

General Assembly 4

Addressing Legal Identity Issues in Post-War Populations



Forum:	Fourth General Assembly
Issue:	Addressing Legal Identity Issues in Post-War Populations
Student Officer:	Sevanthy Nahenthiram
Position:	President

Introduction

In the aftermath of armed conflict, rebuilding societies takes much more than the reconstruction of physical infrastructure and economic systems. One of the most urgent, yet frequently neglected, tasks for post-conflict communities is securing legal identity. War has the effect of disabling civil registration systems, demolishing official documents, and displacing millions of persons, rendering them devoid of proof of identity. Lacking legal identity, victims of this situation encounter severe obstacles to obtaining fundamental services like health, education, employment, social welfare, and the right to vote or seek legal redress. The problem is most acute where whole records have been obliterated or refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) who return to their nations need to be readmitted into society. Legal identity is described by the United Nations as the "fundamental characteristics of an individual's identity," which are usually determined through birth registration and other vital statistics.

It constitutes the foundation of a person's identification with respect to the law and the prerequisite for the enjoyment of fundamental rights. It is generally overlooked in conflict areas, deliberately manipulated, or actively hindered by parties in opposition.

Post-conflict countries then have to deal with the complicated process of reconstructing civil registration systems as they have to answer to the demands of citizens who have never had their births registered, whose identity documents were destroyed or invalidated by changing borders or regimes. Denial of legal identity to everyone, as SDG Target 16.9 prioritizes, not only undermines human rights

but also jeopardizes national reconciliation, security, and governance. Without strong systems to verify identity, states are unable to launch inclusive political processes, prevent fraud, and ensure equal access to justice and public services.

In post-conflict situations where states are fragile, it is important to restore trust in institutions, and legal identity systems are essential for that. The report makes an effort to examine the legal, administrative, and humanitarian aspects of restoring legal identity in post-conflict situations. It will look at previous and ongoing case studies, extract the main challenges for international actors and states, and provide concrete recommendations to allow all to enjoy their full rights as residents or citizens. By solving this issue, the international community can take a tremendous step towards durable peace, justice, and development in post-conflict societies.

Key Terms

Legal Identity

The official recognition of a person by the law, commonly through birth registration and identity documents. It is essential for accessing fundamental rights such as education, healthcare, employment, and voting.

Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS)

Government systems that record vital events like births, deaths, and marriages. These systems are the foundation of legal identity and are often disrupted or destroyed in times of conflict.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

People who are forced to flee their homes due to conflict, violence, or disasters but remain within their country's borders. They often lose access to legal documentation and protection.

Statelessness

A condition in which a person is not considered a national by any country. Stateless people are typically denied basic rights such as education, employment, and healthcare.

State Succession

The legal and political process that occurs when one state replaces another, often after conflict or decolonization. This can cause old identity documents to become invalid.

Nationality Law

The legal framework that determines who is recognized as a citizen of a state. Discriminatory laws can leave people stateless or prevent them from reclaiming citizenship post-conflict.

Temporary or Provisional IDs

Short-term identification documents issued during emergencies when official records are missing or destroyed. They allow individuals to access services while waiting for permanent documentation.

Digitization of Identity Systems

The process of converting paper-based identity records into electronic formats. Digital systems are more resilient and easier to recover after conflict.

Recognition Frameworks (Regional Agreements)

Mutual agreements between countries to acknowledge and validate identity documents across borders. These frameworks support displaced individuals in being recognized abroad.

Marginalized Populations

Groups that are excluded from full participation in society due to factors like ethnicity, gender, religion, or displacement. They often face additional legal identity challenges.

International Humanitarian and Human Rights Law

Legal frameworks, including treaties like the UDHR and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, that protect individuals' rights to identity during and after conflict.

#IBelong Campaign

A UNHCR initiative launched in 2014 to end statelessness within a decade. It promotes legal reform and wider birth registration, especially in post-conflict settings.

Peacebuilding Mandates

Strategic goals included in UN and other missions after conflict, focusing on rebuilding institutions, justice systems, and public services. Incorporating legal identity into these mandates supports long-term recovery.

Mobile Registration Units

Teams that travel to conflict-affected or remote areas to register individuals and issue IDs on-site. They ensure access to legal identity for people unable to reach central offices.

General Overview

The United Nations defines legal identity as the fundamental acknowledgement of an individual's existence before the law, usually accomplished through birth registration and the provision of identity documents. Numerous fundamental rights, such as those related to education, healthcare, voting, work, property ownership, and legal protection, are made possible by it. Restoring legal identification is frequently one of the first stages toward reintegration, restoring social trust, and facilitating involvement in reconstruction activities in the context of post-war recovery.

