹⁹ Farquharson, “Statelessness in Central Asia,” 4.

²²⁰ UNHCR, “Analysis of National Legislation,” 4.

²²¹ “Kyrgyzstan and the Fight to Eliminate Statelessness in Central Asia,” 4; ENS, “Tackling Statelessness in Kyrgyzstan,” 4.

²²² ENS, “Tackling Statelessness in Kyrgyzstan,” 5.

²²³ Ashurov, Ferghana Lawyers Without Borders.

UNHCR support for statelessness mapping in 2008, they gained a clearer picture of the extent of statelessness in Kyrgyzstan. It became apparent that statelessness was a widespread issue in the region, affecting numerous individuals with no legal documentation.²²⁴ In 2014, they conducted another round of surveys, registering thousands of stateless individuals.

The organization's advocacy, data collection, and legal expertise led to new amendments that simplified naturalization procedures and legislation aimed at identifying stateless persons. Kyrgyzstan's Presidential Decree No.174, which expedites the citizenship process for certain categories of stateless persons, is an example of the result of the NGO's advocacy and collaboration with the government.²²⁵ Ashurov and his organization have continued to advocate for additional safeguards even after the government achieved zero cases of statelessness. This ongoing advocacy has led to further legislative changes, including a new law passed in February 2023, which allows individuals to renounce their citizenship but mandates that the government verifies their new citizenship first to prevent statelessness.²²⁶ These initiatives and outcomes stem from the NGO's efforts to end statelessness and its collaboration with the UNHCR and Kyrgyz government, which began well before the 2014 GAP.

5.2 Surveys Conducted Before the Global Action Plan

The Kyrgyz government has collaborated with NGOs, international organizations, the UNHCR, and civil society organizations on many joint initiatives such as “surveys, gap analysis studies, and field operations to assist individual applicants.”²²⁷ Without the help and efforts of these organizations, Kyrgyzstan would not have had detailed information on stateless populations, which enabled the creation of specific legislation and policies tailored to unique issues within the state. The first statelessness surveys conducted in Kyrgyzstan consisted of three field studies by the Center for International Protection, Counterpart-She Riktesh, and Ferghana Valley Lawyers Without Borders, commissioned and financed by the UNHCR.²²⁸ These studies took place in 2007-2008, as the Kyrgyz government sought the UNHCR's assistance in determining how to best address statelessness in their country following the passage of the 2007 legislation.²²⁹ They did not attempt to identify all stateless

²²⁴ Ashurov, Fergana Lawyers Without Borders.

²²⁵ ENS, “Tackling Statelessness in Kyrgyzstan,” 9.

²²⁶ Ashurov, Fergana Lawyers Without Borders.

²²⁷ UNHCR, “Good Practice Papers,” 22.

²²⁸ UNHCR, “Good Practice Papers,” 28.

²²⁹ UNHCR, “Good Practice Papers,” 28.

individuals or persons at risk of statelessness; rather, they aimed to gather more accurate data on the cause and scope of statelessness in this region. The goal was to devise strategies for naturalizing and legalizing stateless individuals and to contribute to the development of a GAP.²³⁰ These were “believed to be among the first surveys of their kind,” further demonstrating Kyrgyzstan’s pioneering role in statelessness issues.²³¹

The NGOs conducted their research in Kyrgyzstan’s northern and southern border regions, surveying 18 districts in 4 provinces: Batken, Chui, Jalalabad, and Osh. This focused approach was chosen because the NGOs could not cover the whole country, and experts believed these areas would have a high number of citizenship issues. These surveys were conducted, reported, and analyzed thanks to a collaboration of non-governmental organizations in the region.²³² They collected information on the size of the stateless population, their socio-economic status, their family situations, the challenges they faced due to their lack of citizenship, and their reasons for their statelessness.²³³

In the north, Counterpart-Sheriktesh conducted surveys in the Chuy province, in the Issykata, Moskovskiy, and Jaiyl districts, as well as in the Chuy, Panfilov, and Sokuluk districts.²³⁴ The Fergana Valley Lawyers without Borders and the Center for International Protection conducted surveys in the south, where the team consisted of six groups: one administrative and five mobile. They operated in three Kyrgyz provinces, categorized by their cross-border movement, which was either low or high. The NGOs utilized polls and interviews to identify 11,655 stateless individuals or individuals at risk of becoming stateless, categorizing them into five groups.²³⁵

Example Survey Result: Southern Kyrgyzstan

Category 1:	Individuals who used to have citizenship but, because of gaps in legislation, are stateless or in danger of being stateless	1, 871 individuals
Category 2:	Former USSR citizens who have not applied for any	1,827 individuals

²³⁰ UNHCR, “A Place to Call Home,” 7.

²³¹ Farquharson, “Statelessness in Central Asia,” 8.

²³² UNHCR, “A Place to Call Home,” 3. These included: The Centre for International Protection, Ferghana Valley Lawyers Without Borders, Counterpart Sheriktesh, Sairon, Chi Murgab, Adab, Help Refugees, and the Civil Society Support Centre of Karabalta.

²³³ UNHCR, “A Place to Call Home,” 2.

²³⁴ UNHCR, “A Place to Call Home,” 38.

²³⁵ UNHCR, “A Place to Call Home,” 7, 15.

	other citizenship and arrived in Kyrgyzstan after the Law On Citizenship came into effect in 1993 (have resided for over five years and have a 1974 USSR passport)	
Category 3:	Former USSR citizens residing in Kyrgyzstan on February 19th, 1994, who do not hold any other citizenship and have not applied to exchange for Kyrgyz passports	1,870 individuals
Category 4:	Children born to stateless parents (one or both)	6,087 individuals
Category 5:	Children of labor migrants (many labor migrants had been adopting Russian citizenship) No concrete numbers, just cases that may rise substantially in the future without proper legislation	---

After the surveys were completed, the organizations prepared a comprehensive report with recommendations on how to implement changes to applicable legislation based on the gathered evidence and presented it to relevant government officials.²³⁶ In 2009, the UNHCR published the survey results, marking the first time they could identify reasons for statelessness and provide statistical, aggregated data on stateless persons.²³⁷ These categories included gender, age, marital status, education level of the head of households, ethnicity, basic identification documents held, and their needs.²³⁸ The surveys revealed that most respondents had been integrated into their communities, with many stateless individuals having family or cultural links to the state and resided within the country for at least five years.²³⁹

Furthermore, the surveys uncovered the main questions and concerns of stateless individuals. They wanted to know how to acquire citizenship, ensure that their whole family had the same nationality, resolve passport issues, secure employment, and understand whether statelessness would affect their children's ability to receive an education, get married, or have legitimate children.²⁴⁰ These

²³⁶ UNHCR, "A Place to Call Home," 7.

²³⁷ Farquharson, "Statelessness in Central Asia," 6.

²³⁸ UNHCR, "A Place to Call Home," 53; UNHCR,

²³⁹ UNHCR, "Good Practice Papers," 22, 28, 24. Only 3% of the individuals in the survey had no relatives in the country.

²⁴⁰ Farquharson, "Statelessness in Central Asia," 63.

findings enabled the government and the UNHCR to identify the key issues facing stateless persons in the region. The aggregated data equips government officials and lawmakers with the necessary information to propose necessary policy reforms, allowing for specific actions to be taken rather than attempting a one-size-fits-all solution, thereby resolving statelessness more quickly and efficiently.

For example, the survey found that “91.3% of the elderly stateless individuals were originally from Kyrgyzstan but had not exchanged their old USSR passports.”²⁴¹ By addressing statelessness cases according to age, authorities could resolve many similar cases at once involving expired passports, as most elderly individuals faced this issue. Additionally, while children of stateless persons could access the education system with little difficulty, stateless individuals faced many issues with property rights, requiring family members with citizenship to register property on their behalf.²⁴² This indicated that while access to education was not a significant issue the government needed to focus on, property rights were a major problem for stateless individuals and legislation on this should be updated.

Survey insights also demonstrated a general lack of awareness among stateless persons regarding the legal procedures for obtaining residency and citizenship. This was compounded by challenges in meeting application requirements, such as obtaining necessary documents, financial constraints, or encountering difficulties traveling to the relevant government offices and facilities.²⁴³ Consequently, Kyrgyzstan conducted an awareness-raising campaign before its next registration drive in 2014 to inform more stateless persons of issues related to their situations. The surveys also indicated areas where the government could additionally train its staff. It was found that stateless persons avoided law enforcement authorities because they did not have proper documentation to prove their statelessness and were afraid to interact with the officers.²⁴⁴ Training law enforcement officers on statelessness would enable them to better interact with and resolve cases involving stateless individuals without identification. Overall, these surveys provided more than just numbers of where stateless individuals were found; they identified specific areas for legislative improvement.

These examples exemplify the crucial role data received from NGOs played in addressing statelessness in the Kyrgyz Republic. The surveys aimed to provide more accurate information on the data, causes, and extent of statelessness and to contribute to the creation of an action plan to end

²⁴¹ UNHCR, “Good Practice Papers,” 24.

²⁴² UNHCR, “Good Practice Papers,” 23.

²⁴³ UNHCR, “A Place to Call Home,” 27; Farquharson, “Statelessness in Central Asia,” 28.

²⁴⁴ Farquharson, “Statelessness in Central Asia,” 46.

statelessness in Kyrgyzstan.²⁴⁵ With specific data segregated by various categories, it became easier for Kyrgyzstan to adopt policies, create legislative changes, and conduct mobile registration campaigns. Five years after the initial surveys were completed, the government agreed to launch a nationwide campaign to register stateless persons and grant citizenship to those who meet specific criteria.²⁴⁶ This demonstrates that surveying was essential in the process of creating a National Action Plan and launching registration campaigns in Kyrgyzstan.

5.3 The Nationwide Registration Campaign

In 2014, through its Seeds for Solutions program, the UNHCR provided support to the Kyrgyz government and the Ferghana Valley Lawyer's efforts to "identify, register, and legally assist stateless persons and those at risk of statelessness, and support them to acquire identity documents."²⁴⁷ The funding allocated to the Ferghana Lawyers enabled them to assist Kyrgyzstan with its nationwide pilot "door-to-door" registration campaign.²⁴⁸ The objective of this campaign differed from that of the surveys conducted between 2007 and 2008; rather than focusing on aggregated data and the reasons behind statelessness, this campaign aimed to register and document all stateless individuals in the country.²⁴⁹ This was the first time a campaign of this nature had been initiated in the Central Asian region, further demonstrating Kyrgyzstan's pioneering efforts in ending statelessness.²⁵⁰

The initial phase of the campaign was informational in nature. The locations of the registration sites and the dates on which services would be provided were disseminated through advertisements in several languages on local television stations, posters in village centers, transportation hubs and buses, and through word-of-mouth communication by local village leaders. This information campaign was tailored to the regions where the units were stationed, allowing the national issue to be more individualized.²⁵¹ The NGO's work then focused on deploying mobile legal clinics in remote regions to locate and register stateless individuals for identification documents or citizenship determination.²⁵²

Over sixty mobile teams functioned as "mobile passport desks... fully equipped with the technical

²⁴⁵ UNHCR, "A Place to Call Home," 7.

²⁴⁶ Gaina, *Statelessness In Central Asia*.

²⁴⁷ UNHCR, "Ending Statelessness in Central Asia," 1.

²⁴⁸ Bond, "Intrepid Lawyer Achieves Quest to Eradicate Statelessness in Kyrgyzstan."

²⁴⁹ Global COVID19 Consortium, "Central Asia Together We Can," 3.

²⁵⁰ ENS, "Tackling Statelessness in Kyrgyzstan," 6.

²⁵¹ Tucker, "Statelessness in Central Asia," 10.

²⁵² "Kyrgyzstan and the Fight to Eliminate Statelessness in Central Asia," 4; OSCE and UNHCR, "Handbook on Statelessness," 67.

equipment and application forms” needed for stateless persons to apply for citizenship.²⁵³ The NGO’s teams operated in every country district, working alongside migration and passport desk officers. The government granted these teams authority to receive applications for citizenship and register stateless individuals through a temporary decree. It was a “very interesting, extraordinary model of cooperation in one unit– civil society and government officers.”²⁵⁴ This demonstrates a case where the political will of the government to address statelessness and its cooperation with the work of the NGOs on data collection came together to address statelessness issues.

An example of someone the NGO assisted is Halimzahn Abdirayimov, a stateless individual who learned about the Fergana Lawyers Without Borders from his fellow villagers. He faced procedural challenges in obtaining social assistance for medical care, disability benefits, and retirement because he had never exchanged his old USSR passport in the 1990s.²⁵⁵ Volunteers with the NGO collaborated with the local government to locate Abdirayimov’s misplaced documents in their archives. They also worked with the registry office to digitize his birth certificate and obtain a personal identification number. Subsequently, the lawyers represented him before the Citizenship Determination Commission at the Department of Civil Status Records, Passportization and Population Registration. Although Abdirayimov was fully entitled to Kyrgyz citizenship, he could not obtain it earlier in his life due to administrative barriers.²⁵⁶ Thanks to the lawyers’ efforts, he finally received his citizenship. Detailed step-by-step instructions on how to assist more individuals like Abdirayimov can be shared with other states working on similar campaigns. These plans can outline the competencies needed by various actors to carry out similar projects and what challenges they may encounter.

Ultimately, the campaign identified 13,707 stateless persons and 13,447 individuals were granted citizenship and received documents.²⁵⁷ The lawyers helped around 55,000 individuals obtain civil and nationality documents through door-to-door visits.²⁵⁸ Due to these efforts, Ashurov was presented with the Nansen Award in 2019; this is granted to an individual, group of people, or an

²⁵³ UNHCR, “Good Practice Papers,” 30.

