**Defining, identifying, and estimating stateless populations: a review of the literature**

Orsola Torrisi†, Monica Alexander\*, and Rohan Alexander#

† London School of Economics. [o.torrisi@lse.ac.uk](mailto:o.torrisi@lse.ac.uk)

\* University of Toronto. [monica.alexander@utoronto.ca](mailto:monica.alexander@utoronto.ca)

# University of Toronto. [rohan.alexander@utoronto.ca](mailto:rohan.alexander@utoronto.ca)

# 1. Introduction

The issue of statelessness was first recognised and approached with instruments of international law in 1954, when the United Nations Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons (“the 1954 Convention”) provided a legal definition of a stateless person as one who is “not considered as a national by any state under the operation of its law” (UN General Assembly 1954). Sixty years later, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) launched the #IBelong campaign with the aim of eliminating statelessness by 2024, thereby bringing the issue at the forefront of the international agenda.

In theory, ending statelessness is a feasible task: as a fundamentally human-made creation, statelessness can be approached with human-made tools. In practice, however, the phenomenon is highly complex not only in its very manifestation and driving mechanisms, but in how it is conceptualised and interpreted legally. These issues complicate related research, making it difficult to identify, quantify, and ultimately safeguard the rights of such populations at the country, regional and global level.

While statelessness can be explored through many lenses, knowing how many, who, and where stateless people are is paramount to understand the magnitude of the issue, and protect such groups. Hence, this document focuses primarily on the question of statistical measurement, estimation, and reporting. It aims to review existing data, evidence and best practices, and highlight gaps with the ultimate objective of devising an improved estimation procedure and of keeping abreast of statistical information on statelessness.

We begin by reviewing definitional issues and conceptual ambiguities related to statelessness, including the historical (yet to date outdated) debate between *de jure* and *de facto* statelessness, and the more recent focus on *undetermined nationality* as a category of statistical relevance. This is an unavoidable step as any following discussion related to measurement, estimation, and statistical reporting stems from how the concept is defined, framed, and interpreted. Next, we identify potential pathways (i.e., circumstances and routes) of how statelessness can emerge. We summarise and discuss the data sources most frequently employed to quantify and analyse demographically the phenomenon, and then present currently available estimates and review their temporal and spatial evolution. We also bring attention to potential case-studies and settings of concern across the globe. We conclude by presenting statistical techniques used to estimate this and other hard-to-reach populations, addressing their strengths and limitations.

# 2. The problem: what is statelessness?

Estimating statelessness is a complex task. The first critical challenge relates to the very identification of what it means to be stateless, a human-made concept intrinsically tied to the notion of the state and membership.

Statelessness was first broadly discussed as a global phenomenon at the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention. As suggested by name of the meeting, the rights of stateless people were presented and addressed within the framework of the refugee problem only.[[1]](#endnote-2) Following its ratification, however, it became clear to the international community that stateless people represented a distinct population of concern, though sharing similar characteristics, needs and entitlements with refugees. Importantly, it was observed and accepted that not all stateless people were necessarily refugees fleeing their country of habitual residence.

A Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons was thus organised in 1954 with the aim of providing a separate legal definition and regulatory framework ensuring fundamental rights and freedoms to stateless individuals. According to Article 1(1) of the 1954 Convention, a *stateless* person is any individual

who is not considered as a national by any state under the operation of its law.

Under this definition, statelessness is regarded as a function of *nationality* – the legal connection between a person and a state – and, specifically, as the absence of such formal bond, its attached duties and rights (UNHCR 2014). Therefore, this definition does not consider the quality, effectiveness, or the way in which nationality is granted or accessed. It is a purely legal statement, identifying what is conventionally known as *de jure* (by law) statelessness (Massey 2010).

By not considering qualitative aspects, and importantly the effectiveness of the national link, this definition excludes all persons who may possess a formal bond of nationality with a state, but are unable or unwilling to avail themselves of its entitlements, including entry, residence and diplomatic protection rights. Up until recently, this group was referred to as *de facto* (in fact) stateless and mainly concerned persons located outside their country of nationality.[[2]](#endnote-3)

The decision to only include *de jure* cases of statelessness in the 1954 Convention definition was largely (and perhaps paradoxically) influenced by the definitional gaps of the 1951 Refugee Convention that it sought to improve. In particular, the drafters of the 1954 Convention understood or presumed that all *de facto* unprotected people, including those without an effective nationality, would be granted support by the 1951 Convention, and diverted their focus to the issue of a *de jure* absence of protection.

These blurred definitional boundaries have for long represented an issue for the creation of coherent databases, which require the implementation of uniform statistics across time and geographies, and as such, have been the subject of a long-standing debate among researchers, legal actors, and interest parties. Nonetheless, while the debate still sparks strong opinions, recent legal and statistical work, building on existing revisions of the 1954 Convention principles (Massey 2010; UNHCR 2010)[[3]](#endnote-4) and recognising that the *de facto* term was often mistakenly employed to refer to persons meeting the 1954 definition, has converged towards the sole use of the *de jure* terminology and the removal of *de facto* statelessness from the corpus of concepts and terms used in discussions around statelessness (IROSS 2021; UNHCR 2019a). Based on these assessments then since 2019, UNHCR stopped any statistical reporting on *de facto* stateless populations.

At the same time, recent recommendations notably started to encourage the use of the concept of *undetermined nationality* and to place on it a stronger statistical focus (IROSS 2021; UNHCR Executive Committee 2006; UNHCR 2019a).[[4]](#endnote-5) While this term carries no definition in international law, a working one has been adopted by UNHCR which identifies as persons of undetermined nationality individuals who, while either have links to more than one state on the basis of birth, marriage, descent or habitual residence or are perceived to have such ties, lack proof of possession of any nationality and have undergone “*a preliminary review that has shown that it is not yet known whether they possess a nationality or are stateless*”. Otherwise stated, if a preliminary review has shown that a person (or a group of people) does not conclusively have a nationality, but has or is perceived as having ties to a state, then s/he meets the undetermined nationality definition, and is to be considered as falling under UNHCR’s statelessness mandate as a person of concern.