Administrative infrastructures such as civil records, archives, and identity documentation systems are frequently destroyed in wars and other armed conflicts. Governments could collapse, borders could shift, and populations may be forcibly relocated. People usually lose access to their identity documents in these situations, or they were never registered at all. These disturbances disproportionately impact vulnerable populations, including refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs), ethnic minorities, and stateless people. Due to the lack or invalidity of legal documentation, these people encounter significant obstacles while restoring their rights in post-war situations.

There are many legal, political, and ethical discussions surrounding the topic of reestablishing legal identity in post-war contexts. The authenticity of recently issued documents is a major point of contention. Should identity be restored in accordance with modern political realities or outdated national laws? Legal limbo may result from the rejection of previously legitimate papers in situations involving state succession or regime change. Furthermore, certain governments may use identity registration systems to target or monitor opposition groups, raising worries about discrimination and exclusion. Thus, identity restoration becomes more than just a technological problem; it's a very political one.

Human rights, safety, and development have all been affected globally by post-war individuals' lack of legal identity. Millions of people without identities are unknown to governments and foreign assistance organizations, which makes it more difficult to rebuild after a conflict and feeds the cycles of poverty and marginalization. Legal identity has been acknowledged by the international community as a priority under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially through UNHCR, UNDP, and UNICEF. By 2030, everyone should have legal identity, including birth registration, according to Goal

16.9. However, implementation is still unequal, and in fragile regimes, development is hampered by financial and technological limitations.

In the end, resolving legal identity concerns in post-war communities necessitates a comprehensive and cooperative strategy. Ensuring inclusive, transparent, and rights-based identity processes is just as important as the technical restoration of civil registration systems. For those coming out of the shadows of conflict, it will take a combination of political resolve, foreign aid, and community involvement to restore not only documents but also dignity and trust.

Major Parties Involved

Afghanistan

After decades of war, Afghanistan has one of the most severe legal identity crises in the world. Major portions of the population, particularly in rural communities, are still undocumented. Collapse of civil registry infrastructure, coupled with political instability and inaccessibility of public services, has denied many Afghans—particularly children and women—proof of legal identity. In recent years, the Afghan government (before the Taliban takeover) had also been collaborating with the World Bank and UN agencies to implement the electronic Tazkira ID system, yet enhancements are still sporadic because of conflict and governance challenges.

South Sudan

Being the world's newest nation, South Sudan has been confronted with enormous challenges in establishing a national identity registration system after decades of conflict and displacement. Most citizens hold Sudanese documents or none. Internally displaced persons and returnees lack birth certificates or national identity cards and thus cannot vote, go to school, or own property. Identity in South Sudan is also entangled with ethnic tensions and citizenship questions and so is politically charged.

Syria

A decade and a half of Syrian civil war has led to the destruction of civil registration offices and the burning of millions of identification documents.

Refugees and internally displaced persons usually cannot replace or substitute their documents, which causes legal and social obstacles. The host states usually do not recognize Syrian documents, and in some cases, the Syrian government is not willing to replace them.

This is putting a generation of children at risk of statelessness. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

UNHCR is at the forefront of safeguarding the rights of displaced and stateless people, who are often devoid of legal status. UNHCR collaborates with governments to enable the issuance or reissuance of documents, prevent statelessness, and offer legal services. UNHCR has launched global campaigns like #IBelong to end statelessness and still serves post-conflict societies through field operations, advocacy, and technical support.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

UNDP assists in the reconstruction of public institutions in post-conflict countries, such as civil registry and ID systems. Through its governance and digital innovation programs, UNDP assists in building states' administrative capacity towards legal identity for all. It also works with local authorities to make sure that marginalized communities are not left behind in the recovery.

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

ICRC operates in conflict and post-conflict environments to restore family links and assist individuals in reestablishing their legal status. This encompasses initiatives to reunite families with children and assist those who lost documents because of violence or displacement. ICRC tends to operate where state services do not exist or are restricted, plugging a critical humanitarian gap. Norway has also been a prominent global donor and voice for the acknowledgment of legal identity as a human right. Norway assists civil registration programs in post-conflict countries through financing and collaboration with UN agencies and NGOs. Norway has also guided the UN and other forums' agenda on the link between legal identity and peacebuilding, and advancing sustainable development goals on identity.