²⁵⁴ Ashurov, Fergana Lawyers Without Borders; UNHCR, “Good Practice Papers,” 29. The units were made up of: “representatives of territorial Population and Civil Status Acts Registration Departments of the State Registration Service (SRS), regional and local Passport and Visa Registration Work Departments under the State Registration Service, local self-governance bodies, a driver/lawyer’s assistant and a partner NGO lawyer, the latter person being responsible for coordinating the mobile team.”

²⁵⁵ UNDP, “The Long Way to Citizenship Recognition,” 1-2.

²⁵⁶ UNDP, “The Long Way to Citizenship Recognition,” 4-5.

²⁵⁷ ISI and CANS, “Joint Submission,” 6.

²⁵⁸ ENS, “Tackling Statelessness in Kyrgyzstan,” 8.

organization that has done incredible humanitarian work in any of the mandates of the UNHCR: refugees, stateless persons, or displaced people.²⁵⁹ This award was well deserved and only further exemplifies that this work and the efforts of the Ferghana Lawyers were instrumental in Kyrgyzstan's progress towards ending statelessness.

5.4 Best Practices in NGO Collaboration and Data Collection

Gaps in certain areas of the Global Action Plan indicate opportunities where non-UN organizations, such as civil society actors and NGOs, can “play a more important role in preventing and ending statelessness.”²⁶⁰ The case of Kyrgyzstan highlights the pivotal role of NGOs and civil society organizations in addressing statelessness, taking initiative where the government has not yet acted. These groups have significantly contributed to the elimination of statelessness in Kyrgyzstan through a range of activities, including data collection, raising awareness, analyzing challenges, providing legal guidance, and supporting and representing individuals.²⁶¹ The actions taken by Kyrgyzstan have been unprecedented in the region; many of the data mapping projects, collaborations with NGOs, and advocacy efforts by NGOs to encourage the government to enact legislative policies to end statelessness have been identified as pioneering initiatives.

The work of the Ferghana Valley Lawyers, which has now dedicated over 15 years to the fight to end statelessness, exemplifies the importance of the government in facilitating and maintaining connections with NGOs. Furthermore, it illustrates the potential impact of the collective efforts of a single NGO, in collaboration with the government and the UNHCR, in transforming the statelessness situation within a given country. The Ferghana Valley Lawyers can be an inspiring example for other governments and NGOs working in other countries, demonstrating that a small number of dedicated organizations can significantly impact statelessness issues, emphasizing quality over quantity. In collaboration with other organizations, the lawyers were able to effect significant legal reforms due to their advocacy efforts. This further illustrates how NGOs and local civil society organizations can carry out advocacy efforts in areas where the UNHCR is limited due to political sensitivities.²⁶² The UNHCR

²⁵⁹ Ashurov, *Fergana Lawyers Without Borders*.

²⁶⁰ Avenir Analytics, “Evaluation of UNHCR,” iv.

²⁶¹ Engstrom and Obi, “UNHCR’s Role,” 18.

²⁶² Avenir Analytics, “Evaluation of UNHCR,” 42.

should encourage NGOs that address statelessness issues to undertake further awareness campaigns to stimulate or strengthen political will within a state.

One of the best practices that can be learned from NGOs operating in Kyrgyzstan is using high-quality, aggregated data to solve statelessness issues. To prevent statelessness and protect stateless persons, governments, the UNHCR, and other organizations need to be able to identify who is stateless.²⁶³ Investing in accurate and reliable data collection is essential to support the efforts to make all stateless cases known. Furthermore, specific data collected on statelessness helps governments to decide where to begin taking action. For example, in Kyrgyzstan, data collection by NGOs allowed the government to adopt specific legislation or policies based on the aggregated data they received.

When conducting surveys in a country is not feasible, censuses are a valuable starting point for determining the number and location of stateless persons in a state. Currently, the UNHCR is working “with states and NGOs to undertake targeted surveys and studies and to incorporate questions that allow for the identification of stateless persons in population and housing censuses.”²⁶⁴ UNHCR headquarters and regional office staff have indicated that including questions on statelessness in national censuses would be more time and cost effective than conducting a direct survey; however, measuring statelessness with a population census presents its own challenges. Some individuals may believe they have citizenship when they actually do not, or vice versa.²⁶⁵ Moreover, there is a larger data gap associated with using the census because it is not conducted annually, and certain states may have to wait a significant amount of time before they are able to add questions about statelessness to the census.²⁶⁶ As seen in the case of Kyrgyzstan, aggregated data can only be collected through surveys, not censuses, as there is no space in the latter to accommodate multiple statelessness-related questions. These challenges exemplify that it is important for states that are beginning to address statelessness to conduct nationwide or regional surveys. This allows them to understand the statelessness situation in their country and identify individuals who are at risk of statelessness, as demonstrated by the positive impacts of the surveys in Kyrgyzstan. However, if conducting surveys is not feasible, a census can provide a valuable overview.

²⁶³ UNHCR, “Global Trends 2019,” 3.

²⁶⁴ UNHCR, “Global Trends 2019,” 4.

²⁶⁵ OSCE and UNHCR, “Handbook on Statelessness,” 45.

²⁶⁶ Cherednichenko, UNHCR Headquarters: Statelessness.

The UNHCR may consider using states such as Kyrgyzstan as an example to demonstrate to other states that data collection does not need to be intimidating or daunting when collaborating with NGOs and civil society groups. Initially, the Kyrgyz Republic conducted only a few surveys with NGOs to obtain data on stateless populations. As their campaign progressed, they updated these numbers annually as cases were resolved or if new, previously unregistered cases became known. This can illustrate to other countries how collaborating with NGOs can alleviate some of the state's responsibilities, and how a well-conducted survey can reduce the need for subsequent data collection. The UNHCR should actively encourage states to further collaborate with NGOs working on statelessness issues and consistently provide funding for mapping efforts, as exemplified through successful programs such as the "Seeds for Solutions" initiative in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan. However, allocating significant funds and resources on data collection could be ineffective if a state lacks government interest or political will to act on the results.²⁶⁷ This highlights the crucial link between political will and data collection, emphasizing its important role in the success of initiatives post-surveying or mapping.

Addressing statelessness requires ongoing engagement with local, national, regional, and global actors working on these issues, as the UNHCR cannot resolve each individual case of statelessness on its own.²⁶⁸ In the 2019 midpoint meeting of the UNHCR campaign, NGOs and civil society organizations pledged to "support governments in the establishment or implementation of national or regional action plans," as well as to participate in "awareness raising, training, or fundraising [and] outreach and legal assistance."²⁶⁹ The UNHCR should act as a facilitator between these organizations and their respective governments, assisting in plan development and providing funding to help them achieve their goals and fulfill their pledges. While the work of NGOs is supported by the UNHCR, emerging networks on statelessness are also becoming crucial in the campaign to end statelessness.²⁷⁰ Independent organizations have observed that global and regional cooperation has enabled them to broaden their work on statelessness issues. Regional networks and conferences have notably influenced Central Asian states and NGOs, positively contributing to Kyrgyzstan's efforts to address statelessness within its borders.

²⁶⁷ Avenir Analytics, "Evaluation of UNHCR," 38.

²⁶⁸ Engstrom and Obi, "UNHCR's Role," 16; Avenir Analytics, "Evaluation of UNHCR," 53.

²⁶⁹ UNHCR, "High-Level Segment," 8.

²⁷⁰ Cherednichenko, UNHCR Headquarters: Statelessness.

Chapter 6: Impacts of Kyrgyzstan's Engagement with Regional Organizations on Statelessness

When the UN was first established, regional arrangements were viewed as “competing with and detrimental to the universal approach embodied in the UN.”²⁷¹ Today, however, regional organizations are widely accepted and even encouraged, with the recognition that states must work together to solve shared problems. These organizations are defined as entities that foster cooperation among three or more countries or NGOs, working for mutual goals in specific issue areas. They provide legitimacy to projects, maintain strong community ties, possess local knowledge, and can provide resources such as personnel with experience in the issues being addressed.²⁷² Regional cooperation is necessary to ensure that all states share the responsibility for granting citizenship to everyone in their region. This is especially true in Central Asia, where many of the stateless cases require input from neighboring states.²⁷³ In this region, countries must work together for mutual gain, as the legislation and actions of one state can significantly impact the number of statelessness cases in another.

In the early 2000s, international conversations regarding statelessness began to stir between activists, NGOs, UN organizations, and local groups; however, there was little coordination between the groups themselves.²⁷⁴ These groups were criticized for their inability to influence the actions of the states in which they operated, and their involvement was primarily limited to advocacy efforts and legal arguments.²⁷⁵ In the present era, more organizations²⁷⁵ have emerged and are engaged in direct collaboration with stateless populations across the globe, as well as with one another.

The UNHCR itself has played a significant role in facilitating many meetings both between states and NGOs, thanks to the efforts of their regional offices. These dialogues lead to “increased knowledge and awareness,” as well as “regional treaties, agreements and plans of action with obligations for Member States.”²⁷⁶ In a report analyzing UNHCR’s statelessness initiatives, key informants highlighted the importance of regional initiatives, stating that they “help elevate consideration of statelessness above sometimes contentious national political and cultural issues, create

²⁷¹ Alagappa, “Regional Institutions, the UN and International Security: A framework for analysis,” 422.

²⁷² Alagappa, “Regional Institutions, the UN and International Security,” 422-423.

²⁷³ UNHCR, “Comparative Legal Analysis,” 60.

²⁷⁴ Mantu, *Contingent Citizenship*, 30.

²⁷⁵ Mantu, *Contingent Citizenship*, 30.

²⁷⁶ Avenir Analytics, “Evaluation of UNHCR,” 23.

positive peer pressure, and share lessons and good practices.”²⁷⁷ This is precisely what has happened within the Central Asian region, where sharing best practices among countries with similar backgrounds of statelessness has led to more cases being resolved.

6.1 Central Asian Regional Cooperation

Central Asia is "an inspiring example that when there is political will and collaboration, statelessness can be eradicated.”²⁷⁸ One in every three resolved cases of statelessness in the world occurred in this region.²⁷⁹ Kyrgyzstan was the first country to resolve all known cases of statelessness, Uzbekistan has resolved the most cases of statelessness, and Tajikistan plans to become the second country in the world to resolve all cases of known statelessness by the end of this year.²⁸⁰ Regional cooperation has been instrumental in the campaign’s success in this region.

The organizational structure of the UNHCR statelessness team consists of national offices, regional offices, and headquarters in Geneva. Requests for cross-regional communications are typically channeled through the regional offices. The regional office representative would organize meetings for states in the region, facilitating the exchange of best practices and important information. Afterward, the most effective practices were disseminated to other regions globally.²⁸¹ Upon opening its Almaty multi-country office in the Central Asian Region, the UNHCR began promoting discussions on statelessness and advocated for accession to the Refugee and Statelessness Conventions. Each year, the Almaty office collaborates with NGOs to assess the prevalence of statelessness in the region and to collect proposals outlining suggested solutions and required resources for implementation.²⁸²

The necessity for cross-country communication in this region can be attributed to the specific proximity and interconnection of stateless individuals in the area. It is not uncommon for a stateless person to reside in Kyrgyzstan yet ethnically originate from one of the other Central Asian states. This communication is also necessary because when applying for statelessness status, inquiries about lack of citizenship should only be made in states where the applicant has a link of descent, marriage,

²⁷⁷ Avenir Analytics, “Evaluation of UNHCR,” 23.

²⁷⁸ UNHCR, “Statelessness in Central Asia Can Be Eradicated Soon.”

²⁷⁹ Gaina, *Statelessness In Central Asia*

²⁸⁰ Ashurov, *Ferggana Lawyers Without Borders*; Gaina, *Statelessness In Central Asia*.

²⁸¹ Cherednichenko, UNHCR Headquarters: Statelessness. For example, in 2022, as the regional officer for Europe, Cherednichenko facilitated connections and supported efforts for Kyrgyzstan to visit Georgia to study best practices.

²⁸² Gaina, *Statelessness In Central Asia*.

birthplace, long-term residence, or other similar traits.²⁸³ In Central Asia, applicants may have legal access to citizenship of another state within the region. Therefore, collaboration is necessary to effectively resolve cases of statelessness.²⁸⁴

Cross-country cooperation has been a feature of this region due to internal migration during and immediately after the collapse of the USSR. Consequently, many individuals from different ethnic groups settled within the borders of different states, which led to numerous challenges. For instance, ethnic Tajiks who settled in the Batken region of Kyrgyzstan in the 1990s and purchased homes could not obtain valid purchase or sale documents because of their statelessness status. As a result of cooperation between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, these individuals gained access to a simplified procedure for acquiring Kyrgyz citizenship in June of 2002, which allowed them to legally register their homes and regain ownership.²⁸⁵ These types of agreements were typically bilateral in nature, but since the mid-2000s, the UNHCR has facilitated the establishment of more formal means of communication between all the states in the region. In Central Asia, the UNHCR organizes one or two regional events annually. Such events often include roundtable conferences, during which participants share best practices with other representatives from the region.²⁸⁶ These regional conferences have resulted in more resolved statelessness cases and increased visibility of the issue in Central Asia.

6.2 UNHCR-Led Regional Roundtables and Conferences

In 2007, with funding from the European Union, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees convened a conference in Dushanbe for representatives of the governments of all the Central Asian states.²⁸⁷ The conference attendees engaged in discussions about governments' initiatives to replace USSR passports, naturalize significant numbers of stateless individuals, establish new legal frameworks for stateless individuals permanently residing within their states, and accede to the conventions. Representatives observed that the official number of stateless persons in Central Asia did not accurately reflect the true situation in the region. They also recognized that campaigns to

²⁸³ UNHCR, "Handbook on Protection of Stateless Persons," 35.

²⁸⁴ UNHCR, "Handbook on Protection of Stateless Persons," 42.

²⁸⁵ Farquharson, "Statelessness in Central Asia," 71.

²⁸⁶ Gaina, *Statelessness In Central Asia*.