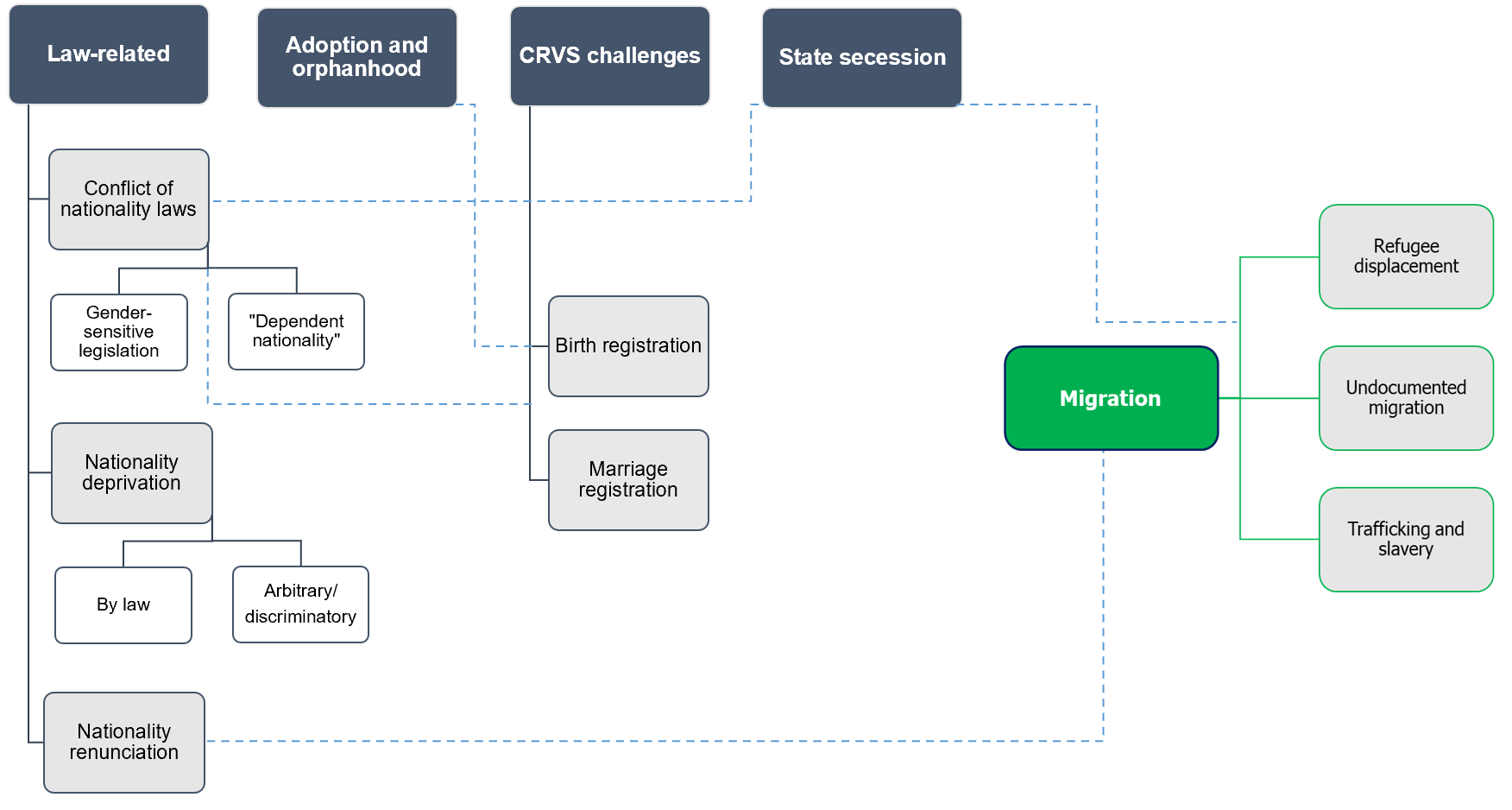
Following these developments, for the purposes of this review we therefore:

* Adopt the *de jure* definition of statelessness. Throughout the paper, we employ the term “stateless” to refer to persons who meet the *de jure* statelessness definition as expressed in the 1954 Convention because they are not considered nationals of any state.
* Treat *de facto* statelessness as an historical, yet obsolete category for current statistical purposes. Any reference to this concept in the paper will thus be explicit.
* Use the term *undetermined nationality* to refer to persons who lack proof of possession of any nationality, who at the same time have or are perceived as having links to a state other than the one they are living in, and have undergone a preliminary screening that could not conclude they were nationals of any state.

# 3. The pathways into statelessness

Many potential, often interconnected, routes may lead to statelessness. These can emerge at birth or later in life, once or more, during the life-course. Understanding these various circumstances is key to determining how we think about estimating different stateless populations in diverse settings. In this section, we review plausible mechanisms bearing in mind the conceptual definitions discussed above.

In this section, routes are categorised separately for sake of clarity, but are often far from being mutually exclusive. Two or more mechanisms often combine to generate conditions of statelessness, or create ambiguous situations that may need case-by-case review before proper classification, as in the case of migration-related routes. The diagram shown in Figure 1 summarises the identified sources of statelessness, or temporary undetermined nationality, as well as their possible linkages. Each pathway is discussed in more detail in the following sub-sections, along with a short description of peculiar historical cases.

**Figure 1 Pathways into statelessness and undetermined nationality**

Note: Dark blue boxes and solid lines indicate direct routes towards statelessness. Green(-outlined) boxes and solid lines indicate possible routes towards undetermined nationality. Dashed lines indicate indirect connections between pathways.

Source: adapted by the author.

## 3.1 Conflict of nationality laws

At birth: Mismatches in the criteria leading to nationality acquisition between two (or more) states can cause *de jure* statelessness at birth. Internationally, states tend to follow two main guiding principles to grant nationality: *jus soli* (by land) or *jus sanguinis* (by blood).[[5]](#endnote-6)

According to the most common interpretation of the former, nationality is granted on the basis of one’s place of birth. That is, nationality is obtained by virtue of being born within the territories of a state (Stolke 1997; Bauböck 1994). This principle is more prevalent where there is a tradition of immigration. By contrast, *jus sanguinis* dictates nationality on the basis of family heritage or descent, i.e., if one or both parents of the new-born are nationals of the state themselves. In this case, nationality is passed on across generations. Today, this doctrine is preferred in countries with an history of emigration, mainly in Europe, the Middle East and Asia (Batchelor 1998).

A typical example of how the existence, and permutations, of these different legal doctrines for the attribution of nationality can create statelessness is when an individual is born in the territories of a state which grants nationality only via *jus sanguinis*, and his/her parents are nationals of a foreign state which only confers nationality by place of birth (*jus soli*). A child born in such a situation would fail to qualify for nationality under the laws of either state with which they have connections: they cannot acquire the nationality of the state in which they were born because this country grants it only on the basis of descent, and cannot obtain that of their parents as they are technically born on foreign soil.