Timeline of Key Events

[10 December 1948]	[Adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations General Assembly, including Article 6 which ensures the right to recognition as a person before the law.]
[28 September 1954]	[Adoption of the Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, which sets out the legal definition of a stateless person and outlines rights and protections.]
[20 November 1989]	[The UN General Assembly adopts the Convention on the Rights of the Child, recognizing the right of every child to be registered immediately after birth and to acquire a nationality.]
[18-19 February 2004]	[The first International Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) takes place in Pretoria, South Africa, bringing global attention to identity systems in developing and post-conflict regions.]
[15 March 2011]	[Start of the Syrian Civil War following nationwide protests, leading to mass displacement and the widespread loss of civil documentation.]
[25 September 2015]	[The United Nations launches the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including Goal 16.9: "By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration.]
[4 November 2014]	[UNHCR launches the #IBelong campaign to end statelessness within 10 years, promoting legal reforms and birth registration efforts worldwide.]
[15 August 2021]	[The Taliban captures Kabul, leading to the collapse of the Afghan government and

disruption of ID and civil registration systems across the country.]

[17 May 2023]

[NDP and UNICEF announce expanded collaboration to digitize civil registration systems in fragile and post-conflict states, focusing on identity access for children and displaced people.]

UN Involvement and Other Treaties

- UN Membership and Other Treaties
- What follows is an inventory of United Nations resolutions, conferences, and international treaties that directly pertain to legal identity for post-conflict populations. These instruments are indicative of the global commitment to the legal recognition of all persons, and in particular those who have been displaced or affected by conflict.
-
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 Dec. 1948 (A/RES/217 A)
- Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, 28 Sep. 1954 (UN Treaty Series No. 5158).
- Convention on the Rights of the Child, 20 Nov. 1989 (UN Treaty Series No. 27531)
- Secretary-General on civil registration and vital statistics, 4 Mar. 2003 (E/CN.3/2003/16)
- Sustainable Development Goals – Target 16.9, 25 Sep. 2015 (A/RES/70/1)
- United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, 10–19 Jul. 2017, New York, United States
- UNHCR #IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness, 4 Nov. 2014, Geneva, Switzerland
- United Nations Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics, 18–19 Feb. 2004, Pretoria, South Africa Human Rights Council Resolution on Birth

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, laid the foundation for the modern understanding of legal identity as a human right. Article 6 specifically states that “everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.” This principle has since been echoed in numerous international treaties and resolutions and serves as a key legal reference point in post-conflict legal identity advocacy.

Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons (1954)

This landmark treaty established the international legal definition of a stateless person and set standards for their treatment. While not specifically aimed at post-conflict populations, it became particularly relevant in the aftermath of war when individuals lose or are denied nationality. The convention has been used by UNHCR and NGOs to pressure governments into granting legal status to those displaced by conflict or civil unrest.

Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)

The CRC obliges all ratifying countries to ensure every child is registered immediately after birth and has the right to a name and nationality. This has made it one of the most powerful tools for addressing the risks of statelessness among children born in conflict zones or refugee settings. UNICEF has led many successful registration drives based on this treaty in post-conflict countries like Sierra Leone and South Sudan.

Secretary-General report on civil registration and vital statistics (2003)

This report emphasized the importance of building resilient civil registration systems in fragile and post-conflict states. It recommended the use of mobile units, digitization, and international support to re-establish destroyed registries. The report influenced subsequent UN projects and served as a roadmap for technical capacity-building in countries emerging from war.

Sustainable Development Goals – Target 16.9 (2015)

The adoption of SDG Target 16.9—"legal identity for all, including birth registration"—marked the first time that legal identity was formally integrated into the global development agenda. Since then, it has driven increased investment and cooperation among governments, international organizations, and donors to build or restore ID systems in conflict-affected states such as Afghanistan and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (2017)

During this major UN event, states reaffirmed their commitment to achieving the SDGs, including legal identity. Several post-conflict nations presented their national progress, and the forum offered a platform for sharing best practices. The event also highlighted ongoing challenges, particularly the lack of data on unregistered persons and the difficulties of restoring systems in fragile environments.

UNHCR #IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness (2014)

Launched in Geneva in 2014, this global campaign aims to end statelessness within a decade. The campaign works closely with governments, civil society, and regional bodies to identify and register stateless individuals, many of whom are post-war returnees or displaced people. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, #IBelong supported legislative reforms that provided nationality to thousands of people previously considered stateless due to war-related displacement.

UN Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (2004)

Held in Pretoria, South Africa, this conference brought together UN agencies, national governments, and experts to strategize on rebuilding registration systems, particularly in post-conflict and post-disaster settings. The conference led to the development of frameworks and partnerships that continue to inform technical support missions in fragile states today.

Human Rights Council Resolution on Birth Registration (2012)

This resolution emphasized the right of all individuals to be recognized before the law and called for strengthened national birth registration systems, especially in conflict and post-conflict environments. It urged states to remove legal and practical barriers to registration and highlighted the link between legal identity and access to education, healthcare, and justice.