²⁸⁷ Uzbekistan did not attend.

disseminate information in areas with significant populations of stateless persons were crucial to ensure that stateless individuals know their rights and how they can obtain citizenship.²⁸⁸

In May 2009, the regional office initiated a project to identify effective strategies for the prevention, reduction, and protection of stateless persons. The project aimed to identify best practices and any gaps in legislation or administrative procedures in the region. That same year, the UNHCR convened a series of roundtables, culminating in the Regional Conference on Prevention and Reduction of Statelessness and Protection of Stateless Persons in Central Asia, held in Turkmenistan.²⁸⁹ Best practices were shared, with a particular focus on identifying stateless individuals and developing solutions to large-scale cases of statelessness through legislative reforms, referencing international standards.²⁹⁰ Kyrgyzstan demonstrated how the UNHCR's support of their initiative to conduct surveys led to the identification of more than 10,000 stateless individuals.²⁹¹ This example illustrated how other states could learn from Kyrgyzstan's experience and become inspired to conduct similar surveys. The conference concluded that the prevention and resolution of statelessness situations require the involvement of many actors, including "the cooperation of other States."²⁹²

In October 2013, the UNHCR convened another roundtable in Kazakhstan on statelessness, status determination procedures, and law reform, with representatives from Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan in attendance. It was observed that multi and bilateral agreements were necessary for states to share information concerning statelessness applicants or those requesting nationality determination within the region. The participants shared their experiences and insights regarding implementing national law reforms and informed the UNHCR that they required assistance to conduct outreach campaigns, technical guidance on reforming national legislation, and advice on registration initiatives.²⁹³ In all three states, registration campaigns were conducted with the UNHCR's assistance in the following year. This further demonstrates that the regional roundtables and information sharing between states lead to outcomes that help resolve statelessness.

²⁸⁸ Farquharson, "Statelessness in Central Asia," 3.

²⁸⁹ Farquharson, "Statelessness in Central Asia," 3.

²⁹⁰ OSCE and UNHCR, "Handbook on Statelessness," 88.

²⁹¹ UNHCR, "Small Changes - Big Gains," 10.

²⁹² UNHCR, "Universal Periodic Review: Kyrgyzstan," 9. At this conference, government representatives from Slovakia and Ukraine also shared best practices on initiatives to end statelessness in their respective countries. This demonstrates that cooperation between states can sometimes extend beyond the region to include countries facing similar issues.

²⁹³ UNHCR "Roundtable on Statelessness," 1.

In 2016, the OSCE and UNHCR held a Regional Conference on Accession to the Statelessness Conventions. Representatives from three countries parties to the Statelessness Conventions, Turkmenistan, Georgia, and Moldova, provided detailed information on a range of topics to Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan, which are not parties to the conventions.²⁹⁴ The participants shared their experiences regarding the impact of signing the conventions, including both successes and challenges.²⁹⁵ The topics discussed included migration, security, legislation, and documentation, all of which are issues raised by Central Asian states when they express their reluctance to accede to the conventions.²⁹⁶ The cross-regional and regional dissemination of best practices proved to be an effective strategy, as representatives from Kyrgyzstan visited Georgia in 2022 to continue studying their efforts in eradicating statelessness.

The UNHCR and the National Human Rights Centre of the Republic of Uzbekistan co-hosted a roundtable on statelessness with the Central Asian States in March 2021. During the conference, states presented their most effective strategies for eliminating statelessness and any significant accomplishments they had achieved in this regard. For example, Uzbekistan reported it had been implementing a new procedure under which 20,000 stateless individuals would be able to apply for citizenship due to their long, permanent residence in the country for over 15 years.²⁹⁷ In May 2023, the UNHCR convened another round table, bringing together UN agencies, civil society representatives, and Central Asian government officials for discussions aimed at eliminating statelessness in the region by the campaign's conclusion in 2024. Participants shared best practices on universal birth registration, discussed accession to the Statelessness Conventions, strategies for resolving individual cases, and improving data and statistics on stateless populations. The Global Refugee Forum of 2023 was highlighted, with states expected to generate statelessness-related pledges by the end of the year. This roundtable underscored the significance of data-driven approaches and regional collaboration in the protection, prevention, and identification of stateless individuals in Central Asia, where over 180,000 statelessness cases had been resolved by this time.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁴ The additional CIS states were invited because Turkmenistan is the only Central Asian state party to either convention.

²⁹⁵ OSCE and UNHCR, "Handbook on Statelessness," 67.

²⁹⁶ Gaina, *Statelessness In Central Asia*.

²⁹⁷ UNHCR, "Statelessness in Central Asia Can Be Eradicated Soon."

²⁹⁸ UNHCR, "UNHCR and Government Representatives Meeting Enhances Efforts to End Statelessness in Central Asia."

Regional cooperation has facilitated the resolution of statelessness in instances where the involvement of one state was necessary to address issues in another. For example, Turkmenistan authorities sent letters to Tajikistan concerning the citizenship status of several hundred individuals, requesting that they determine whether or not they were citizens. Despite the simplicity of the request, as most responses could have been as straightforward as “yes” or “no,” Turkmenistan received no reply. During one of the UNHCR-hosted roundtables, representatives from both states discussed the issue at hand. Within a month, Tajikistan confirmed that hundreds of these individuals were indeed stateless, and Turkmenistan authorities could use this information to resolve their citizenship status.²⁹⁹ Such outcomes underscore the importance of UNHCR support in facilitating regional connections, enabling states to collaborate more efficiently and benefit from insights gained through shared exchanges of experiences.

6.3 The Central Asian Network on Statelessness

For the past two decades, the UNHCR has promoted regional cooperation among Central Asian states; however, NGOs have also taken the initiative to establish their own networks of cooperation. In 2015, the UNHCR organized a regional conference in collaboration with the Ferghana Lawyers. Representatives from the UNHCR, the European Network on Statelessness (ENS), ten NGOs, four media agencies, and three universities were invited to discuss the potential formation of a network for NGOs and civil society organizations in Central Asia.³⁰⁰ The conference showcased examples of stateless networks from around the world, discussed fundraising activities, and addressed common concerns or challenges related to forming a network. Participants recognized shared similarities in their statelessness issues and that collaboration would be necessary to address these challenges effectively.³⁰¹

Initially, there was a significant reluctance to establish a regional network due to concerns about its feasibility and the potential political implications. Allan Leas, chair of trustees of the European Network on Statelessness and a key figure in its establishment, was approached by the UNHCR and the Ferghana Lawyers Without Borders to share his experience and expertise in creating a regional network on statelessness. He emphasized that the countries’ hesitation did not stem from a lack of interest but

²⁹⁹ Gaina, *Statelessness In Central Asia*.

³⁰⁰ UNHCR Protection Unit, “Outcomes of the Civil Society Retreat ‘Ending Statelessness in Central Asia,’” 1.

³⁰¹ UNHCR Protection Unit, “Outcomes of the Civil Society Retreat,” 2. Examples of other organizations included the European Network on Statelessness (ENS), the European Legal Network on Asylum (ELENA), the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), and AMERA International (AMERA).

rather from doubts about the feasibility of the network: “They just didn’t think it was possible knowing themselves, knowing the grouping, knowing their politics, [and knowing their] individual challenges in their respective countries.”³⁰² While Leas couldn’t provide financial support, he offered expertise and solidarity from the ENS and helped them recognize the network’s potential for success.³⁰³

Leas shared the operation model of the ENS and explained to the organizations interested in establishing the Central Asian Network on Statelessness (CANS) that while the network could thrive, it would take effort. He highlighted that it took him and his colleagues approximately ten years to build the ENS network.³⁰⁴ The Ferghana Valley Lawyers Without Borders drafted the memorandum for the establishment of the CANS, and Lease facilitated the creation of a strategic plan outlining the organization’s vision for the next few years, providing guidance on garnering international support, including how to fundraise.³⁰⁵ The UNHCR indicated that it would “follow up on the points agreed and facilitate, to the extent possible, creation and birth of the Central Asian Civil Society Network on Statelessness.”³⁰⁶ With follow-up meetings and mentoring, the CANS network was able to increase in membership and grow.³⁰⁷ This exemplifies the necessity of regional collaboration while also underscoring the importance of global cooperation.

In June 2016, the CANS was established, composed of representatives from 15 NGOs active in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.³⁰⁸ It acts as a forum for collaboration among civil society, journalists, and academics on matters related to statelessness in Central Asia.³⁰⁹ The network’s website serves as a repository for information about national legislation, making it more accessible to representatives of various organizations and stateless persons alike.³¹⁰ Through several initiatives, the CANS has facilitated connections between states and organizations in the region to facilitate the sharing of expertise and advice on ending statelessness. One such initiative is the opportunity for lawyers from different NGOs in the network to assist one another in collecting necessary documentation for identity verification purposes. This could include medical forms,

³⁰² Leas, European Network on Statelessness.

³⁰³ Leas, European Network on Statelessness.

³⁰⁴ Leas, European Network on Statelessness.

³⁰⁵ UNHCR Protection Unit, “Outcomes of the Civil Society Retreat,” 2.

³⁰⁶ UNHCR Protection Unit, “Outcomes of the Civil Society Retreat,” 5.

³⁰⁷ ENS, “Interview- Azizbek Ashurov, Winner of the 2019 Nansen Award,” 1-2.

³⁰⁸ High Commissioner’s Programme, “Overview of UNHCR’s Operations in Asia and the Pacific,” 1.

³⁰⁹ ENS, “Tackling Statelessness in Kyrgyzstan,” 14.

³¹⁰ UNHCR Protection Unit, “Outcomes of the Civil Society Retreat,” 3.

statements from persons acquainted with the individual in question, documents from archives, or other relevant materials.³¹¹ Additionally, an internal referral system was created to share and compare case law, easing the work involved with cases where an individual had ties to multiple states—a common occurrence in this region.³¹²

CANS also facilitated study exchanges, such as sending representatives from Tajikistan to Kyrgyzstan to learn about its “pilot campaign to reduce statelessness.”³¹³ Consequently, Tajikistan launched a similar registration campaign from 2016 to 2018, identifying 24,000 stateless cases and resolving a significant proportion of them.³¹⁴ Tajikistan’s campaign included sharing information about their recently enacted Amnesty Law, which granted residence permits to thousands of stateless individuals and provided them access to a simplified, three-year citizenship application.³¹⁵ This exemplifies the direct impact of regional collaboration, where one state can learn from another’s experiences. In this case, Tajikistan benefited from studying Kyrgyzstan’s awareness and registration campaigns, demonstrating how the CANS facilitated the transfer of knowledge and best practices, helping to resolve more stateless cases in Central Asia.

In Uzbekistan, following collaboration between the CANS, the UNHCR, and the newly elected government, amnesty amendments were enacted, resulting in 54,000 individuals being permitted to apply for citizenship without fees.³¹⁶ Furthermore, new legislation was implemented that conferred citizenship upon thousands of additional individuals, significantly improving the situation of statelessness.³¹⁷ Prior to these changes, Uzbekistan harbored over 97,000 documented cases of statelessness, representing one of the largest stateless populations globally.³¹⁸ Both Tajikistan and Uzbekistan subsequently implemented policies similar to those in Kyrgyzstan after the CANS was formed. While these states may have had some political will or NGO involvement prior to the formation of the network which also contributed to increased work on statelessness issues, the opportunity to share and learn from best practices within the region led to a greater number of stateless

³¹¹ UNHCR Protection Unit, “Outcomes of the Civil Society Retreat,” 3.

³¹² Gaina, *Statelessness In Central Asia*.

³¹³ Gaina, *Statelessness In Central Asia*.

³¹⁴ ENS, “Tackling Statelessness in Kyrgyzstan,” 15.

³¹⁵ Global COVID19 Consortium, “Central Asia Together We Can,” 3.

³¹⁶ Ashurov, *Fergana Lawyers Without Borders*.

³¹⁷ Ganiev, *Central Asian Network on Statelessness*.

³¹⁸ Global COVID19 Consortium, “Central Asia Together We Can,” 4.

cases to be resolved in their respective countries. This highlights the essential role of regional organizations in ending statelessness.

One of CAN's key strengths is its ability to flourish due to its core activities of exchanging best practices and casework, which do not require substantial financial resources. This focus has prevented the organization from needing to engage in extensive fundraising initiatives, which can cause individuals or organizations belonging to a network to lose interest and drift away.³¹⁹ However, the network faces other challenges, particularly in raising awareness and engaging more organizations in addressing the issue of statelessness. It is evident that a limited number of organizations in the region are aware of the issue and the necessary initiatives needed to eradicate it. In Central Asia, many organizations are instead affiliated with networks on education, youth, civil rights, and anti-torture efforts.³²⁰ This lack of awareness makes it difficult for the CANS to attract close partners in the region. CANS also recognized that the lack of diplomatic representations from various countries in all Central Asian states poses a challenge in resolving individual cases, underscoring the importance of establishing collaborative relationships with other stateless networks around the world.³²¹ Despite its limited size and challenges, the network is highly influential, capable of operating independently and adapting to changing circumstances.³²² Since the inception of the CANS and throughout the GAP campaign, over 57,000 cases of statelessness have been resolved, and 154,000 stateless persons have been identified in the Central Asian region.³²³

6.4 Best Practices in Regional Organizations to Foster Collaboration and Mutual Learning

The dissemination of best practices in the Central Asian region has been instrumental in eradicating statelessness in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia. For two decades, Central Asian states have been convening to discuss issues of statelessness, share best practices, and eventually create their own regional network. This cooperation has facilitated Kyrgyzstan's efforts to end statelessness by allowing it to engage in discourse with states experiencing similar problems. Given the interrelated nature of the issue with the laws and policies of other states, communication was essential. The importance of this cross-country cooperation was emphasized by a CANS member organization, which stated: "The

³¹⁹ Leas, European Network on Statelessness.

³²⁰ Ashurov, Fergana Lawyers Without Borders.

³²¹ UNHCR Protection Unit, "Outcomes of the Civil Society Retreat," 4.