Another way in which incongruous principles of nationality law can engender statelessness at birth is when a child is born in a state where nationality is granted only via parental descent and his/her parents are stateless. In this context, statelessness becomes inherited.

Statelessness at birth becomes even more likely when principles of nationality attribution are gender-sensitive, i.e., when nationality is granted only via patrilinear *jus sanguinis.* In such cases, a child risks becoming stateless even when born on the territory of the mother’s state of nationality (e.g., if the father is a foreigner and a national of a country where nationality is obtained via *jus soli*) or if, born outside their parents’ country, the nationality laws of the birth country are based on *jus sanguinis* only (e.g., the case of Syrian refugee children with missing fathers).

Later in life: Conflicts of law can generate statelessnessalso over one’s lifespan.In many instances, this results from the “accumulative” effect of the application of the domestic laws of different states. In particular, two main categories of problems might trigger this type of statelessness.

The former is linked to the concept of “dependent nationality”, i.e., the practice of linking one’s nationality to that of someone else following a legally certified event such as adoption and marriage (Weissbrodt and Collins 2006). For instance, some countries prescribe an automatic change of nationality for a spouse (typically the woman) when they marry a non-national (UN Women 2003). If the other spouse’s state does not grant nationality through marriage to a national, this person is automatically rendered stateless. Moreover, even if nationality is granted upon or after marriage, some states might revoke it following divorce or spousal death. This in turn might cause statelessness should the origin state not guarantee the restoration of previous nationality. An example is that of the so-called Vietnamese “economic brides”, who lost their Vietnamese nationality once they married non-nationals, but then either failed to obtain their husbands’ nationality before marriages dissolved or lost it due to divorce (McKinsey 2007).

Equally, statelessness later in life may follow international adoption. This is rare, but occurs in the case of adopted children whose prospective country did not automatically grant the nationality of the adoptive parents, and the laws of the origin country, took it away precisely because of adoption (Duncan 2005).

Another conflict of law that might lead to statelessnesscan occur when an individual applies to obtain a certain nationality and the state to which they are applying requires the renunciation of any previous nationality before acquiring the new one (see more in 3.5 below).

## 3.2 Abandonment and orphanhood

Statelessness at birth may also relate to when a child is abandoned, and it is not possible to legally establish the identity of the parents (Lynch 2005; UNHCR and IPU 2005). This is more prevalent in states where nationality laws are guided by the *jus sanguinis* principle, but may also occur with *jus soli*-inspired legislations*.*

Similar issues emerge with respect to orphaned children as their parents’ identity or nationality of may be unknown. For the purposes of estimation, this is particularly relevant for countries with high rates of HIV/AIDS, as well as for those subject to natural/man-made disasters, including armed conflict.

## 3.3 State succession

Statelessness, both at birth and in later life, may arise when sovereignty over a territory is transferred from a “predecessor” to a “successor” entity, i.e., when some form of state succession takes place. Clearly, statelessness emerging from similar events could also be understood through the lens of conflicts of nationality laws. However, given the potentially much larger number of persons that state successions can affect, it is worth considering this as a stand-alone route to statelessness.

For the purposes of the nationality question, it is relevant to differentiate between “universal” and “partial” succession. In the former case, the “predecessor” state entity has ceased completely to operate. This makes its nationality obsolete and renders all its former citizens stateless, unless they have a second nationality, or they can immediately acquire a replacement nationality because of a genuine link to another state. The dismantling of federal states such as the USSR and Yugoslavia into smaller independent republics, or state splitting, e.g., South Sudan from Sudan and Eritrea from Ethiopia are archetypal cases of “universal” state succession resulting in large-scale statelessness (UNHCR 1997). “Partial” succession, conversely, occurs when part of a state undergoes a change in sovereignty through either acquisition by another entity or via the formation of an entirely new state (e.g., after de-colonisation). In this form, statelessness can result from a clash between two still existing nationalities – that of the “predecessor” and that of the “successor” state.

Given the sizable number of people these events may affect, a range of solutions have been attempted to mitigate the emergence of statelessness, including the “restored nationality model” (anyone who had the nationality of a state before it was occupied/incorporated by another state is entitled to that nationality again), the “zero-option model” (van Krieken 1994) (everyone, who at the time of independence is a legal resident of its new territories, is entitled to its nationality) and the “ethnicity model” (Weis 1979) (when nationality is attributed on the basis of ethnic concerns), with different degree of success.

State succession is particularly problematic because newly formed states generally have either limited resources or time to draft detailed nationality laws, determine who is/is not a national in that context, ratify and implement international treaties for the protection of stateless individuals. These factors typically especially affect those population subgroups – often minorities – that are more connected with either the “successor” or “predecessor” state, thereby exposing them to implicit or indirect discriminatory, arbitrary, exclusions and disenfranchisement.

A particular case in this regard is that of contested or emerging statehood, e.g., the Sahrawi and Palestinian causes. These peculiar groups are discussed more in detail in Section 5.1.2.

## 3.4 Deprivation of nationality

*Discriminatory/arbitrary:* Related to the above, but outside the context of state succession, statelessness can result from the deprivation of nationality on an arbitrary/discriminatory basis, namely when a state purposefully withdraws, withholds, or denies recognition of nationality to a specific population because of some collective particular characteristic like ethnicity, language, or religion. If the population group has no way to access other nationalities, such practice will render its members stateless. Kurds in Syria, Rohingya in Myanmar, Bidoon in the Gulf, and Haitian descendants in the Dominican Republic are often cited as populations affected by discriminatory statelessness.

Lawful: In some instances, the bond of nationality may also be taken away on legal grounds by the granting state itself. If citizens deprived of nationality do not possess a second nationality, lawful deprivation of nationality can cause statelessness.

States can revoke one’s nationality on the basis of various legal claims (UNHCR 2020a), including (i) prolonged periods of residence in a foreign state (seen as allowing the connection with the state of nationality to decay)[[6]](#endnote-7); (ii) as a punitive action or as a response to acts perceived as a threat to state security; (iii) following disloyal acts performed by the individual (e.g., voting in another country’s election, serving in foreign armed forces)[[7]](#endnote-8); (iv) if nationality was obtained using incorrect or fraudulent information.

## 3.5 Renunciation of nationality

In some countries, the bond of nationality, once acquired, can be voluntary forfeited by the individual. This freedom, however, can be a source of statelessness. The most typical example occurs during naturalisation procedures, when the process in the state of application requires renouncing to the original nationality. If renunciation of nationality does not coincide temporally with the grant of naturalisation, the individual may become (at least temporarily) stateless.

