

# UN agencies call for action to bolster rights of Europe's stateless children

With more than 500,000 people in Europe estimated to be unrecognized as a citizen of any country, the UN Refugee Agency ([UNHCR](#)) and the [UN Children's Fund](#) ([UNICEF](#)) underscored that children without a nationality have limited access to basic rights and services, like education or healthcare, and can face life-long discrimination.

"Life is stacked against a [stateless child](#) right from the start", said UNHCR's Europe Bureau Director Pascale Moreau, adding that legal obstacles often mean their dreams are "dashed before they are adults, and their potential squandered".

As the overall number of asylum-seeking children in Europe has grown since 2010, so too has the number of children identified as stateless. In 2017 some 2,100 children were registered as such, representing a four-fold increase compared to seven years earlier.

Basic rights and services, including education and healthcare, are denied to children without a nationality. Lacking official documents, they are also at greater risk of violence, trafficking and life-long discrimination. Moreover, along with their families, they are often exposed to arrest and detention.

"Every child has the right to a name and a nationality," said UNICEF Regional Director and Special Coordinator for the Refugee and Migrant Response in Europe, Afshan Khan.

He underscored that Governments have a responsibility to adopt safeguards that prevent a child from being born stateless and "to provide legal aid and support to ensure every stateless child realizes their right to citizenship."

The UN agencies said children born stateless are at a particular disadvantage, explaining that they cannot inherit their parents' nationality due to gender discrimination and gaps in nationality laws. Children born in Europe whose births are not registered are another vulnerable group that includes minority populations, like the Roma.

And children from countries with known stateless populations who enter Europe as refugees and asylum-seekers are particularly defenseless.

While birth registration rates are high in Europe, UNHCR and UNICEF are pushing for information campaigns that target families most at risk, to help identify and register them.

Achieving legal identity for all through birth registration, is one of the goals of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

While UNICEF is working to ensure [all children are registered at birth](#), UNHCR's [#IBelong Campaign](#) aims to end Statelessness by 2024.

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## Measles cases nearly doubled in a year, UN health agency projects

A projected near-doubling of measles infections has been identified amid rising severe and protracted outbreaks all over the planet, in poor and rich countries alike, the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) said on Thursday.

The appeal to Member States to close gaps in vaccine coverage follows the previously announced news that an estimated 110,000 people died from the highly infectious but easily preventable disease in 2017.

“Measles is not going anywhere...It’s everyone’s responsibility,” said Dr. Katherine O’Brien, Director of Immunization, Vaccines and Biologicals at WHO. “For one person infected, up to nine or 10 people could catch the virus.”

In addition to being potentially fatal, measles symptoms include rashes, blindness and inflammation of the brain. The virus can be transmitted extremely easily, by coughing and sneezing, and it can also survive for hours in a droplet of water.

It knows no “geographical or political borders”, Dr. O’Brien said, noting nonetheless that since the year 2000, deaths from measles have fallen by over 80 per cent “probably saving around 21 million lives” in that period.

### **Disease burden in 2018 almost double previous 12-month tally**

The WHO alert follows its announcement that as of mid-January this year, it had seen 229,068 reported cases of measles during 2018, in 183 Member States, which have until April to file data on the previous year’s disease burden.

This is almost double the 115,117 cases reported at the same point last year, and WHO’s concern is based on the fact that the final number of infections rose to 173,330.

“Due to reporting delays and outbreaks late in 2018, we expect that these numbers will increase, as they have done in previous years,” the agency said in a statement.

### **Measles infections ‘increased in all regions’**

By region in 2018, Africa saw 33,879 measles infections; of these, 4,391 were from Madagascar alone, where 922 deaths have been reported in an ongoing outbreak that began last October.

The Americas recorded nearly 17,000 cases of measles in 2018, the Eastern Mediterranean, just under 22,000. In Europe, there were 82,596 infections in

47 of 53 countries, ahead of South-East Asia (73,133) and the Western Pacific (23,607).