³²² Ashurov, Fergana Lawyers Without Borders.

³²³ ENS, "Tackling Statelessness in Kyrgyzstan," 17.

Central Asia network for statelessness work is crucial for coordinating and effectively addressing the issue in the region. In particular, feedback mechanisms on addressing statelessness complaints are impossible without the Central Asia Network and its partners.³²⁴ This illustrates the value and necessity of the network for states and NGOs operating in this region.

To address the issue of statelessness in a region, it is important to harmonize the legislation of countries whose statelessness issues are interconnected to ensure that no gaps remain. This can be achieved by encouraging states to implement legislation in accordance with “generally accepted principles and norms of international law” when addressing issues that require regional uniformity or bilateral agreements.³²⁵ For example, stateless individuals in the region informed the UNHCR that “other states did not recognize their statelessness documentation as valid or a basis for issuing visas.”³²⁶ Apart from visa fees, the lack of recognition of documents poses a significant barrier to travel for officially recognized stateless individuals. This exemplifies the need for regional collaboration, as stateless individuals cannot enjoy freedom of movement unless other states recognize their documents as valid. The most effective way to align national legislation is to promote state accession to the conventions through regional networks and provide examples of best practices from other states. This can only be achieved through regional collaboration, facilitated by networks like CANS or with UNHCR assistance.

State-to-state engagement is also needed to build political will in countries to address statelessness.³²⁷ By analyzing specific challenges within each country, the UNHCR can facilitate connections between states to help them discover solutions that originate from their own ideas. This approach enables the UNHCR to assume a more facilitative role, assisting states in taking leadership and pride in their initiatives. For example, the UNHCR could use their regional office or CANS to facilitate an exchange for representatives from the governments of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, along with NGOs, to study Kyrgyzstan’s legislative changes regarding consulate registration. Many Uzbekistan and Tajikistan citizens who moved to Kyrgyzstan became stateless due to requirements for consulate registration, which could lead to loss of citizenship if not completed. The prevalence of statelessness in Kyrgyzstan will persist if other countries continue the practice of citizenship

³²⁴ Ganiev, Central Asian Network on Statelessness.

³²⁵ UNHCR, “A Place to Call Home,” 36.

³²⁶ Farquharson, “Statelessness in Central Asia,” 44.

³²⁷ OSCE and UNHCR, “Handbook on Statelessness,” 5.

renunciation due to lack of registration, illustrating how statelessness issues can be affected by decisions made by neighboring states. Cross-border regional cooperation is necessary to demonstrate the potential benefits of removing these laws and to encourage governments to have the political will to change their legislations.

Another potential initiative that could be undertaken through regional cooperation is addressing an issue that all states in a region have committed to. All Central Asian countries (except Uzbekistan) and the CANS submitted pledges to work on Action 7 during the 2019 High-Level segment on statelessness.³²⁸ Action 7 strives to “ensure birth registration for the prevention of statelessness,” with the goal of eliminating “reported cases of statelessness due to a lack of birth registration.”³²⁹ Birth registration documents establish a child’s place of birth and parental lineage, thereby determining which country can grant them nationality. While lack of registration does not equate to statelessness, it heightens the risk due to the difficulty children may face in proving their link to the state where they were born.³³⁰ Given that most Central Asian countries have already committed to addressing this issue, the UNHCR is well-positioned to support the CANS in facilitating a roundtable discussion or creating a paper outlining best practices to be shared within the region. An example that could be used is that of the Kyrgyz Republic, which established universal birth registration for children within its borders in 2023. Such an initiative encourages other countries to adopt similar legislative changes and allows Kyrgyzstan to share its best practices and expertise in birth registration.

These regional initiatives could also benefit from global insights from other parts of the world. The UN employs a variety of regional classifications, some based on geographical proximity, while others incorporate social, cultural, or economic factors.³³¹ In Central Asia, all countries were affected by statelessness due to state succession after the dissolution of the USSR, which is why using a regional classification based on geographic proximity was effective. Establishing partnerships with countries outside the region could also be beneficial in cases where specific expertise or similarities on issues are not found within the region itself. For example, the director of the CANS stated that the organization would rely on its international partners to help raise awareness about acceding to the Statelessness Conventions, emphasizing that “collaboration is seen as the most effective way to

³²⁸ UNHCR, “High-Level Segment.” See Appendix D, “Central Asia and the Central Asian Network on Statelessness.”

³²⁹ UNHCR, Global Action Plan, 14.

³³⁰ EEAS, “In Kyrgyzstan as Much as 18,000 Children Are Invisible.”

³³¹ De Lombaerde et al., “UNdefined Regions,” 11. Regions may overlap depending on the classifications provided.

influence state actions,” especially since only one Central Asian state has signed either convention.³³² Additional instances of global cooperation include the ENS providing expertise on network formation to the CANS, as well as occasions when non-Central Asian countries participated in study exchanges or shared their expertise in regional round tables. These examples underscore how cross-regional cooperation can benefit regional organizations and states working to end statelessness by providing additional expertise on issues where these countries lack knowledge.

This dissemination of knowledge would go both ways, as Central Asian states also have their own expertise to share with other countries that could aid them in their efforts to end statelessness. For example, in Kyrgyzstan, a significant challenge for surveying was accessing stateless individuals residing in remote mountainous villages. Ashurov and the Ferghana Lawyers Without Borders traveled by horseback from village to village to discover, document, and help grant citizenship to thousands of stateless individuals.³³³ Other states facing similar geographical challenges could collaborate with Kyrgyzstan to facilitate the development of their own action plans using similar methods and learn from their successful coordination of the campaign. In regional terms, this initiative could be implemented in Tajikistan, which also has mountainous areas.³³⁴ Additionally, cross-regional connections could be established with other states globally that encounter difficulties in accessing remote areas when trying to register stateless individuals.

In other regions of the world, it could benefit the UNHCR to identify similar areas where regional organizations could be established to work on parallel initiatives. These organizations could include a small number of countries, as the CANS, or be as large as the ENS. The sharing of best practices will facilitate progress and even allow the UNHCR to take a more supportive role as these organizations take charge. Most importantly, stateless organizations themselves are seeking to collaborate with other organizations addressing similar issues. For instance, the director of United Statelessness said that one of the organization’s focal points is global work, aiming to connect to similar organizations because “statelessness is everywhere.” She believes that the eradication of statelessness on a global scale will be contingent upon the collective efforts of grassroots organizations,

³³² ENS, “Interview- Azizbek Ashurov,” 4.

³³³ Gaina, *Statelessness In Central Asia*.

³³⁴ CIA, “Tajikistan.”

which will act as the driving force behind the necessary change.³³⁵ Regional organizations will play a vital role in coordinating these efforts.

Through participation in regional networks, UNHCR conferences, and regional roundtables, Kyrgyzstan and its supporting NGOs have not only inspired other states to take action based on their own efforts but have also gained valuable insights from neighboring states on addressing issues related to statelessness. These regional initiatives have led to many positive outcomes. The NGOs and states participating have received expertise and support in their efforts to end statelessness. Moreover, the CANS has strengthened political will in Central Asian states by operating outside the constraints of national regulations and creating peer pressure amongst participating countries. It is evident that regional networks represent a crucial element in eradicating statelessness in Kyrgyzstan because of their unique ability to disseminate information, foster political will, and share best practices.

³³⁵ Ambartsoumian-Clough, *United Statelessness*.

Chapter 7: Recommendations for the UNHCR and the New Global Alliance

This research aimed to identify the most effective strategies for ending statelessness in the Kyrgyz Republic and to demonstrate their applicability to other countries working on the issue. This is particularly significant within the current timeframe, as the 2014 Global Action Plan concludes at the end of 2024, and the UNHCR is launching a new Global Alliance by year-end. It is crucial to examine case studies such as that of Kyrgyzstan to inform the design of new initiatives, projects, or actions to achieve zero cases of statelessness in other countries. Through the example of Kyrgyzstan, we see that although a state could get to zero cases, its work on statelessness will have to continue to prevent new cases from emerging. Furthermore, understanding the successes of the Central Asian states can inform regional and global strategies to combat statelessness. This study can help to prevent the repetition of past mistakes or ensure the replication of successful plans.

The UNHCR's objective in their 2023-2026 organization's vision was to increase the number of countries that show political will to end statelessness, increase access to statelessness determination procedures and identify documents, increase stateless individuals access to social and economic services provided by the states, and increase empowerment within stateless populations by 2026.³³⁶ This was not an official plan as the campaign was; however, a new 2030 Global Alliance wants to bring more ownership to stateless or previously stateless individuals and "accelerate solutions to statelessness through a collective multi-stakeholder approach."³³⁷ Other than states or previously stateless individuals, this includes academic institutions, civil society, faith-based organizations, and states.³³⁸ It will shift from a UNHCR-driven initiative to one that involves more stateless-led organizations, aiming to reduce some of the bureaucratic processes. For example, the UNHCR would provide secretarial support, while other organizations would take on leadership positions in various components of the plan.³³⁹ The UNHCR can then, in lieu of leadership, provide "resources, legitimacy, and training on structure and how to manage a project."³⁴⁰ In the new plan, the UNHCR must be careful about being overly politically sensitive, ensure that the refugee mandate does not have priority over the stateless

³³⁶ UNHCR, "Plan 2023-2026," 5.

³³⁷ UNHCR, "The New Global Alliance to End Statelessness."

³³⁸ UNHCR, "The New Global Alliance;" Ashurov, Fergana Lawyers Without Borders.

³³⁹ Ashurov, Fergana Lawyers Without Borders.

³⁴⁰ Alagappa, "Regional Institutions, the UN and International Security."

one, and transition from a short-term mindset of net-zero elimination and identification to long-term solutions that include more prevention and protection aspects.³⁴¹

The UNHCR now has a real opportunity to review the old plan to see what needs to be changed for the new one. Currently, it is conducting surveys to gather feedback from governments, NGOs, and civil society about their needs and preferences for the new Global Alliance.³⁴² This consultative process will ensure that certain changes are made; however, these are not predicted to be tremendous as the ten actions in the plan “still represent the reality today.”³⁴³ The UNHCR has already recognized the importance of involving stateless individuals to empower them and create joint solutions, as well as adopting a more supportive role in the new plan. Based on the outcomes of this research, the following additional recommendations can be made.

The UNHCR should implement tailored strategies for engaging with countries based on their political will to address statelessness. Internal factors, such as the state’s political dynamics, and external factors, such as conflict or natural disasters, should be considered. For states resisting working on ending statelessness, the UNHCR should collaborate with external partners (such as NGOs) to gather preliminary data on statelessness in the country and present positive examples of other countries, demonstrating how relatively little effort is required to address statelessness compared to other national issues, to persuade the state into action. In contrast, for states already demonstrating political will, the UNHCR could focus on implementing legal reforms and registering stateless individuals. Regardless of the state’s stance, UNHCR action is needed in all states, not just those showing strong political will.

The UNHCR should also provide increased leadership and technical support to NGOs working on statelessness. Organizations specifically working on the issue have been emerging in the past decade; the UNHCR should help them become leaders in addressing statelessness, taking on a more supportive role. This support includes encouraging the formation of regional organizations focused on statelessness. These regional organizations can empower NGOs to act independently of the pressures exerted by the countries they operate in. They can also facilitate the sharing of best practices and communication on issues arising from cultural, geographical, political, or other similarities.

³⁴¹ Avenir Analytics, “Evaluation of UNHCR,” viii.

³⁴² Cherednichenko, UNHCR Headquarters: Statelessness.

³⁴³ Cherednichenko, UNHCR Headquarters: Statelessness. The questionnaire includes questions about stakeholder’s opinions on whether specific points of the action plan should be removed or joined, whether they consider these actions to be the most crucial for the UNHCR to prioritize, and if other points not listed should be included.

Additionally, the UNHCR should organize regional meetings between government representatives, allowing states to encourage one another and share responsibility for ending statelessness.

The UNHCR should also encourage data collection surveys, using new International Recommendations on Statelessness Statistics (IROSS) made by EGRISS, at the beginning stages of work on statelessness in a country, as this will identify where support is most needed and what the main issues are. Nearly 80 pledges have been made by states, donors, and international and regional organizations to improve statistics on statelessness, demonstrating a commitment to data collection.³⁴⁴ This will help the UNHCR realize its goals, such as the “reduce” objective in its 3-year plan, which prioritizes advocacy in states with large numbers of stateless persons with ties to the country. Accurate data is necessary to identify these countries.

Temporary asylum procedures must accompany data collection, as this will encourage more stateless people to become registered. This aligns with another objective outlined in the UNHCR's new plan: “increasing numbers of stateless persons are empowered to claim their rights.”³⁴⁵ Emphasis should be placed on statelessness determination procedures, enabling individuals to receive identity cards and enjoy more rights without obligating the country to grant citizenship immediately. Sharing templates or best practices from other countries would be beneficial, including when group determinations may be appropriate.

The UNHCR needs to go beyond generating general awareness on the issue of statelessness, like in the #IBelong campaign, instead tailoring its messages to specific audiences. A targeted plan is necessary to reach stateless individuals directly, as many are unaware of their status and rights. Furthermore, it is crucial for the UNHCR and governments to train their officials on statelessness, given its relevance in various contexts. Currently, UN officers lack sufficient training or knowledge on statelessness, and government officials typically receive training in specific departments, such as birth registration or passport services, but broader knowledge of statelessness is essential across all departments. The UNHCR can facilitate and encourage these comprehensive training initiatives.

Finally, the UNHCR must address states’ hesitancy to join the conventions on statelessness and dispel misconceptions. States often cite security concerns, apprehension of being compelled to grant citizenship to all stateless persons within their territories, fear of significant reporting obligations, and

³⁴⁴ EGRISS, “Statistical Inclusion Pledge,” 1.