## 3.6 Deficient civil registration procedures and administrative practices

Imperfect civil registration procedures, and in particular, deficient birth and marriage registration services, can result in persons failing to acquire a nationality to which they are eligible and, thus, to become stateless.

Underlying reasons for this route include states’ lack of dedicated resources to have complete registration, (e.g., limited registration bureaus and equipment, inadequate storage facilities for documents and poorly trained and supervised registry officials), excessive administrative fees and strict or unrealistic application deadlines (UNICEF 2002, 2006). In the case of birth registration, these may be connected and further aggravated by parental inertia, and possibly by issues of marriage registration itself. For instance, when a marital union goes unrecorded, the registration of children born from that union may also be postponed or never occur.

Such barriers to proper documentation therefore can “add-up” and become self-perpetuating. This may, in particular, affect highly vulnerable groups like minorities, indigenous groups, migrant/displaced or nomadic populations (Batchelor 2002).

## 3.7 Migration

Contemporary situations of statelessness are largely rooted in identifiable legal mechanisms, historical events, administrative and procedural malfunctions. For large part, these have effect *in situ* and impact people who have not left their country of habitual residence or birth.

However, in the current globalised world, the question of whether international migration *per se* may represent a source of statelessness has become increasingly relevant. In this regard, extant literature seems to view modern migration as a contributory (or precipitator) factor of many of the “technical” routes to statelessness examined above (Van Waas 2008). Greater intermingling of people across formal national frontiers increases the incidence of conflicts between law, and/or administrative malfunctioning (e.g., in situations when children are born to immigrants coming from countries where the conferral of nationality is based on gender-imbalanced laws, or when marital unions occur between citizens of different states). These situations are likely exacerbated by cultural and linguistic barriers that might prevent migrants from accessing administrative and legal services useful to prevent statelessness. Equally, we may expect increasing instances of mismatches between nationalisation processes in receiving countries and laws on loss-of-nationality in migrants’ sending countries, as well as new opportunities for discrimination in granting citizenship. Migration occurring just before, or in conjunction with, state succession can also engender and contribute to higher cases of statelessness. Typically, even in the particular case of refugees who lack nationality, statelessness can be tracked back to one of the mechanisms explained above, with migration operating as a contributory/strengthening factor.

However, processes of international migration may still create ambiguous situations and represent a crucial pathway for what UNHCR defines as undetermined nationality. In fact, persons recognised as having an undetermined nationality (as defined in Section 2) most often are located outside the country they may have ties with following a migratory move, and these factors lead them to have an unsettled nationality status. The three main migration-related routes contributing the most to population groups that may be at risk of undetermined nationality are: refugees, irregular/undocumented migrants and victims of human trafficking.

*Refugee displacement:* According to the 1951 and 1954 Conventions, all refugees are to be considered stateless. However, from the point of view of nationality, this population may be divided into two categories:

* Refugees who do not possess a nationality at all (for instance, because they have been officially deprived of it by their home state before they fled the country). These are to be considered as *de jure* stateless.
* Refugees who have or appear to still retain a bound with the country they fled from, but do not possess documentation and no longer enjoy state protection and assistance, and perhaps for this very reason were forced to leave. These may be identified, at least temporarily and following a review, as refugees with *undetermined nationality*.

Both groups face similar threats and challenges (e.g., statelessness may be difficult to prove even for *de jure* stateless, given that they often leave their origin states without identity documents and they have nowhere to claim them when they arrive at destination). They have also both migrated away from their origin state and receive no support from it. However, the latter group, who may be the majority, may still retain a bond with the origin state via a nominal link of nationality and their undetermined status can only be certified following a preliminary review, suggesting the need for a case-by-case analysis.

*Irregular/undocumented migrants*: The very existence of states, and the related notion of national membership, forces a reflection on how to regulate the movement of people across borders. States usually employ border controls and immigration policies detailing the conditions to be lawfully admitted inside their territories. Individuals defying such policies or failing to meet their criteria, but who still manage to enter and stay in a state’s territory, are defined as irregular/undocumented.[[8]](#endnote-9)

Most undocumented migrants could be expected to be recognised as citizens of their origin state if they were to return (or following any preliminary review of their status), and hence their undocumented migration status cannot be directly equated with statelessness or with having undetermined nationality. However, the absence of elements and papers to prove nationality, identity or any other basic personal identification information can still make this group vulnerable to the issue, particularly with respect to their descendants.

First, the absence of documentation prevents undocumented migrants from accessing legal venues for recognition, and may make it more difficult for those among them who are indeed stateless to firmly show that they qualify *de jure*. This places them at elevated risk of being identified as holding undetermined nationality by any preliminary review. Second, lack of regular migration status represents an obvious bar to naturalisation in the host country (which almost everywhere requires proof of legal residence). Third, migrating without proper documents may also limit one’s capacity to claim protection from consular authorities of their home country (for instance, if due to the factual lack of documents, s/he cannot prove to be a citizen of that state), or may make one unwilling to do so for fear of being persecuted. Fourth, and crucially, fear of legal persecution, detention or deportation further implies that for undocumented migrants, statelessness can be more easily inherited across generations. Undocumented migrants are in fact less likely to register their marriages and children in the host state. This also dramatically rises the chances of becoming stateless at birth.[[9]](#endnote-10) Finally, the considerable challenges stateless people face in obtaining legal documents may also contribute to them being more likely to cross borders irregularly.

The group of stateless undocumented migrants is possibly amongst the most complicated to identify and estimate in terms of size and composition. This is not only because their lack of legal documentation hides them from official statistics, but also because their status is influenced by the specificities of domestic immigration laws and by how it understands statelessness.

*Slavery and human trafficking*: Another migratory phenomenon which may engender situations of undetermined nationality, and possibly statelessness, is represented slavery and human trafficking.

Victims of trafficking face a large risk of undetermined nationality, even when they manage to regain freedom, if they have been deprived of their identity documents by their traffickers. Like undocumented migrants, they are technically unable to prove their nationality, although they may still retain a link with their origin country. Without such proof, they may not obtain protection from any diplomatic representation, may not be allowed to return to their homeland, ultimately becoming of undetermined nationality(UNHCR 2007; Weissbrodt and Collins 2006). Equally, the legislation of the destination state may equate them with irregular migrants, and not grant them naturalisation due to the absence of regular residence permits.

## 3.8 Other cases

The routes identified above encompass the main pathways into statelessness and/or undetermined nationality as defined in Section 2 that we deem most useful for the purpose of this review. Nonetheless, there are some other individual and/or historical cases deserving special mention.

