



Joint Statement on the Impact of the UK Government's Earned Settlement Proposals on Statelessness in the UK

We are deeply concerned about the UK Government's [proposed changes](#) to settlement. Overall, the proposals are completely contrary to the significant body of evidence on integration and social cohesion ([including research published by the Home Office itself](#)). If introduced, the proposals risk entrenching insecurity, poverty and exclusion, undermining integration and social cohesion, and placing additional pressure on public services. We are in no doubt that they will cause significant harm to affected migrants, refugees, and stateless people. We are particularly concerned that there appears to have been no Equality Impact Assessment of the proposals, which are intended to have far-reaching impact on those with protected characteristics, which includes statelessness.

For stateless people specifically, the risks are acute. Stateless adults and children rely on timely access to settlement as their only route to citizenship and a durable solution to statelessness. Extending and complicating settlement pathways would prolong statelessness, increase the likelihood of falling into irregularity, heighten barriers to work and integration, and—because stateless people have no other country to turn to for protection—trap individuals and families indefinitely in insecurity.

Our focus in this statement is therefore on the severe impact the proposals would have on stateless adults and children in the UK if introduced.

A damaging approach for all, with disproportionate impacts on the most vulnerable

The proposed expansion of an 'earned settlement' system is fundamentally flawed. It introduces increased complexity, repeated renewals, and extended periods of insecure status in a system already characterised by long delays, high costs, and inconsistent decision-making. There is no evidence that making people wait longer for settlement improves integration or outcomes. On the contrary, insecurity of status is well-established as a driver of poverty, homelessness, exploitation, poor mental health, and disablement, with knock-on impacts for communities, local authorities, and public services.

The proposals both create and punish vulnerability. Requiring people to repeatedly renew status will make it more difficult to seek and retain work thereby heightening the risk of losing secure immigration status and getting into debt. This in turn, would lock people out of settlement, entrenching the problem.

"I have been exploring training as a teacher, but I could not go ahead as the application specifies ILR as an eligibility basis. Similarly, last month I applied to

volunteer as a magistrate but was advised that I would not be eligible if I was planning to apply for ILR in the future. In essence, the Government's earned settlement proposals would constitute further barriers to my endeavours to rebuild a normal life and contribute to the society in which my family and I live."

(Ahmad Jaber Benswait, stateless refugee)

The proposals will be particularly damaging for refugees, many of whom have already experienced trauma, displacement and long periods of uncertainty. Additional barriers to settlement risk delaying recovery, family stability and integration, while undermining the very protection refugee status is meant to provide. Subjecting refugees to prolonged limbo undermines their right to rebuild their lives. It is especially troubling that refugees would be subject to even lengthier routes to settlement under the proposals. Women, carers, disabled people, survivors of trafficking and domestic abuse, and families with children will also be disproportionately affected.

Stateless people face unique and heightened harm

While the proposals are harmful in general, there are serious consequences for stateless adults and children. Stateless people are living without any nationality, not recognised as a citizen by any State. Settlement is the only available pathway for most stateless people in the UK to resolve their statelessness through naturalisation. Extending and complicating routes to settlement therefore means prolonging statelessness, potentially indefinitely.

This approach is incompatible with the UK's international obligations to prevent and reduce statelessness and to facilitate the naturalisation of stateless people. It is also deeply harmful and impractical. Stateless people, by definition, have nowhere else to turn or return to for rights and citizenship. Keeping them in prolonged precarity offers no benefit to individuals, communities or the State, and risks further entrenching exclusion with long-term social and economic costs.

Many stateless people have already spent years in precarious situations due to lack of awareness of routes to protection or leave to remain, delays in decision-making, high fees, or periods of irregularity through no fault of their own. These proposals risk pushing people who are close to finally securing a route to citizenship back into prolonged insecurity, leaving them with no clear pathway to resolve their statelessness.

Stateless people in our community have said they feel like 'collateral damage' in the proposals, invisible, unrecognised, and subject to further punishment for the injustices already experienced in their lives:

"Due to my complex PTSD condition because of experiences of detention and torture... and forced displacement from my home and family, I lost my full-time employment in the UK [18 months ago]. While on long-term therapy, which

requires stabilisation before trauma processing, I feel the new proposals are punishing me for my health condition which is a result of injustices I suffered as a stateless person.”

(Ahmad Jaber Benswait, stateless refugee)

Profound consequences for children heightening the risk of statelessness

The potential impact on children, including stateless children and children of stateless parents, is especially alarming. Under the proposed changes, some children born in the UK who would otherwise be entitled to register as British (on the basis that a parent is settled) will be prevented from doing so if their parents cannot access settlement. Children who arrive in the UK at a young age with stateless parents will also face extended insecurity and barriers to settlement and citizenship as a result of circumstances entirely beyond their control.

Penalising children in this way is incompatible with the principle that a child’s best interests must be a primary consideration in all decisions affecting them. Insecure immigration status is a known driver of child poverty, limiting access to stable housing, social security, and essential services, and exposing children to long-term harm that extends far beyond the immigration or asylum system.

A call for a different approach

Without a thorough overhaul, these proposals risk prolonging statelessness, undermining refugee protection, harming children, and entrenching inequality across generations. We stand ready to work with the UK Government to develop an approach to settlement that is humane, evidence-based and consistent with the UK’s domestic and international commitments in general, as well as specifically to protect stateless people and prevent and reduce statelessness.

With this in mind, we urge the UK Government to:

- Maintain a clear, accessible and timely route to settlement for refugees and stateless people, without additional hurdles, extensions or conditionality.
- Give full consideration to its international obligations and commitments – including as members of the Global Alliance to End Statelessness – to prevent and reduce statelessness when considering any changes to settlement.
- Carry out, publish, and act upon a full and comprehensive Equality Impact Assessment and a Child Rights Impact Assessment of proposed changes to settlement and ensure that these safeguard and prioritise stateless people and children’s rights and best interests in any proposed changes.

European Network on Statelessness

Jesuit Refugee Service UK (JRS UK)

Asylum Aid

British Rohingya Community

Bhutanese Association

Immigration Law Practitioners' Association (ILPA)

Just Right Scotland

Kuwaiti Community Association

Liverpool Law Clinic

Northern Arabia's Surviving Indigeneity

Salam For Democracy and Human Rights (SALAM DHR)