³⁴⁵ UNHCR, “Redoubling Our Efforts,” 3.

potential border overburdening with stateless individuals seeking entry as reasons for not signing the conventions. Data demonstrating positive experiences of other signatory states can effectively counter these concerns. States are keen to study the experiences of other countries and want to understand the “financial, legislative, and administrative implications related to accession.”³⁴⁶ The UNHCR is responsible for providing answers to these issues with supporting data, showing that adopting the conventions has not led to these issues in other countries. Emphasizing that stateless persons must abide by the same laws as citizens, clarifying that there is no requirement in the conventions for states to grant entry to all stateless individuals, and highlighting that registration does not guarantee citizenship or legal residence (with reference to specific convention articles) will help address concerns.³⁴⁷ These efforts have the potential to increase signatories to the conventions, further helping the fight to end statelessness.

³⁴⁶ The High Commissioner’s Programme, “Overview of UNHCR’s Operations in Asia and the Pacific,” 2.

³⁴⁷ Mantu, *Contingent Citizenship*, 20-22.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

The key factors that helped Kyrgyzstan become the first and only country to end all known cases of statelessness during the UNHCR campaign were political will, collaboration with NGOs, and regional cooperation. Through its strong political will, Kyrgyzstan enacted several legislative changes that significantly reduced the number of stateless persons in its country. As the Global Action Plan was designed to not only resolve current cases but also prevent future issues of statelessness, the short-term goal of eradicating statelessness in the country was accompanied by the long-term goal of preventing its reoccurrence.³⁴⁸ In subsequent years, Kyrgyzstan continued to amend its citizenship legislation, this time to prevent statelessness. Kyrgyzstan's efforts led to positive changes regarding statelessness within its legal framework. The UNHCR requires political will and cooperation from states to eliminate statelessness because only states can change their legislation regarding citizenship.

In collaboration with NGOs, Kyrgyzstan employed data mapping campaigns to identify stateless individuals, which led to registration campaigns. Led by efforts of the Ferghana Lawyers Without Borders, all known cases of statelessness were registered and resolved by 2019. Involving stateless individuals in this process was essential to the success of the campaigns. The comprehensive surveying and registration conducted in the region were effective due to the specific data collected, which included information on age, gender, race, socio-economic status, and education, as well as reasons for statelessness and the main issues stateless persons face due to their status.

Regional cooperation has also been crucial in preventing and eradicating statelessness in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia. It has fostered shared responsibility to end statelessness and protect the rights of stateless individuals throughout the region. Statelessness is a regional issue because a state cannot fully eradicate it if policies in neighboring countries continue to create new cases of statelessness within its borders. While bilateral partnerships are meaningful, regional and national coalitions must be developed further to end statelessness as they allow for more collaboration and cooperation. The UNHCR should assume the role of a mediator, facilitating connections between states and regions worldwide to address the issue of statelessness.

The impact of each of these initiatives would have been severely limited in the absence of the others. Moreover, none would have been possible without the support of the UNHCR. In Kyrgyzstan's

³⁴⁸ UNHCR, "High-Level Segment," 3.

plan to end statelessness, no action was more important than any other. Rather, they were all intertwined, and the simultaneous occurrence of these actions allowed for such success in the country. Kyrgyzstan's political will was influenced by data produced by NGOs and their advocacy to alter certain laws. Furthermore, it was impacted by external pressure from other regional states and the Central Asian Network on Statelessness, an international organization less susceptible to pressures from national governments. NGOs fulfilled their objectives and pursued actions due to government support, which enhanced their authority to complete applications and conduct surveys within the state. Regional organizations facilitated NGO operations by disseminating case studies and best practices from other regional states. These organizations can only operate effectively with the support of member NGOs and states willing to share their work and issues. Additionally, regional networks are supported by governments that are open to their suggestions and allow them to strengthen NGO advocacy in the state.

Behind the scenes of all these initiatives was the UNHCR, linking states and organizations, organizing regional round tables, and providing expertise and financial support for government initiatives. Without the UNHCR's assistance, many states, NGOs, and regional organizations would encounter significant challenges in achieving their goals to end statelessness. The UNHCR has actively worked to empower these groups to take ownership of the campaign, and its efforts in the Central Asian region contributed to the realization of the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness in Kyrgyzstan.

Statelessness is a unique issue under the UNHCR's mandate because it is a phenomenon that can actually be resolved.³⁴⁹ While the refugee crisis and internal displacement may continue in various forms, statelessness can be eradicated with proper legal measures, removal of economic barriers, and social support. Legal measures can ensure that future generations have the right to citizenship and protect current citizens from arbitrary deprivation of their nationality. Removing economic barriers will allow individuals to access citizenship, regardless of their financial status. Social support will help stateless individuals understand how to attain citizenship and comprehend the implications of statelessness. In this respect, the UNHCR aims to eliminate the need for future global plans by solving the issue entirely. Although this may not happen within the ten-year time frame the UNHCR hopes for, it is a realistic possibility for the near future. For now, the new Global Alliance is necessary to facilitate

³⁴⁹ Leas, European Network on Statelessness.

the movement against statelessness, and examining best practices, such as those of Kyrgyzstan, will help strengthen this plan.

The impact of statelessness significantly affects an individual's day-to-day life. Our ability to travel, obtain health insurance, receive social security benefits, and seek help from embassies abroad all rely on our citizenship status. Although benefits vary from country to country, one thing is for certain: without citizenship, fundamental human rights and privileges that are meant for all human beings are inaccessible to millions of people worldwide. Ending statelessness means beginning a new era where all individuals may enjoy the full range of human rights to which they are entitled, a world where everyone can state with certainty that they belong.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Minimum International Standards on Nationality

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

Article 24:

1. Every child shall have, without any discrimination as to race, color, sex, language, religion, national or social origin, property or birth, the right to such measures of protection as are required by his status as a minor, on the part of his family, society and the State.
2. Every child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have a name.
3. Every child has the right to acquire a nationality.³⁵⁰

The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)

Article 5:

In compliance with the fundamental obligations laid down in article 2 of this Convention, States Parties undertake to prohibit and to eliminate racial discrimination in all its forms and to guarantee the right of everyone, without distinction as to race, color, or national or ethnic origin, to equality before the law, notably in the enjoyment of the following rights:

- (iii) The right to nationality³⁵¹

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

Article 9:

1. States Parties shall grant women equal rights with men to acquire, change or retain their nationality. They shall ensure in particular that neither marriage to an alien nor change of nationality by the husband during marriage shall automatically change the nationality of the wife, render her stateless or force upon her the nationality of the husband.
2. States Parties shall grant women equal rights with men with respect to the nationality of their children.³⁵²

The Convention on the Rights of the Child

Article 7:

1. The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and, as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents.
2. States Parties shall ensure the implementation of these rights in accordance with their national law and their obligations under the relevant international instruments in this field, in particular where the child would otherwise be stateless.

Article 8:

1. States Parties undertake to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations as recognized by law without unlawful interference.

³⁵⁰ “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,” December 16, 1966.

³⁵¹ “International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,” December 21, 1965.

³⁵² “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,” December 18, 1979.

2. Where a child is illegally deprived of some or all of the elements of his or her identity, States Parties shall provide appropriate assistance and protection with a view to re-establishing speedily his or her identity.³⁵³

The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (CMW)

Article 29:

Each child of a migrant worker shall have the right to a name, to registration of birth and to a nationality.³⁵⁴

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

Article 18:

1. States Parties shall recognize the rights of persons with disabilities to liberty of movement, to freedom to choose their residence and to a nationality, on an equal basis with others, including by ensuring that persons with disabilities:
 - a. Have the right to acquire and change a nationality and are not deprived of their nationality arbitrarily or on the basis of disability;
 - b. Are not deprived, on the basis of disability, of their ability to obtain, possess and utilize documentation of their nationality or other documentation of identification, or to utilize relevant processes such as immigration proceedings, that may be needed to facilitate exercise of the right to liberty of movement;
 - c. Are free to leave any country, including their own;
 - d. Are not deprived, arbitrarily or on the basis of disability, of the right to enter their own country.
2. Children with disabilities shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and, as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by their parents³⁵⁵

³⁵³ “Convention on the Rights of the Child,” November 20, 1989.

³⁵⁴ “International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families,” December 18, 1990.

³⁵⁵ “The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,” December 12, 2006.

*Appendix B: Kyrgyzstan's National Action Plan*³⁵⁶

1. To accelerate exchange of old 1974 standard Soviet passports by the Department of Passport and Visa Control of the Ministry of Interior of the Kyrgyz Republic (with support of UNHCR)
2. To bring relevant by-laws and instructions in compliance with the 2007 Law on Citizenship of the Kyrgyz Republic (the Parliament, Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Justice with support of the working group on citizenship and statelessness)
3. To adopt an Instruction on the procedure for the determination of status of stateless persons (Ministry of Interior with support of the working group on citizenship and statelessness)
4. To introduce accelerated procedures for the naturalization of spouses of Kyrgyz citizens originating from CIS countries (Citizenship Commission, Ministry of Interior with support of the working group on citizenship and statelessness)
5. To prepare implementing comments to the Law on Citizenship of the Kyrgyz Republic (Ministry of Interior with support of academicians and the working group on citizenship and statelessness)
6. To recommend and promote accession of the Kyrgyz Republic to the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness including through a public hearing at Parliament
7. To continue supporting the activities of the working group on citizenship and statelessness
8. To again meet in the spring of 2010 to take stock of the implementation, revise and update this joint work plan

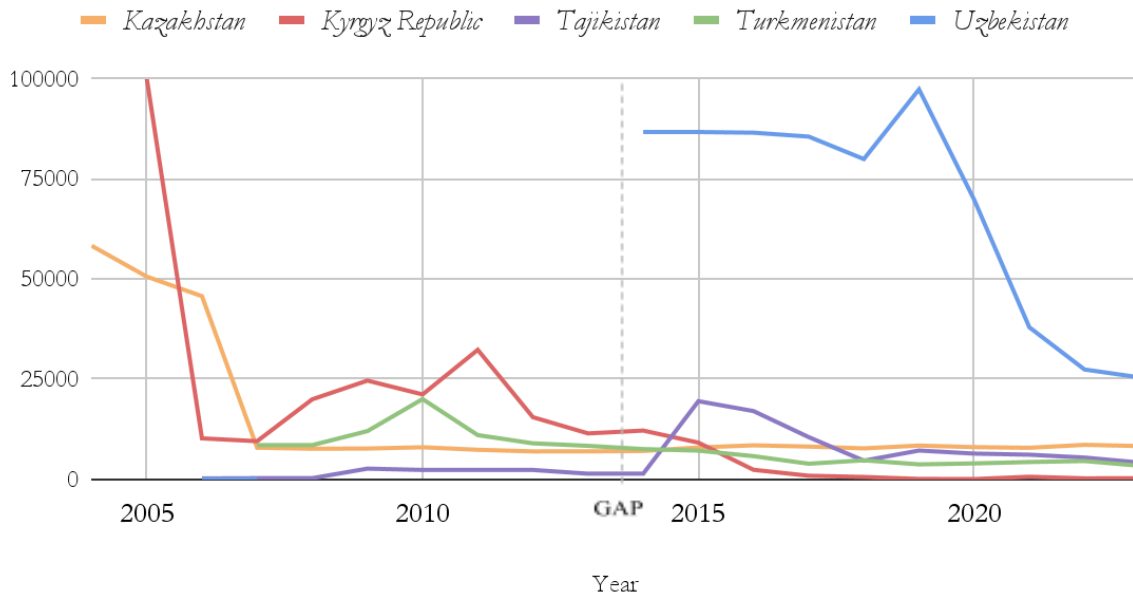
The creation of a National Action Plan: The NAPs require a state to select an action from the GAP. Then, the national context of the action's problem is explained, including both historical and current events. This provides insight to the obstacles and potential manners of assistance in implementation. For each action, the state is also required to define a starting point, a goal (with a date, expected results, and how performance will be tracked), and milestones (with specific dates, detailed activities, and expected results). Finally, responsibility is assigned to the authority in charge of implementing the action, and the support needed from the UNHCR or other stakeholders is identified in detail for each activity. This process is repeated for any action the state decides to address.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁶ UNHCR, "Small Changes - Big Gains: An Action Plan to Prevent and Reduce Statelessness in the Kyrgyz Republic."

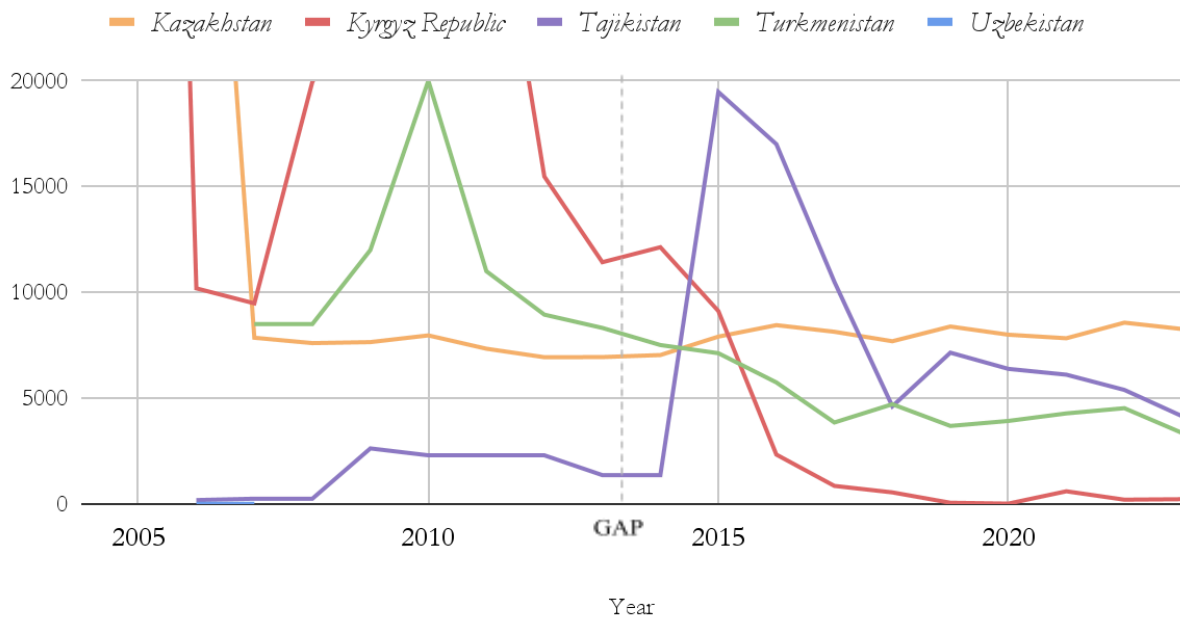
³⁵⁷ OSCE and UNHCR, "Handbook on Statelessness," 125-126.