Possible Solutions

Strengthening national civil registration systems

The most effective way to ensure access to legal identity in post-war populations is to support the reconstruction and modernization of national civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems. This can be done through international funding, technical assistance, and training of local officials. Post-conflict governments should be encouraged to adopt digital and decentralized registration systems to improve access in rural or previously war-affected areas. The establishment of mobile registration units and simplified documentation processes will also be essential for reaching displaced communities.

Creating regional identity recognition frameworks

In regions with large displaced populations crossing borders due to conflict (such as in East Africa, the Balkans, or Southeast Asia), regional frameworks for mutual recognition of identity documents should be developed. These agreements would allow individuals who were born or displaced during conflict to access services and citizenship processes in neighboring countries. Regional bodies such as the African Union or ASEAN can facilitate such cooperation, ensuring legal consistency and reducing statelessness.

Including legal identity in peacebuilding and reconstruction mandates

Legal identity should not be treated as a separate issue from post-war reconstruction, but rather as a central pillar of peacebuilding. Mandates for UN peacekeeping missions or transitional governments should include legal identity as a priority area. For example, rebuilding courts, schools, and healthcare systems must go hand-in-hand with ensuring that the people accessing them are legally recognized. A coordinated approach between UNHCR, UNDP, and national actors is essential.

Protecting identity rights in emergency response

In the early stages of conflict or displacement, emergency response plans should include identity protection mechanisms. This could mean the safe storage or digitization of records, issuing temporary identity documents to fleeing civilians, or supporting safe return programs that reinstate lost documents. Humanitarian organizations should work with governments to ensure displaced individuals are not permanently excluded from legal identity due to the chaos of war.

Reforming discriminatory nationality laws

One of the root causes of statelessness in post-conflict settings is the existence of discriminatory nationality laws, particularly those based on ethnicity, religion, or gender. International pressure should be placed on governments to reform such laws in accordance with international human rights standards. Legal aid programs can support individuals to navigate complex systems and claim the nationality to which they are entitled.

Encouraging public awareness and community involvement

Even in post-war settings, many people may not understand the importance of legal identity or may distrust authorities after years of conflict. Public information campaigns and collaboration with trusted local leaders can encourage communities to participate in registration efforts. Governments and international agencies must engage local populations to rebuild trust and demonstrate the real-life benefits of having a legal identity, such as access to education, healthcare, voting rights, and protection under the law.

Bibliography

“About the #IBelong Campaign.” *UNHCR*, <https://www.unhcr.org/ibelong/>. Accessed 1 July 2025.

“Birth Registration and Legal Identity.” *UNICEF*, <https://www.unicef.org/protection/birth-registration>. Accessed 1 July 2025.

“Convention on the Rights of the Child.” *United Nations Treaty Collection*, 20 Nov. 1989, https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1990/09/19900902%2000-41%20AM/Ch_IV_11p.pdf.

“Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons.” *United Nations Treaty Series*, 28 Sept. 1954, https://www.unhcr.org/ibelong/wp-content/uploads/1954-Convention-relating-to-the-Status-of-Stateless-Persons_ENG.pdf.

“Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.” *United Nations Sustainable Development Goals*, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16>. Accessed 1 July 2025.

“Human Rights Council Resolution on Birth Registration.” *UN Human Rights Council*, 2012, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/732745?ln=en>.

“Secretary-General Report on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics.” *United Nations Economic and Social Council*, 4 Mar. 2003, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4878459?ln=en>.

“Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” *United Nations*, 10 Dec. 1948, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.

“United Nations Conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics.” *United Nations Statistics Division*, 18–19 Feb. 2004, Pretoria, South Africa, https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/meetings/wshops/South_Africa/2004/docs/default.htm.

“United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.” *United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs*, 10–19 July 2017, New York, USA, <https://hlpf.un.org/2017>.

Appendix

- **UN library**, <https://digitallibrary.un.org>
- **UN official website**, <https://www.un.org>
- **UNHCR – Statelessness and #IBelong Campaign**, <https://www.unhcr.org/ibelong>
- **UNICEF – Legal Identity and Birth Registration**, <https://www.unicef.org/protection/birth-registration>
- **United Nations SDG Goal 16.9**, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16>
- **MLA Citation Generator (for delegates)**, <https://www.mybib.com>
- **OHCHR – Human Rights Council Resolutions**, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc>
- **Treaties and Conventions on Statelessness**, <https://www.unhcr.org/stateless-people.html>
- **UN Statistics Division – Civil Registration Resources**, <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/crvs/>