*Lack of consular protection*: A rare case of migration-related source of potential statelessness can emerge when a national of a country is in a territory where its national state cannot provide them with consular protection. This can occur, for instance, when there are no diplomatic relationships between the host and the origin country of that person, or when there are no consular representations in the host country, and no other state is willing to provide protection to the person. For example, some Cubans (e.g., undocumented migrants) in the United States (US) may be considered stateless as they cannot avail themselves of protection from their state, because there is no diplomatic connection between the two countries, and at the same time the US are unlikely to confer them with nationality.

*Historical example of de facto, in situ, statelessness:* As laid out above, the concept and category of *de facto* stateless is now considered obsolete, and was predominantly used to identify persons lacking protection while outside their country of nationality, and hence who had taken part in some form of migration. However, an interesting historical case that is worth mentioning is that of German Jews between the 1935 Nuremberg Laws and the 1941 official mass denationalisation. This group was affected by what has been historically defined as *de facto in situ* stateless: while still legally holding German nationality, this group was not able to access protection from the German state within its territorial boundaries as the government actively and deliberately refused to do so.

# 4. Current available data

This section summarises what currently exists in terms of the data sources (coverage and availability) typically used to estimate statelessness. Data on stateless persons are primarily collected by states, both because of international obligations and capacity. While in a few instances these data can be supplemented by information collected by non-governmental bodies, we here mainly focus on the different types of data sources produced by states as these are more comprehensive and the key sources UNHCR officially draws on in its statistical reporting on statelessness at the global level.

Before going into detail, it is important to highlight some factors of concern affecting, to various extent, all the data sources presented below:

* The existing widespread conceptual ambiguity around the notion of statelessness and the ensuing absence of a universal definition almost inevitably generates inconsistencies across time and countries in terms of procedural applications. These in turn cyclically affect data collection methodologies, where data gathering systems are in place.
* Not all nation states are willing or able to provide information about statelessness. As of 2020, fewer than half the countries in the world possess government data on stateless populations and UNHCR is not always able to supply and support data collection.
* Not all nation states are willing to abide to their international responsibilities and share information about statelessness, even when they may have the technical capacity to do so. This is because issues around statelessness and citizenship more broadly in many settings are still widely considered to politically sensitive, and often closely guarded by states as a matter of sovereignty.
* Statistical coverage of stateless people is often influenced by the fact that many data sources rely on self-identification. This is problematic because many statelessness persons may not see themselves as stateless, or are reluctant to identify as such and intentionally elude official detection for a variety of reasons related to their disadvantaged position, thereby causing underestimation (Tapinos 1999).

These factors alone, and combined, largely challenge the quality, completeness and comparability of existing data sources, over time, across space, within and between datasets.

## 4.1. State-gathered data

According to the 1954 Convention and international human rights law, state governments have the primary responsibility of collecting data on statelessness. Nonetheless, not all countries fulfil this obligation, some by not disclosing data (often deliberately), some because of lack of technical capacities. Presently, some of the world’s most populous countries do not report on statelessness (e.g., China, Indonesia, Nigeria, and India only providing figures for stateless refugees from Myanmar). Even where government data collection systems are in place, they do not always yield comprehensive or accurate statistics, and these mainly seek to minimise false positive cases (thereby increasing the risk of underestimation).

For countries where government reporting occurs, existing data sources are the following:

### 4.1.1 Administrative registers, including nationality determination procedures

Administrative data sources appear to be the most common, but also methodologically heterogeneous type of government statistics on statelessness. These include central population registries, vital statistics, migration-related databases, and data connected to immigration law enforcement. They usually come from national statistical offices, ministries of the interior (e.g., residence permits), departments of immigration (most common), as well as police and border control, ministries of justice, and dedicated offices (least frequent) (UNHCR 2019a). Out of the 20 high- to middle-income countries that established statelessness determination procedures, a few also occasionally provide related figures as a (additional) source of administrative data (UNHCR 2020b).

These administrative data are affected by a number of limitations both within and between countries that often hamper the accuracy and comprehensiveness of estimates generated from them.

* Data collection often occurs at different geographical units. In some countries, data is gathered at the regional level, while in others at the national or municipality level. Sometimes, registration methods also differ across geographies of the same state. For instance, in Belgium or the Netherlands registration occurs at the municipal level, but methods and determination procedures vary across municipalities.
* In some instances, data generating procedures are unclear. This risk is magnified when data collected by one department/organisation is subsequently passed on to other institutions (e.g., from immigration departments to statistical offices), with the process sometimes involving unspecified adjustments.
* Definitional/inclusion issues also affect the comparability of administrative data. In some countries, individuals with “unknown” nationality are included and counted along with stateless persons (e.g., Sweden), while in others are not (e.g., the Netherlands) (Kerwin et al. 2020).
* Some registries do not have procedures to verify self-reported data, while others may determine statelessness on the basis of ethnicity or other documentation (e.g., residence permits), resulting in under or misreporting and likely in the exclusion of the most vulnerable ones. Figures on stateless persons coming from national government agencies therefore may neither correspond directly to registration data nor to specific statelessness categories.
* Figures determined from statelessness determination procedures may be inaccurate due to the fact that a case may be counted while its procedure has not been finalised. This can cause fluctuating estimates that are purely due to the ongoing process of determination and not to any actual changes in the number of stateless persons.

### 4.1.2. Population censuses

A few countries gather information on statelessness using censual information. Censual data, though, may include both stateless and undetermined populations, and are unlikely to capture differences between them. Their use as primary identification source might be particularly problematic in countries with high rates of irregular migrants, a group known to be often excluded from censual enumeration.

Additional challenges of this data source relate to the census being dependent on self-identification as a means of identifying the population of interest and the fact that this population enumeration exercise is normally carried decennially (UNHCR 2008). Censual data may thus fail to capture emerging contexts of statelessness, and also any effective effort to lessen its prevalence.

### 4.1.3. Household surveys

A limited number of governments utilise household surveys to produce information about statelessness people. These include broad national surveys (e.g., the UK Labour Force Survey and International Passenger Survey) as well as targeted mapping exercises.

These latter are typically limited in scope with regard to the population of interest and the timeframe. Examples include surveys in Myanmar, where only stateless Rohingya residing in some villages of Rakhine state were sampled (thereby excluding other Rohingyas in other parts of Myanmar or stateless persons in the Rakhine state) (Fortify Rights 2014), and in the Philippines, where a survey targeting persons of Indonesian descent at risk of statelessness was carried in 2013 in Southern Mindanao (ISI 2014).