Appendix C: Statelessness in Numbers - Central Asia

Statelessness in Numbers- Central Asia



Statelessness in Numbers, a Closer Look- Central Asia



Statelessness in Numbers³⁵⁸

KEY: Red boxes highlight significant increases or decreases in statelessness numbers.

GAP

Country	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005
Kazakhstan	8,266	8,569	7,831	7,999	8,386	7,690	8,138	8,451	7,909	7,038	6,942	6,935	7,337	7,966	7,649	7,602	7,856	45,698	50,576
Kyrgyz Republic	227	203	600	18	58	548	855	2,334	9,118	12,133	11,425	15,473	32,300	21,157	24,615	19,943	9,480	10,190	100,000
Tajikistan	4,144	5,391	6,110	6,385	7,151	4,616	10,500	17,002	19,469	1,364	1,364	2,300	2,300	2,300	2,626	249	249	184	
Turkmenistan	3,351	4,527	4,280	3,924	3,688	4,714	3,851	5,744	7,125	7,511	8,320	8,947	11,000	20,000	12,000	8,500	8,500		
Uzbekistan	25,413	27,389	37,933	69,791	97,346	79,942	85,555	86,524	86,703	86,703							6	7	

Growth Rates

KEY: Yellow boxes represent a growth rate greater than 10% or -10%.

GAP

Growth rates	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005
Kazakhstan	-3.54	9.42	-2.1	-4.61	9.05	-5.51	-3.7	6.85	12.38	1.38	0.1	-5.48	-7.9	4.14	0.62	-3.23	-82.81	-9.64	-13.24
Kyrgyz Republic	11.82	-66.17	3233.33	-68.97	-89.42	-35.91	-63.37	-74.4	-24.85	6.2	-26.16	-52.1	52.67	-14.05	23.43	110.37	-6.97	-89.81	
Tajikistan	-23.13	-11.77	-4.31	-10.71	54.92	-56.04	-38.24	-12.67	1327.35	0	-40.7	0	0	-12.41	954.62	0	35.33		
Turkmenistan	-25.98	5.77	9.07	6.4	-21.76	22.41	-32.96	-19.38	-5.14	-9.72	-7.01	-18.66	-45	66.67	41.18	0			
Uzbekistan	-7.21	-27.8	-45.65	-28.31	21.77	-6.56	-1.12	-0.21	0							-100	-14.29		

³⁵⁸ UNHCR, "Refugee Data Finder."

Appendix D: 2019 Pledges - Central Asia and the Central Asian Network on Statelessness³⁵⁹

Country	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Kazakhstan							X			
Kyrgyzstan						X	X		X	
Tajikistan						X	X		X	X
Turkmenistan	X					X	X			X
Uzbekistan										
CANS	X	X					X		X	

KEY

Y = pledge made

³⁵⁹ UNHCR, “High-Level Segment on Statelessness: Results and Highlights.”

Appendix E: 1954 Stateless Convention Accession Date and Subsequent Changes in Stateless Populations³⁶⁰

Country	Accession date	Before Accession Year	Accession Year	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
Romania	2006	400	223	257	253	306	321	275	248	297	299	240	249
Austria	2008	472	464	523	401	464	542	604	570	828	937	1003	1062
Georgia	2011	1826	1569	1156	776	770	627	580	587	566	559	531	530
Turkmenistan	2011	20,000	11,000	8947	8320	7511	7125	5744	3851	4714	3688	3924	4280
Portugal	2012	31	553	553	14	14	14	14	14	50	45	45	24
Republic of Moldova	2012	2073	1998	2029	2036	5014	4776	4569	4451	3500	3405	3343	3307
Côte d'Ivoire	2013	700,000	700,000	700,000	700,000	694000	692000	692000	955,399	954,531	931,166	931,076	931,041
Ukraine	2013	35,000	33,271	35,335	35,228	35,363	35,294	35,650	35,701	35,875	35,933	36,233	36,235
Türkiye	2015	780	780	780	117	117	x	x	x	439	439		
Colombia	2019	11	11	11	11	11	11						
Malta	2019	11	11	11	11	x	x						
Croatia	2020	2896	2900	2890	734	733							
Iceland	2021	65	68	64	64								

³⁶⁰ “Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons,” September 28, 1954;” UNHCR, “Refugee Data Finder.”

KEY:

Yellow: States which also signed the 1961 Convention

Red: Increase in statelessness

Green: Decrease in statelessness

No color: No change in statelessness

X: No numbers reported for that year

States not used if:

1. Data on stateless persons began being collected after accession (ex: Czechia signed in 2004, data not received until 2012 forward)
2. They signed the convention before 2004, as data on statelessness only began to be collected in 2004
3. No data was reported
4. Not enough data was collected (Ex: Liechtenstein signed in 2009, only reported data for 2009, 2010, and 2012; Haiti collected data for four years up until the year it signed, no data after)
5. They are not signatories or have not ratified the treaty (not listed)

1: Bulgaria, Chile, Czechia, Montenegro, Philippines, Rwanda, Uruguay

2: Albania, Algeria, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Azerbaijan, Barbados, Belgium, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Chad, Costa Rica, Denmark, Ecuador, Fiji, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Guinea-Bissau, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kiribati, Latvia, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Mexico, Mozambique, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Norway, Paraguay, Peru, Republic of Korea, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Sweden, Switzerland, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Uganda, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Zambia, Zimbabwe

3: Angola, Belize, Benin, Burkina Faso, Congo, El Salvador, Eswatini, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Honduras, Mali, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo

4: Haiti, Liechtenstein, Panama

Appendix F: Annual Growth Rates of Stateless Population Changes Post-1954 Stateless Convention Accession³⁶¹

Country	Year Before	Year of Accession	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
Romania	0	-44.25	15.25	-1.56	20.95	4.9	-14.33	-9.82	19.76	0.67	-19.73	3.75
Austria	-5.79	-1.69	12.72	-23.33	15.71	16.81	11.44	-5.63	45.26	13.16	7.04	5.88
Georgia	8.88	-14.07	-26.32	-32.87	-0.77	-18.57	-7.5	1.21	-3.58	-1.24	-5.01	-0.19
Turkmenistan*	66.67	-45.00	-18.66	-7.01	-9.72	-5.14	-19.38	-32.96	22.41	-21.76	6.40	9.07
Portugal	0	1683.87	0	-97.47	0	0	0	0	257.14	-10	0	-46.67
Republic of Moldova	2.07	-3.62	1.55	0.34	146.27	-4.75	-4.33	-2.58	-21.37	-2.71	-1.82	-1.08
Côte d'Ivoire		0.00	0.00	0.00	-0.86	-0.29	0.00	38.06	-0.09	-2.45	-0.01	0.00
Ukraine	-12.10	-4.94	6.20	-0.30	0.38	-0.20	1.01	0.14	0.49	0.16	0.83	0.01
Türkiye	0	0	0	-85	0	x	x	x	x	0		
Colombia	0	0	0	0	0	0						
Malta	0	0	0	0	x	x						
Croatia*	0.35	0.14	-0.34	-74.6	-0.14							
Iceland	12.07	4.62	-5.88	0								

³⁶¹ “Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons,” September 28, 1954;” UNHCR, “Refugee Data Finder.”

KEY:

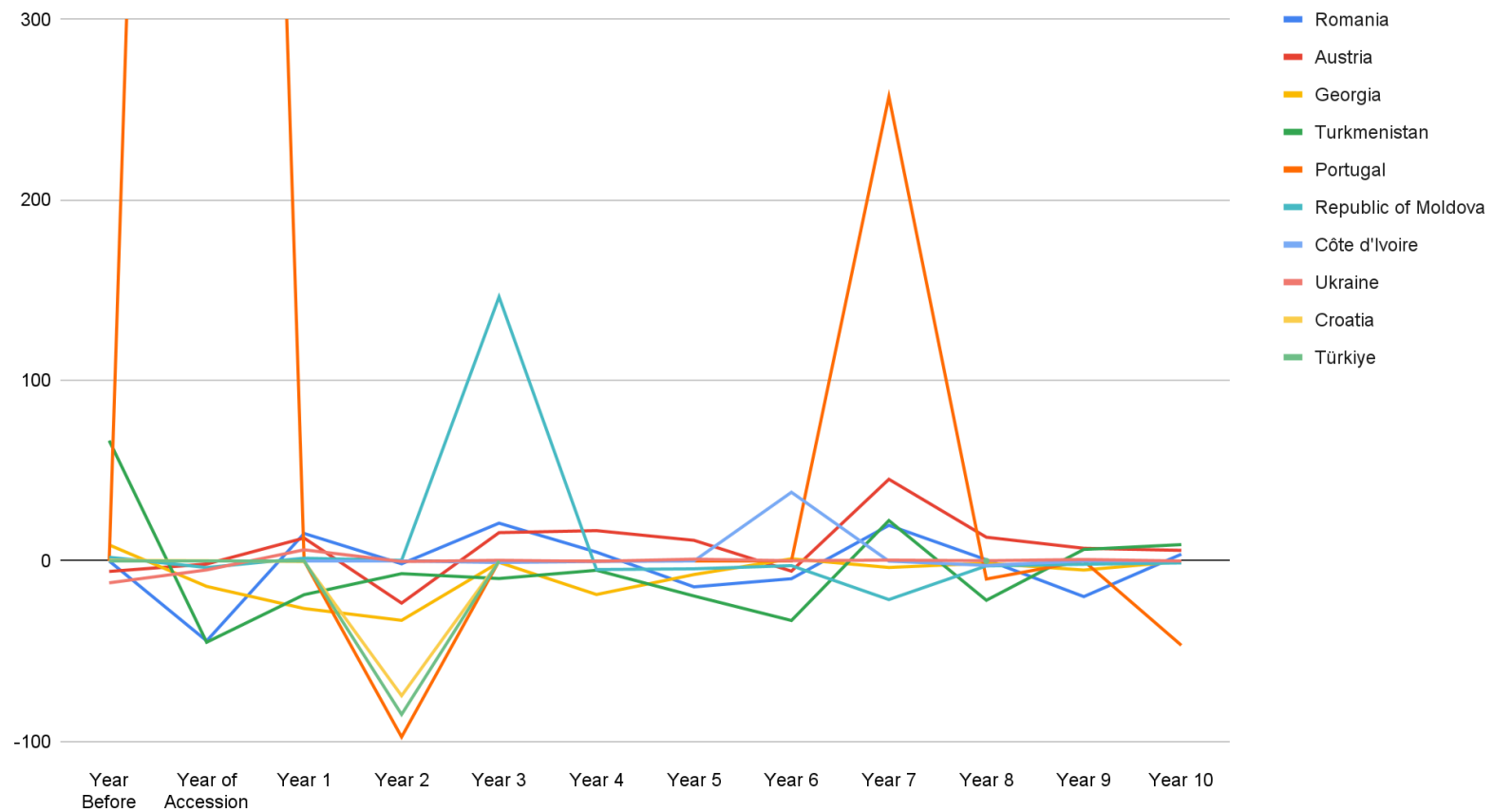
Yellow: States which also signed the 1961 Convention

Blue: Change above 10%

*: States which signed the 1954 Convention in a different year than the 1961 Convention

X: No growth rate due to numbers not being reported

1954 Growth Rates



Appendix G. 1961 Stateless Convention Accession Date and Subsequent Changes in Stateless Populations³⁶²

Country	Accession date	Year Before	Year of Accession	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
Romania	2006	400	223	257	253	306	321	275	248	297	299	240	249
Finland	2008	68	1397	2407	3125	3614	2017	2122	2293	2427	2671	2749	2759
Hungary	2009	241	49	62	89	111	113	124	132	135	139	144	147
Croatia	2011	1749	1720	2886	2886	2886	2873	2873	2873	2886	2896	2900	2890
Serbia (and Kosovo)	2011	8500	8500	8500	4195	3578	2700	2373	2155	2052	1951	2144	2669
Portugal	2012	31	553	553	14	14	14	14	14	50	45	45	24
Republic of Moldova	2012	2073	1998	2029	2036	5014	4776	4569	4451	3500	3405	3343	3307
Turkmenistan	2012	11,000	8947	8320	7511	7125	5744	3851	4714	3688	3924	4280	4527
Côte d'Ivoire	2013	700,000	700,000	700,000	700,000	694000	692000	692000	955,399	954,531	931,166	931,076	931,041
Lithuania	2013	4130	3892	3645	3466	3466	3193	3039	2940	2720	2720	2427	2427
Montenegro	2013	3383	3341	3296	3262	3237	145	145	142	472	502	503	485
Ukraine	2013	35,000	33,271	35,335	35,228	35,363	35,294	35,650	35,701	35,875	35,933	36,233	36,235

³⁶² “Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness,” August 30, 1961; UNHCR, “Refugee Data Finder.”