To prevent outbreaks and eliminate measles, WHO urges countries to sustain high immunization coverage with two doses of measles vaccine, a regimen which has been administered to “billions” of children, Dr. O’Brien told journalists in Geneva.

“We’re backsliding on the progress that has been made, not because we don’t have the tools, but because we’re not vaccinating,” she insisted.

### **Measles jab myth debunked**

There is no association between autism and the measles jab; that myth has been debunked, Dr. O’Brien said, noting that the study that started the falsehood, was based on erroneous data.

Nonetheless, in recent years vaccine coverage has stalled, at 85 per cent. This is far short of the 95 per cent needed to prevent outbreaks and leaves many people susceptible to the disease. Second-dose coverage stands at 67 per cent.

Countries should also identify and address all communities that are under-immunized, advised Dr. Katrina Kretsinger, Medical Officer in the Expanded Programme on Immunization at WHO.

“Some populations are more at risk than others” she said. “Children, migrants, refugees and poor populations.”

Although WHO is working in affected regions with ministries of health it won’t commit to a compulsory vaccination recommendation.

“It’s up to the countries to implement vaccination programmes,” Dr. Kretsinger suggested. “Some have made it mandatory for children to be vaccinated in order to attend school.”

Before the introduction of the measles vaccine in 1963, outbreaks and epidemics occurred every two to three years, causing an estimated 2.6 million deaths every year.

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## **Rights of ‘gilets jaunes’ protesters in France, ‘disproportionately curtailed’, say UN independent experts**

French protesters’ rights have been “disproportionately curtailed” during the

wave of recent “gilet jaunes”, or yellow jacket demonstrations across the country over Government economic policies, [said a group of independent UN human rights experts](#) on Thursday.

The demonstrations were sparked nearly three months ago by President Emmanuel Macron’s introduction of fuel taxes, but quickly morphed into a more general revolt against austerity measures, and the political establishment in general, despite a Government climb-down over the tax.

“Since the start of the yellow vest protest movement in November 2018, we have received serious allegations of excessive use of force. More than 1,700 people have been injured as a result of the protests across the country”, the experts said.

It is very disturbing to note that despite weeks of demonstrations, the restrictions and tactics of managing rallies and the use of force have not improved – *UN rights experts*

“The restrictions on rights have also resulted in a high number of arrests and detentions, searches and confiscations of demonstrators’ possessions, and serious injuries have been caused by a disproportionate use of so-called ‘non-lethal’ weapons like grenades and defensive bullets or ‘flashballs’,” they added.

The experts said that they were aware that some of the demonstrators themselves had resorted to violence, “but we fear that the disproportionate response to these excesses may deter the population from continuing to exercise its fundamental freedoms.”

It is very disturbing to note that despite weeks of demonstrations, the restrictions and tactics of managing rallies and the use of force have not improved,” the experts said.

They also expressed “deep concern” over a proposed law aimed at preventing violence during demonstrations and to punish the perpetrators, pointing out that some of the provisions of this law are “not in line with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which France is a Party.”

“The proposed administrative ban on demonstrations, the establishment of additional control measures and the imposition of heavy sanctions constitute severe restrictions on the right to freedom of peaceful assembly. These provisions can be applied arbitrarily and lead to extremely serious abuses,” the experts emphasized.

“We encourage France to rethink its law enforcement policies and encourage the French authorities to establish avenues for dialogue to reduce tension and to recognize the important and legitimate role that social movements play in governance,” the experts said.

The experts adding their names to the statement are Seong-Phil Hong Chair-Rapporteur of the [Working Group on Arbitrary Detention](#); Michel Forst, Special Rapporteur on the situation of [human rights defenders](#); and Clément Nyaletsossi Voule, Special Rapporteur [on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association](#).

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## **UN chief hails victory of ‘political will’ in historic Republic of North Macedonia accord**

The UN-brokered agreement between Athens and Skopje to formally recognize the “Republic of North Macedonia”, is a welcome, “historical” step that should be supported by regional and international Member States, [António Guterres](#) has announced.