Similar to other sources, most household surveys are affected by the accuracy of self-reported information, and by their limited scope. These two factors together often cause exclusion and underreporting. In a few cases, targeted surveys, such as the 2019 Socioeconomic Survey on the Shoma community in Kenya (UNHCR 2019b) and the 2019 nation-wide survey on statelessness in Ivory Coast (UNHCR 2018), attempted to explicitly address the issue of self-identification by using pre-screenings and household listings based on qualitative knowledge before survey implementation and/or by collecting survey information that could help assessing nationality status (e.g., asking questions related to documentation, migration history of individuals and families).

### 4.1.4. Other government reporting sources

When unable to collect structured data on statelessness, countries may resort to extrapolation from media reports, internal data and government commissions. Limited conceptual rigor and accuracy and lack of detailed information on extrapolation methodologies make these data sources volatile and unreliable for estimation purposes (UNHCR 2019a)

In the past decades, some of the most technically-equipped states attempted to combine all the above sources and map statelessness within their borders (e.g., Austria (UNHCR 2017) Belgium ([UNHCR 2012](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2331502420907028)), Estonia ([UNHCR 2016](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2331502420907028)), Finland ([UNHCR 2014](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2331502420907028)), Iceland ([UNHCR 2014](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2331502420907028)), Lithuania ([UNHCR 2016](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2331502420907028)), Malta ([UNHCR 2014](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2331502420907028)), the Netherlands ([UNHCR 2011](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2331502420907028)), Norway ([UNHCR 2015b](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2331502420907028)), Sweden ([UNHCR 2016](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2331502420907028)), and the United Kingdom ([UNHCR and Asylum Aid 2011](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2331502420907028)). These commendable exercises, however, make use of cross-country inconsistent definitions and do not always produce reliable/comprehensive results (e.g., the United Kingdom identified several methodological flaws in its statelessness data, and found diverging information across different data sets).

Finally, some countries, including the US, provide some information on statelessness via their respective human rights institutes, e.g., in yearly reports.[[10]](#endnote-11) These types of information are often in the public domain, but not collated and compiled in a single database.

## 4.2. Non-governmental data sources

In addition to, or in the absence of, data sources collected by governments, some countries rely on the work of NGOs (e.g., those working on minority rights issues or on forced displacement) to gather information on their stateless population. Much of this data is publicly available, but it is not easy to navigate(e.g., reports from the European Network on Statelessness such as its work on Slovenia (2015) or from the Bhutanese Refugee Support Group and Association of Human Rights Activists (2007))**.** Moreover, these sources tend to mix forms of statelessness with undetermined populations in their counts. Their methodologies for data collection may be spotty, and it is difficult to check their reliability, authenticity or whether they are up-to-date. As such, these data sources are of limited usefulness for estimation.

# 5. An overview of the current estimates of stateless populations

Since 2004, UNHCR collects and compiles statistics on stateless persons using the data sources detailed above, and the resulting database – the Population Statistics Reference database[[11]](#endnote-12) – is today the only systematic source seeking to offer a global statistical snapshot of the issue. This section describes the dataset and then discusses its existing versions to examine how estimates of statelessness have evolved over time and space.

## 5.1 UNHCR Population Statistics Reference database

UNHCR gathers data on statelessness from its country offices twice a year (31/12 and 30/06). These statistics are then checked and processed, though UNHCR does not provide a comprehensive handbook on reporting standards nor best practice guidelines for measurement.[[12]](#endnote-13) Consolidated statistics are published in the UNHCR Population Statistics Reference database[[13]](#endnote-14) and commented annually in the organisation’s Global Trends report, along with data on other groups falling under its mandate (e.g., refugees, IDPs and asylum-seekers).[[14]](#endnote-15)

UNHCR Population Statistics Reference database is organised across “Source” and “Basis”. The former denotes the main data processing institution (normally, the state’s government body). The latter identifies the data collection method and typically refers to the state-level data sources described above, but may further include data from UNHCR initiatives, civil society and NGOs, and other internal estimates (for instance, in 2018 UNHCR itself was either partially or fully involved in the collection and reporting of figures on statelessness of 13 out of the 78 countries for which stateless data were available). The database, when needed, also provides supplementary descriptions, comments, and footnotes specifying relevant characteristics and anomalies of the enumerated populations, reporting timelines and methods used.[[15]](#endnote-16) Countries for which UNHCR “has information about stateless persons, but no reliable data” are indicated with an asterisk.

Presently, UNHCR compiles figures for two population groups: *de jure* stateless persons (i.e., persons who meet the statelessness definition in the 1954 Convention) and individuals with undeterminednationality. Up until mid-2019, alongside these two categories, UNHCR also reported on *de facto* stateless population. Following recent assessments, it was determined that many stateless persons were often incorrectly labelled as *de facto* when they actually met the definition of the 1954 Convention. Hence, as noted in Section 2, the category was removed and is now considered obsolete.

When possible, UNHCR also seeks to provide age-sex disaggregated data on *de jure* stateless or persons with undetermined nationality. In 2019, sex-disaggregated data was available for 28 of the 76 countries reporting on stateless populations, and these countries were mainly in Central and Western Africa and the Asia-Pacific area (UNCHR 2020c). Country-specific population descriptions sometimes provide ethnic or other group characteristics, particularly for settings where data collection methodologies target narrowly-defined population subgroups. In this respect, it is relevant to highlight that the usual strategy of UNHCR is to report on one legal status as a “person of concern” only. However, given the extraordinarily large size of the dual-status population related to Myanmar (stateless refugees/IDPs/asylum-seekers), UNHCR public database includes stateless persons who are also refugees/asylum-seekers from Myanmar or IDPs in Myanmar in its counts. Starting from 2019, UNHCR have started the collection of data on statelessness from all displaced populations.

### 5.1.1 Time trends

A first indication of the overall size of the problem was given in UNHCR Global Appeal (a fundraising document) in 2002 (“some 8.9 million stateless or potentially stateless”) and then again in 2003-2004 (dropping to “at least 1 million”). However, these estimates did not result from detailed statistical analyses.

The first time UNHCR actually reported country-to-country statistical data on statelessness was in its 2004 Global Trends report. Using data from 41 countries (of which 30 were deemed reliable), it counted just under 1.5 million stateless persons, but it did not attempt to provide a global estimate of the phenomenon.