KEY:

Yellow: States which also signed the 1954 Convention

Red: Increase in statelessness

Green: Decrease in statelessness

No color: No change in statelessness

States not used if:

1. Data on stateless persons began being collected after the accession (Ex: New Zealand)
2. They signed the convention before 2004, as data on statelessness only began to be collected in 2004
3. No data was reported
4. Not enough data was collected (Ex: Brazil collected data for 2005 and 2009, and only started regular reporting after 2016)
5. They are not signatories or have not ratified the treaty (not listed)

1: Bulgaria, New Zealand, Rwanda

2: Albania, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Chad, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Guatemala, Ireland, Kiribati, Latvia, Libya, Netherlands, Niger, Norway, Slovakia, Sweden, Swaziland, Tunisia, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Uruguay

3: Lesotho, Liberia, Senegal, Benin, Nigeria, Ecuador, Honduras, Paraguay, Jamaica, Nicaragua

4. Brazil, Liechtenstein, Panama

Appendix H: Annual Growth Rates of Stateless Population Changes Post-1961 Stateless Convention Accession³⁶³

Country	Year Before	Year of Accession	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
Romania	0	-44.25	15.25	-1.56	20.95	4.9	-14.33	-9.82	19.76	0.67	-19.73	3.75
Finland	0	1954.41	72.3	29.83	15.65	-44.19	5.21	8.06	5.84	10.05	2.92	0.36
Hungary	0	-79.67	26.53	43.55	24.72	1.8	9.73	6.45	2.27	2.96	3.6	2.08
Croatia*	637.97	-1.66	67.79	0	0	-0.45	0	0	0.45	0.35	0.14*	-0.34
Serbia (and Kosovo)	-49.1	0	0	-50.65	-14.71	-24.54	-12.11	-9.19	-4.78	-4.92	9.89	24.49
Portugal	0	1683.87	0	-97.47	0	0	0	0	257.14	-10	0	-46.67
Republic of Moldova	2.07	-3.62	1.55	0.34	146.27	-4.75	-4.33	-2.58	-21.37	-2.71	-1.82	-1.08
Turkmenistan*	-45.00*	-18.66	-7.01	-9.72	-5.14	-19.38	-32.96	22.41	-21.76	6.40	9.07	5.77
Côte d'Ivoire	x	0	0	0	-0.86	-0.29	0.00	38.06	-0.09	-2.45	-0.01	0.00
Lithuania	18.68	-5.76	-6.35	-4.91	0	-7.88	-4.82	-3.26	-7.48	0	-10.77	0
Montenegro	-21.54	-1.24	-1.35	-1.03	-0.77	-95.52	0	-2.07	232.39	6.36	0.2	-3.58
Ukraine	-12.10	-4.94	6.20	-0.30	0.38	-0.20	1.01	0.14	0.49	0.16	0.83	0.01

³⁶³ “Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness,” August 30, 1961;” UNHCR, “Refugee Data Finder.”

KEY:

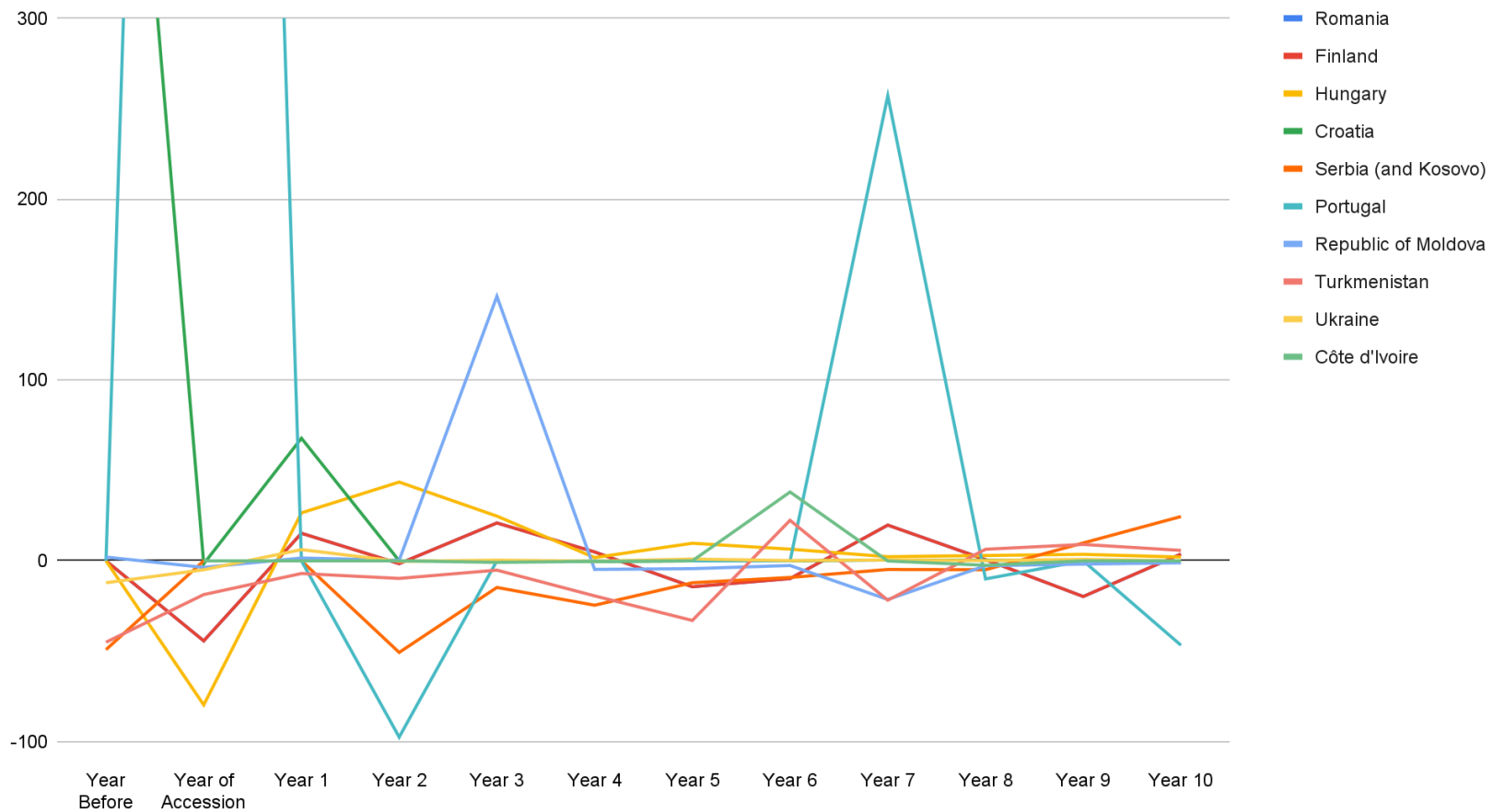
Yellow: States which also signed the 1954 Convention

Blue: Change above 10%

*: States which signed the 1961 Convention in a different year than the 1954 Convention

X: No growth rate due to numbers not being reported

1961 Growth Rates



Appendix I: Country-Specific Graphs of Stateless Population Changes

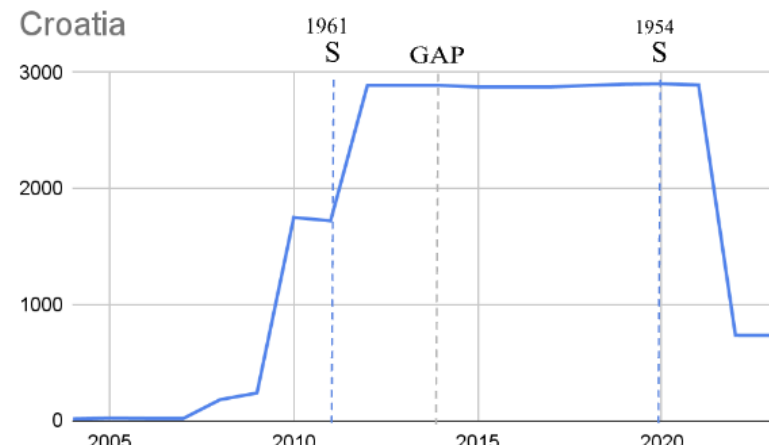
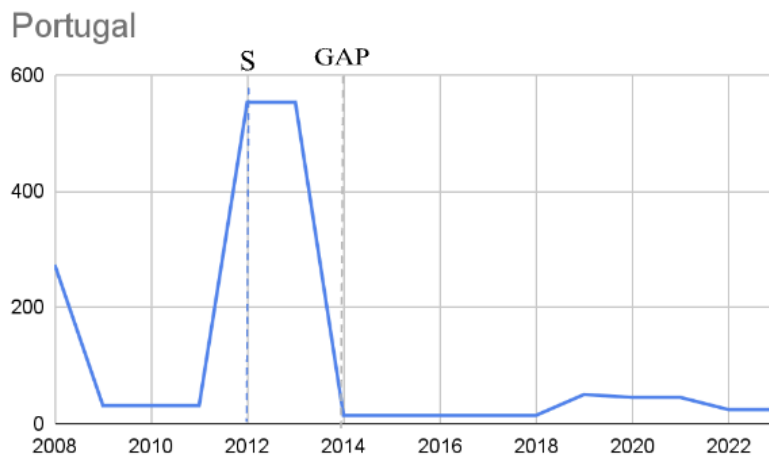
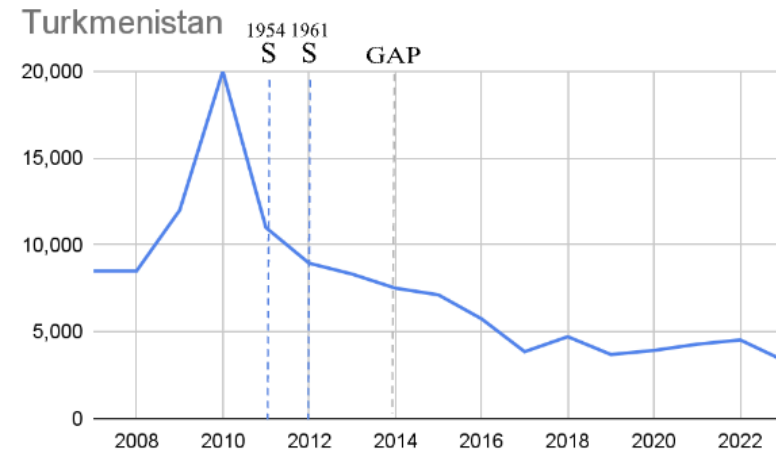
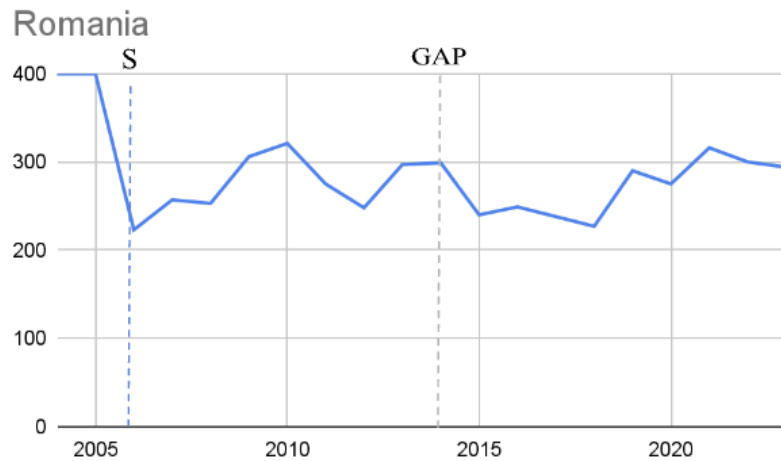
Signatory of both Conventions

KEY:

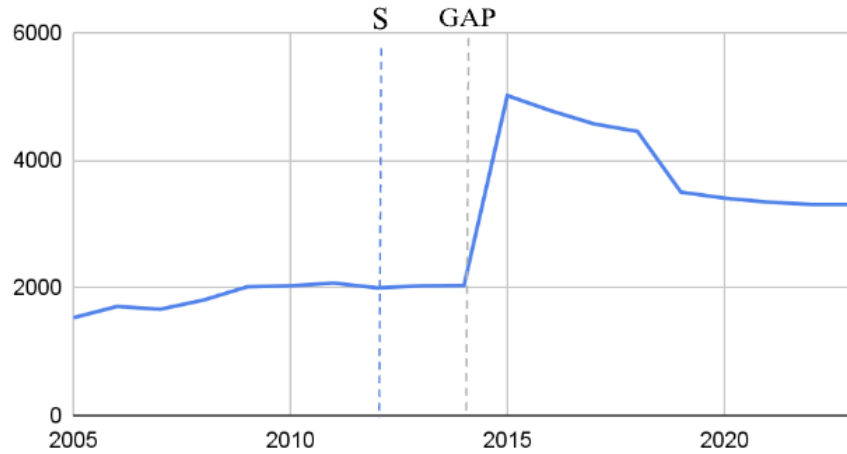
S: Year the conventions were signed (Croatia and Turkmenistan signed the conventions in two different years)

GAP: The year the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness began (2014)

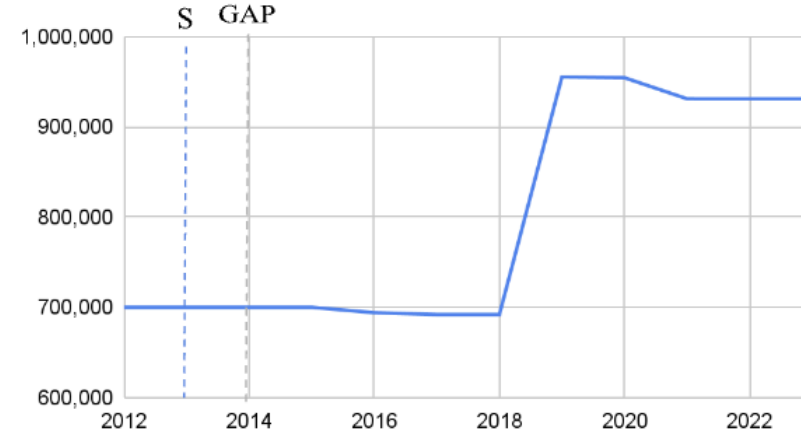
Not visualized: States with insufficient data