In a statement following on from the entry into force of the Prespa Agreement between the two countries on Tuesday, the UN Secretary-General confirmed that he had received official notification of the development, which settles a near 30-year dispute between the two neighbours.

Mr. Guterres congratulated the two sides and Prime Ministers Alexis Tsipras of Greece, and Zoran Zaev “on their determination in creating a forward-looking vision for relations between the two countries and reconciliation in the Balkan region and beyond”.

He added that he was “deeply grateful” to the UN’s longest serving envoy [Matthew Nimetz](#) of the United States, for his “unwavering commitment and dedication” in pursuing the deal.

### **Name-change deal solves ‘seemingly intractable’ split**

The Prespa Agreement was signed by both countries on 17 June last year and ratified by their parliaments last month. It demonstrates that “even seemingly intractable issues can be resolved through dialogue and political will”, Mr. Guterres insisted.

Negotiations on the name dispute began in 1993 and have been led by the UN Secretary-General’s Personal Envoy Mr Nimitz since 1999.

The major diplomatic spat stretches back to 1991, when the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) declared its independence from Yugoslavia and announced its intention to be named “Macedonia”.

Greece refused to recognize the name of its landlocked northern neighbour,

insisting that only the northern Greek region of the same name should be called Macedonia.

Athens also maintained that the former Yugoslav Republic's use of the name was a challenge to Greek sovereignty.

## **Next steps: UN chief to notify General Assembly and Security Council**

According to UN protocol, once the Secretary-General is notified by the parties of the name change agreement, he will then notify the [General Assembly](#) and the [Security Council](#).

Thereafter, all UN departments are instructed to begin using the new name – Republic of North Macedonia – and the correct terminology when referring to the new State or its representatives, namely “Macedonian”, or “of North Macedonia”; and “the Macedonian representative” or “the delegate of North Macedonia”.

Keen UN flag alley watchers and vexillophiles may soon spot that the country's standard – a yellow sun radiating rays onto a red background – will be positioned ahead of Norway's as per the alphabetical ordering convention, outside the organization's main headquarters in New York, and also in Geneva, Nairobi and Vienna.

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## **[Top UN court rules it has jurisdiction to hear Iranian claim against US over frozen assets](#)**

The International Court of Justice ([ICJ](#)) ruled on Wednesday that it has the jurisdiction to hear part of a case brought by Iran against the United States, aimed at unfreezing close to \$2 billion in Iranian assets being held there.

The ruling opens the way for the court to now hear Iran's case on its merits, which news reports suggest, given the complexity of the case, could take several years. Iran filed the case in 2016, based on the 1955 Treaty of Amity between the two nations, from which the US later unilaterally withdrew, in 2018.

The case revolved around assets seized from the Iranian national bank, Bank Markazi, which were taken by the US to compensate victims of a 1983 suicide bombing of a Marine Corps base in Beirut, Lebanon, which the US blames on Tehran. Iran denies involvement in the attack which killed more than 300,

injuring many more, most of whom were US military personnel.

The US has argued that Iran's claims to retrieving its assets based on the Treaty of Amity, were now void, following the US decision to withdraw.

In an 11-4 majority ruling on Wednesday, the ICJ upheld one of five US objections, in this instance to the Court's jurisdiction, based on Iran's assertion of State immunity, but the judges unanimously rejected the US argument that measures freezing Iranian assets fell outside the scope of the treaty.

The judges also unanimously rejected the US claim that the case was an abuse of process, and that it should be thrown out due to Tehran's "unclean hands", the US having cited Iran's alleged sponsorship of terrorism and alleged ambitions to develop nuclear weapons.

ICJ President Abdulqawi Yusuf, reading the ruling, said that the panel "unanimously finds that it has jurisdiction...to rule on the application filed by the Islamic Republic of Iran on 14 June 2016."