Since then and for more than a decade, UNHCR used the figure of (“at least”) 10 million people as its best estimate of the stateless population worldwide. This projected value was based on yearly updated counts from country reports, and on broad information from countries deemed to have large stateless populations, but providing no or unreliable data. This estimate was challenged in 2014 by a desk review provided by the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion, which estimated the global number of people without nationality to be at least 15 million (ISI 2014). This latter figure, though, included also stateless refugees and Palestinians who receive assistance from UNRWA, who are not counted by UNHCR global data on statelessness.

In its most recent 2019 Global Trends report, the figure of “10 million” global stateless people has been replaced with the more general term “millions”. At the same time, the total actual count from the 76 countries which provided data on statelessness amounted to 4.2 million. Unfortunately, given current data gaps and methodological challenges there is no way to know whether the temporal increase in counts observed across UNCHR Global Trends reports is due to a real within-country increase, to a mere increase of countries providing information (Figure 2), to better and wider datasets, or to definitional changes.

### 5.1.2 Geographical coverage

Although statelessness is an issue that affects all parts of the world, its geographical spread is likely uneven. According to UNHCR data, at the start of 2014, there were 20 countries worldwide reporting over 10,000 stateless persons within their borders. In 2019, these were 22. About 97 percent of stateless persons recorded by UNHCR are found in these countries. Between 2014-2019, there have not been major changes in terms of the top 10 countries reporting high numbers of stateless persons (Table 1).

To explore the spatial spread of the phenomenon, UNHCR organises its statistics by world region (Asia and the Pacific, Africa, Europe, the Middle East and North Africa and the Americas). The next sub-sections summarise patterns according to this geographical division and highlight relevant cases.

**Figure 2 Reported number of stateless persons worldwide and number of reporting countries (2014-2020)**

Sources: UNCHR Global Trends reports (2014-2019).

**Table 1. Countries with highest reported stateless populations reported in UNHCR Global Trends data 2014-2019[[16]](#endnote-17)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **2014** | **2015** | **2016** | **2017** | **2018** | **2019** |
| Myanmar (938,000) | Myanmar (810,000) | Myanmar (925,939) | Bangladesh\* (932,204) | Bangladesh\* (906,635) | Côte d’Ivoire (955,399) |
| Côte d'Ivoire (700,000) | Côte d'Ivoire (700,000) | Ivory Coast (694,000) | Côte d’Ivoire (692,000) | Côte d’Ivoire (692,000) | Bangladesh\* (854,704) |
| Thailand (443,862) | Thailand (506,197) | Thailand (487,741) | Myanmar\* (621,763) | Myanmar\* (620,939) | Myanmar\* (600,000) |
| Zimbabwe (300,000) | Latvia (267,559) | Latvia (242,736) | Thailand (486,440) | Thailand (478,843) | Thailand\* (475,009) |
| Latvia (252,017) | Dominican Republic (210,000) | Syria (160,000) | Latvia (233,571) | Latvia (224,844) | Latvia (216,851) |
| Syria (160,000) | Syria (160,000) | Kuwait (93,000) | Syria (160,000) | Syria (160,000) | Syria (160,000) |
| Dominican Republic (133,770) | Iraq (120,000) | Russia (90,771) | Kuwait (92,000) | Kuwait (92,000) | Malaysia\* (108,332) |
| Russia (101,813) | Russia (178,000) | Uzbekistan (86,524) | Uzbekistan (85,555) | Uzbekistan (79,942) | Uzbekistan (97,346) |
| Kuwait (93,000) | Kuwait (93,000) | Estonia (82,585) | Russia (82,148) | Estonia (77,877) | Kuwait (92,020) |
| Uzbekistan (86,703) | Estonia (91,281) | Saudi Arabia (70,000) | Estonia (80,314) | Russia (75,679) | Estonia (75,599) |

Note: Figures marked with an asterisk include stateless Rohingya displaced from/in Myanmar.

Asia and the Pacific

In terms of absolute values, most of the persons falling under the UNHCR statelessness mandate are found in Asia and the Pacific (as per 2019 UNHCR report, about 2.2 million). In part, this results from the fact that the region also hosts the largest share of the global population.

The number of countries significantly affected by the issue in the Asia and the Pacific region is also notable. At the end of 2019, of the 23 countries globally reporting a figure of over 10,000 cases of stateless persons, 8 were located in this region. The region also hosts the largest number of countries where the problem is considered to be substantial, but data unreliable (hence marked with an asterisk) or not available.

Cases requiring special attention in the region are detailed below:

Central Asia: here, most cases of statelessness originate from the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The number of stateless persons has increased over time in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, seemingly because of newly reported statistics.[[17]](#endnote-18) In Uzbekistan, news report from 2008 estimated ‘over 500,000’ stateless persons in the country.[[18]](#endnote-19) This figure was also reported in a 2009 Refugees International (2009) publication.

The problem appears particularly acute in Kazakhstan and Afghanistan. For the former, UNCHR data are available, but studies suggest large underestimation.[[19]](#endnote-20) For the latter, existing data are deemed unreliable, but the prevalence of the phenomenon is considered substantial due to Afghanistan’s large nomadic population (especially the Jogi, estimated to be 20,000-30,000) and history of conflict (Hall and UNICEF 2011).

South-East Asia: here, statelessness tends to be the result of a mix of factors, including historic and contemporary migration patterns, armed conflicts, and the decolonisation process. The largest high-risk group is that of the Rohingya, an ethnic, religious (Muslim) and linguistic minority predominantly residing in northern Rakhine state of Myanmar, which was arbitrarily deprived of nationality as a result of Myanmar 1982 Citizen Act.[[20]](#endnote-21) Other ethnic minority populations are at risk of statelessness in Myanmar and equally affected by the 1982 Act, including persons of Chinese (allegedly 3 percent of the total population of Myanmar) (Minority Rights Group International 2017), Indian (estimated as 2.5 million by the Government of India 2001) and Nepali ancestries.

As of 2019, UNHCR estimated 600,000 stateless Rohingya in Rakhine state – including IDPs.[[21]](#endnote-22) A sizeable proportion of Rohingya reside in several other countries in South-East Asia. While forcibly displaced stateless Rohingya in Bangladesh have been reported in UNHCR statistics since 2017, they have started being counted in India, Malaysia and Thailand in 2019 only. Together, the total number of Rohingya reported across these South-East Asian countries is 1.57 million (or 38 percent of the global stateless population accounted for in the reported statistics).[[22]](#endnote-23) Adding these three other significant Rohingya hosting countries is an important step in addressing the difference in treatment that previously existed between Rohingya in Bangladesh and those elsewhere. However, ongoing challenges around data collection and reporting for displaced Rohingya in these countries mean that figures likely represent an incomplete snapshot of the real size of the population. No data is reported for Pakistan (and Saudi Arabia) though the country is known to be another regional host.