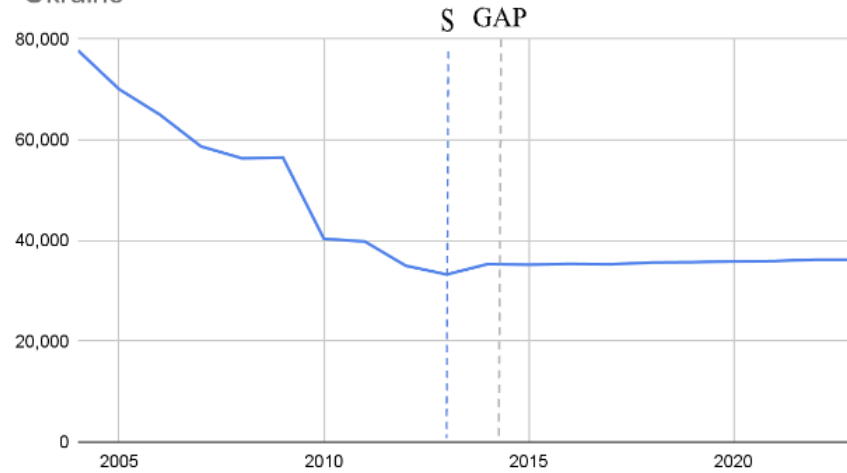
Republic of Moldova



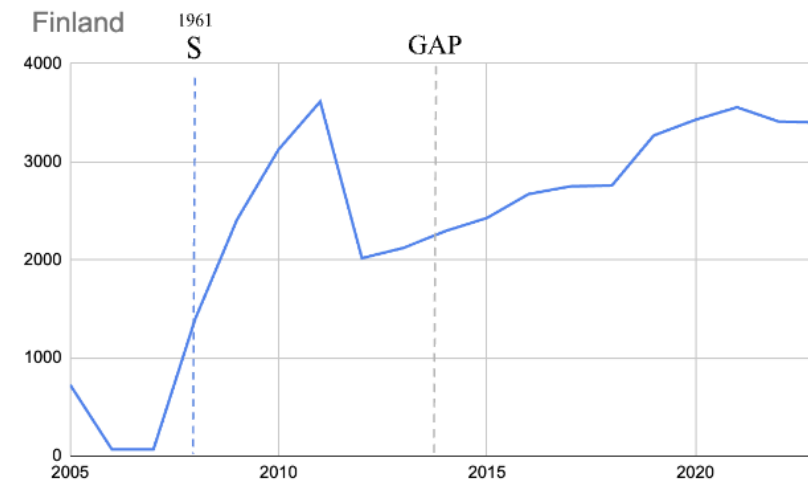
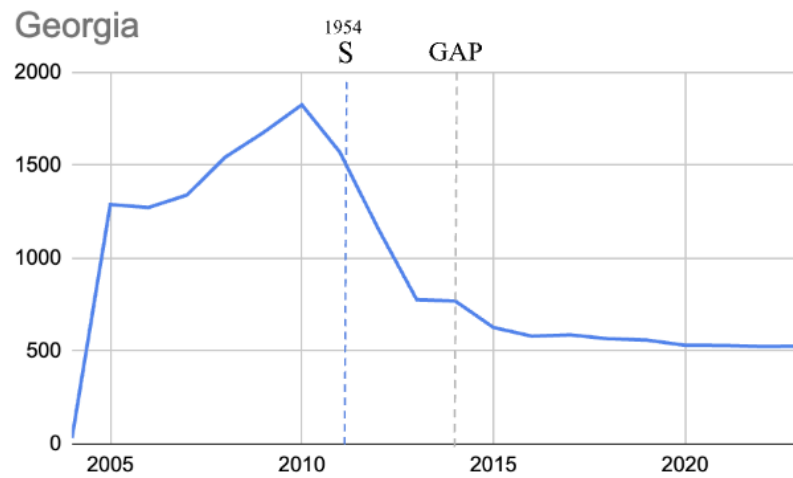
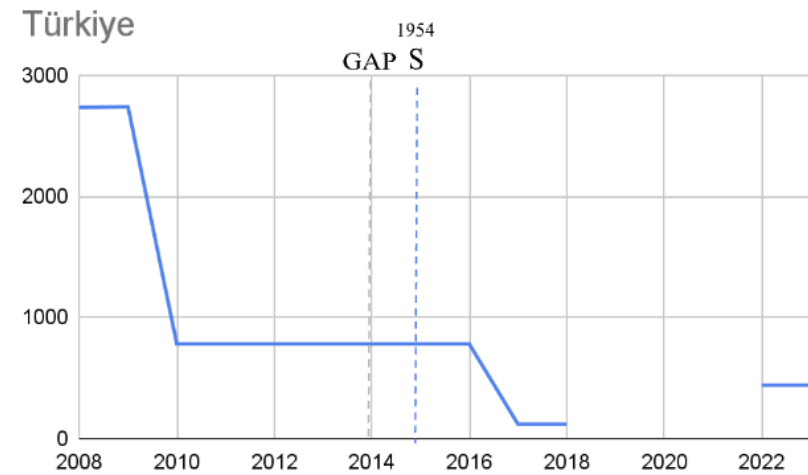
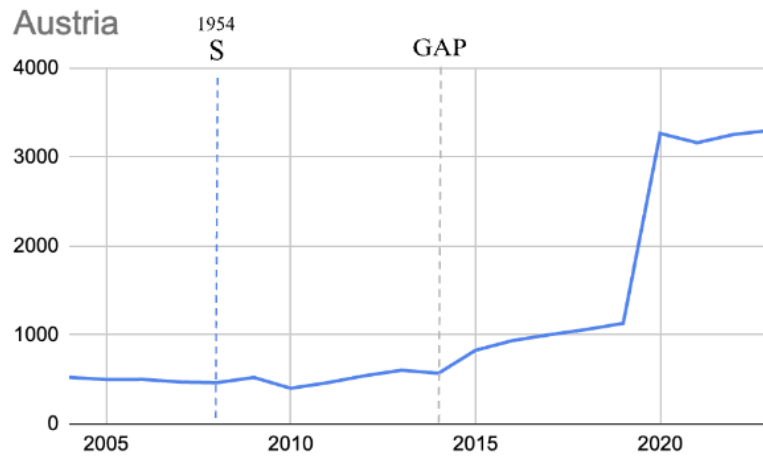
Côte d'Ivoire



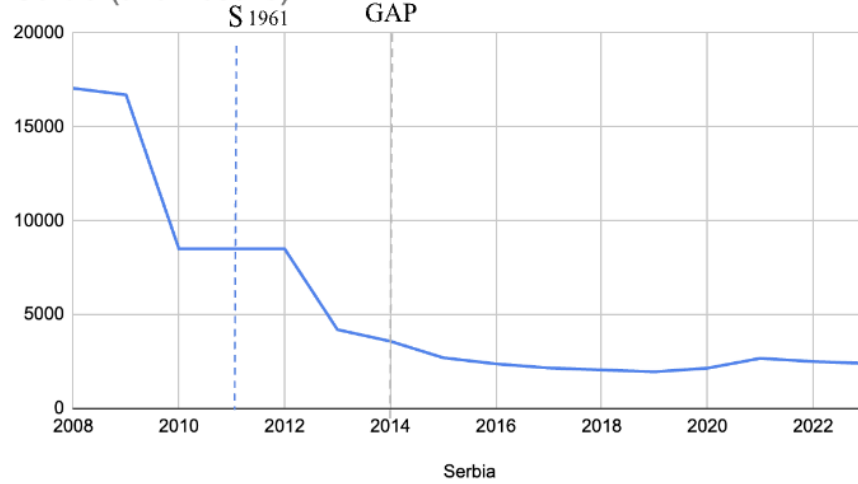
Ukraine



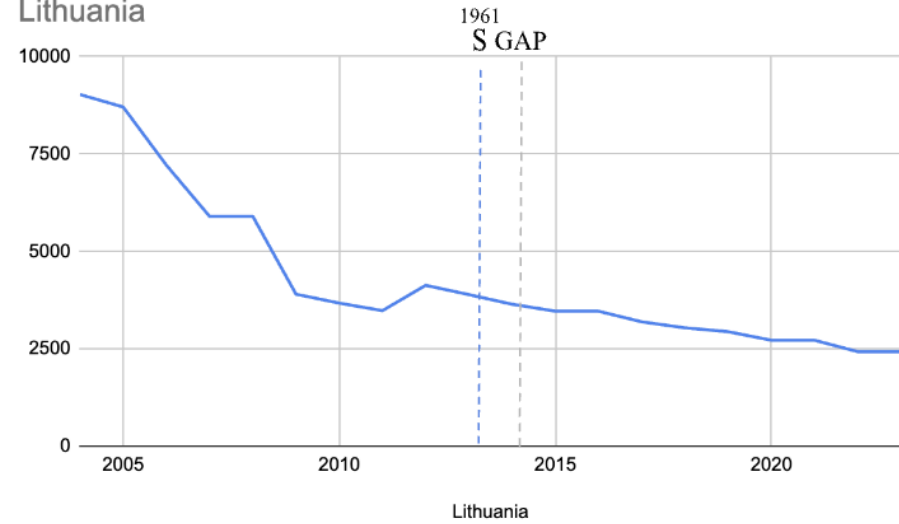
Signatory of the 1954 or 1961 Convention Only



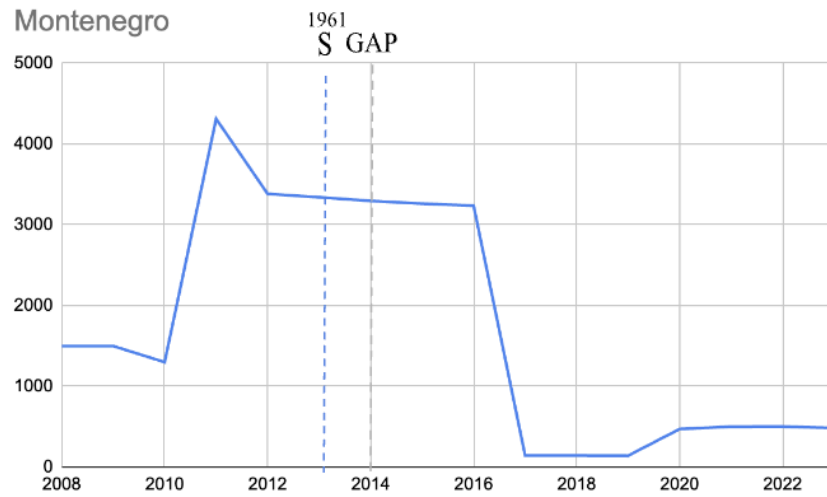
Serbia (and Kosovo)



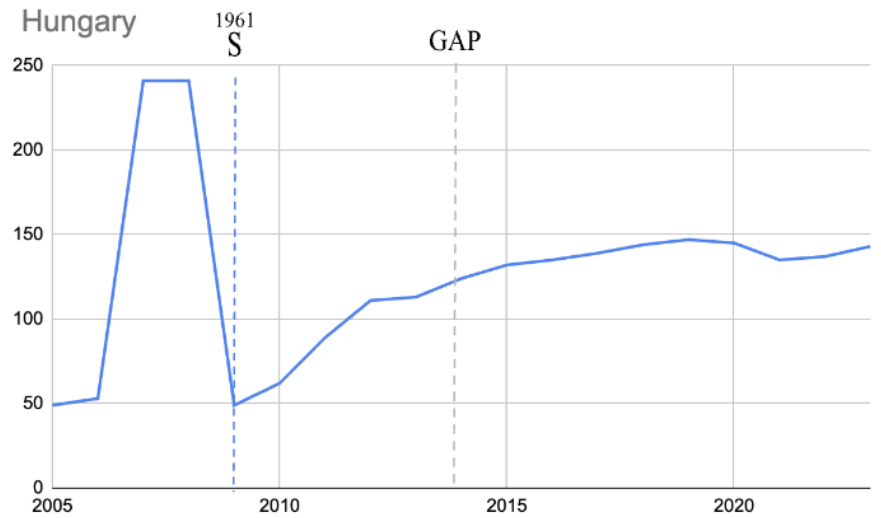
Lithuania



Montenegro



Hungary



Appendix J: Sample Interview Questions

Not every representative was asked each question, as the roles and responsibilities of the interviewees varied, and their organizations were different.

Sample Interview Questions
<p>Organization specific questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How did your organization become involved with addressing statelessness issues? - Did your work on statelessness begin before the #IBelong campaign? - Are you a part of the new Global Alliance to end Statelessness?
<p>Work with the government:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is there political will within the government to resolve statelessness? - Did the government initiate contact to collaborate, or was it the other way around? - Are discussions taking place with the government regarding accession to the 1954 and 1961 Conventions on Statelessness? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If so, what are their primary reasons against signing?
<p>Networking:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do organizations typically seek to join the network after it is officially established, or is membership generally decided upon before its formal creation? - Were you approached by the UNHCR to develop example plans for other organizations? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Would you be willing to share expertise and experiences if requested? - Have you encouraged others to become involved? - Why is it important for states, NGOS, and civil society to participate in networks? - Do you believe that maintaining a network is important for advancing your work on statelessness issues?
<p>Work with the UNHCR:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Did your team encounter any challenges when working with the UNHCR? - What improvements would you like to see in the new plan initiated this year? - Were there any aspects of the 2014 GAP that you did not like? - Did your organization receive funding from the UNHCR? - Have there been any projects that you could have only accomplished with their support and assistance?
<p>Kyrgyzstan specific:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are there any best practices that Kyrgyzstan has implemented that you believe other countries could learn from? - Which initiatives by NGOs or civil society groups in Kyrgyzstan do you believe could offer valuable lessons for other countries?

UNHCR specific:

- What were your primary challenges in working with:
 - Governments?
 - NGOs?
 - Civil Society?

