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**WOMEN'S
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COMMISSION**

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

**UN
WOMEN**

Concept Note for a High Level Side Event on Achieving Gender Equality in Nationality Laws at the 70th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women 10:00-11:15 • United Nations, Conference Room 2

1. Background

On the occasion of the seventieth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70), governments and NGOs will convene in New York from 9-20 March 2025 with the priority theme of “Ensuring and strengthening access to justice for all women and girls, including by promoting inclusive and equitable legal systems, eliminating discriminatory laws, policies, and practices, and addressing structural barriers.” Despite significant reforms to end legal discrimination against women, today over forty-five countries maintain nationality laws that discriminate on the basis of gender.¹ Twenty-four countries deny women the right to confer nationality on their children on an equal basis with men.

Citizenship laws form the foundation of individuals’ relationship with the state and determine access to a range of fundamental human rights. At their core, nationality laws that discriminate on the basis of gender contradict the principle of the equality of all citizens and reflect the state’s position that the rights and responsibilities of citizenship are based not on one’s status as a citizen, but according to one’s gender.

Gender discrimination in nationality laws has far-reaching consequences on all aspects of family life and is a leading cause of statelessness. Without citizenship, children and foreign spouses are often subject to a range of restrictions in their job and education opportunities; their ability to travel, open bank accounts, own or inherit property; and their full participation in society generally. Women’s inability to equally confer citizenship can put huge financial, psychological and physical strains on families, which can result in intergenerational poverty. Nine of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are negatively impacted by this form of legal discrimination. Discriminatory nationality laws can threaten family unity, and in some cases, increase the potential for family violence. Stateless women and girls are at a higher risk of being trafficked, while girls are also at a greater risk of child, early and forced marriage. In contexts of displacement, where fathers may often be separated from their families, discriminatory nationality laws have the potential to impact exponentially larger populations. With the greatest displacement since World War II, current displacement and migration from countries with gender-discriminatory nationality laws threatens to create a new generation of stateless children.

Though such laws were traditionally the norm across the globe, significant progress has been achieved in securing gender-equal nationality rights. Since the launch of the Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights, eighteen States have reformed their nationality laws to advance gender equality. Momentum for reform is also increasing at the regional level, indicated by the establishment of regional declarations calling for the eradication of gender discrimination in nationality laws as essential to ending statelessness, including the [Arab Declaration on Belonging and Legal Identity](#) (2023), [Abidjan Declaration of Ministers of ECOWAS Member States on the Eradication of Statelessness in West Africa](#) (2015), and the new Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Right to Nationality and the Eradication of

¹ Such laws include denying women the right to confer nationality on non-national spouses on an equal basis with men, and linking women’s ability to acquire, change, and retain her nationality to her marital status.

Statelessness in Africa, adopted by the African Union in February 2024. At the international level, heightened attention to advancing gender-equal nationality rights has also been driven by the June 2023 Global Summit on Gender Equality in Nationality Laws and a new Human Rights Council (HRC) Resolution on nondiscrimination in nationality laws (July 2023), which echoed HRC Resolutions in 2012 and 2016 calling for an end to gender discrimination in nationality laws. 2017 witnessed the launch of the “[Equality in Law for Women and Girls by 2030](#)” strategy, a multistakeholder effort chaired by UN Women, which identifies nationality laws as one of five target areas. In 2024, the Global Alliance to End Statelessness, with UNHCR as the secretariat, was launched to support multistakeholder action to end statelessness, with “addressing discriminatory nationality laws and policies” established as a key priority for the Alliance.

Against this backdrop, the Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights and UN Women seek to hold a High-Level Side Event, with cosponsorship by a group of champion States and UN partner agencies, to build on this momentum for reform. At this event, impacted persons will elevate awareness of the significant harm and rights violations caused by gender discrimination in nationality laws; a State will share lessons learned from their reform process, highlighting the significant benefits of gender-equal nationality rights to citizens, their families, and society as a whole; other States will affirm their commitment to advancing gender equality in nationality laws, and UN agencies will unpack why gender-equal nationality laws are essential to realizing their mandates. The event will underscore why the reform of gender-discriminatory nationality laws is essential to women’s equal status in society and the realization of the SDGs.

This concept note sets out the relevant details as well as the proposed format and content of the High-Level Side Event.

2. Date, Time and Venue

The High-Level Side Event will be held 10:00-11:15 AM on March 10, 2026 in Conference Room 2 in the United Nations.

3. Participants

In order to galvanize support for reform of gender-discriminatory nationality laws at the highest levels, speakers are proposed to include States’ and other stakeholders’ head of delegation, along with an Executive Director of a UN agency.

The support of co-sponsors will be acknowledged in all materials advertising the event, during the event itself, and in any documents recording the outcomes of the event.

Co-sponsors:

- Liberia
- Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, United Kingdom
- UN Refugee Agency
- UN Women
- Equality Now
- Global Alliance to End Statelessness
- Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights
- Women’s Refugee Commission

Affected

A woman and youth impacted gender discrimination in nationality law will provide a testimony at the event.

Persons**Audience**

Priority audience members will include States, intergovernmental organizations, and civil society groups working on issues of gender equality, children's rights, nationality, and statelessness.

4. Format

The High-Level Side Event will be led by a panel of speakers comprising a moderator, a keynote speaker, States which have recently taken action or commit to end gender discrimination from their nationality laws; two impacted activists; a representative/representatives from UN Agencies/intergovernmental cosponsor; and a civil society representative.

Following presentations by the panelists, the floor will be opened to States who wish to announce commitments to reform their laws or to make interventions from the floor, as well as audience questions and comments. This process will be facilitated by the panel moderator.

5. Proposed Agenda

5 minutes	Moderator opens event and introduces keynote speaker
5 minutes	High Level Keynote speech
40 minutes	Panel Discussion: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Testimony of woman and youth impacted by gender discrimination in nationality laws• State Pledging Reform & State Champions• Interventions by UN Agencies/other cosponsors
20	Questions and Discussion with Audience
5 minutes	Final remarks and Moderator Close