Other populations, identified elsewhere (ISI 2014), with a potential high risk of statelessness in South-East Asia include:

Malaysia: street children of Indonesian and Filipino migrant descent (estimated from 10-150,000); undocumented nomadic Bahau Laut (maritime populations/groups); Tamils from India who are not being treated as Malaysian nationals.

Bhutan: population of Lhotshampas (people of Nepali origin migrated to Bhutan as workers since the 19th century).

Nepal: according to survey estimates, there are 4.3 million persons in Nepal without citizenship documentation, but it is unknown how many may be stateless (Aryal 2014). Other estimates for stateless persons range between 2.3 to 2.6 million, but this number includes also individuals with “unknown” status (US Department of State 2013).

Brunei: according to UNHCR statistics, there are 20,863 stateless individuals in the country (approximately, 5 percent of the population).

China: China does not provide information on its stateless population to UNHCR, and hence the size of this population is unknown. There appear to be considerable issues with respect to birth registration procedures. According to the 2010 census around 13 million children in China lacked birth registration, although some independent research estimated the figure to be nearly 37 million (Goodkind 2004).[[23]](#endnote-24) Persons born as second or later children following the introduction of the ‘one child policy’ are particularly at high-risk of lack of birth registration certificates and hence statelessness. Another vulnerable group is that of children born out of wedlock, which is largely stigmatised if not prohibited by law in many provinces. Informally adopted children, or living in non-state orphanages are also unlikely to be registered and hence face statelessness.

Finally, North Koreans born in China, especially those born from undocumented North Korean migrant women, likely face the risk of statelessness. Although international law regards North Korean refugees as political refugees, the Chinese government denies this population legal protection due to political reasons.

India: only in 2019, UNHCR provided numbers about India’s stateless population, but this figure concerns exclusively the Rohingyas hosted in the country. Information on other population subgroups affected by statelessness are not available, including data on the Chakmas and Hajongs in Arunachal Pradesh (estimated to be some 60,000-65,000 persons), Hindus from Pakistan who came to India after the 1947 partition riots and are not considered to be Indian citizens, inhabitants of the Chitmahals (Indian enclaves in Bangladesh), persons of Chinese origin in Kolkata, Nepali speakers in the north-eastern states, Bhutanese of Nepali origin living in eastern/north-eastern India, Bihari Muslims from Bangladesh (ISI 2014) and, possibly following recent developments, Muslims living in Assam (Singh 2010; Government of India 2015; UNHCR 2019c).

Africa

Lack of reliable statistics on statelessness is particularly evident in (sub-Saharan) Africa. Only four out of 47 countries in this region provided figures to UNHCR in 2019. By contrast, many more are believed to have large stateless groups, but unreliable statistics.

Statelessness in Africa is largely driven by the legacy of colonialism and the impact of restrictive post-colonial nationality policies. Recent cases of state succession[[24]](#endnote-25), gender discrimination in laws and migration-related issues, including those affecting nomadic pastoral groups, also contribute considerably to the problem. Relevant cases in the region are:

Ivory Coast: as per UNHCR, the world’s largest documented stateless group lives in Ivory Coast (total: 955,399). This is likely due to the large efforts done by the government of the country to map this group, which also make Ivory Coast one of the few states providing sex-age disaggregated statistics. In particular, in 2018 the Government of Cote d’Ivoire, the National Institute of Statistics and UNHCR jointly launched a nation-wide data collection exercise to map and improve data on statelessness in the country. The project also places emphasis on undocumented migrants and, as such, is relevant for the identification of persons with undetermined nationality. This more detailed data suggests that women and children (about 54 percent of stateless persons are underage) are disproportionately affected, and could be further used to measure other groups at risk of statelessness, including persons of undetermined nationality, their size and characteristics.

Kenya: the country currently estimates its stateless population to be of 18,500 units, and the issue appears to affect minority groups, including persons with Somali origin and Muslims in the coastal region (Kenya National Commission on Human Rights 2007; Kenya National Commission on Human Rights and UNHCR 2010).

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC): there are no available estimates for the number of stateless people in DRC. However, its conflict history has likely generated a large amount of individuals at risk, particularly from the Banyarwanda group (estimated to about 2 million in the late 1990s) (ISI 2014).

Nigeria: statelessness is likely to be substantial as a result of issues related to the grant of nationality (especially the fact that for a long time the county did not issue any specific document serving as a definitive proof of nationality) and territorial disputes with Cameroon (Manby 2015).

Europe

Statelessness is more comprehensively mapped in Europe than any other region (about 40 countries provide statistics, and none of them is marked by UNHCR with an asterisk), in part thanks to stronger state systems for identity documentation. Nevertheless, as discussed below, the figures UNHCR reports for the number of stateless persons in countries around Europe are not necessarily representative of the full scale of the issue and there are likely cases of underreporting. In this region, there may also be over-reporting, for instance where census data has been used and this has become outdated due to a subsequent reduction in numbers.

State succession is the primary cause of statelessness in Europe. Around 85 percent of stateless persons reported in Europe are located in Latvia, the Russian Federation, Estonia and Ukraine, as a long-standing consequence of the Soviet break-up. In Eastern Europe, countries and situations that require attention are:

Russia: the country has faced a serious problem of statelessness since the disintegration of the Soviet Union. However, in recent years, the introduction of measures such as simplified naturalisation procedures seemingly reduced the number. Currently, UNHCR counts 68,209 stateless persons in Russia (178,000 in 2010).

Latvia: Latvia’s stateless population is essentially composed of two groups – “non-citizens of Latvia” and “other *de jure* stateless”. The former includes those were left stateless following the country’s independence from the Soviet Union when the country effectively reinstated the 1919 citizenship law that was in place prior to the creation of the USSR. Latvian nationality was granted to those who were nationals under the 1919 law and to their descendants. Conversely, Soviet citizens who migrated to Latvia during Soviet rule, principally ethnic Russians, were only recognised as ‘non-citizens of Latvia’ (almost 200,000 cases). The latter group (about 230 individuals) are those who are recognised as lacking national protection by the 2004 national law on the status of stateless persons (Djackova 2014).

Another trigger factor for statelessness in Europe is migration. This is particularly true for Italy and Sweden. Italy is known to be home to a sizeable migratory Roma population, of which only 40-60 percent is estimated to hold Italian nationality (The National Union of Roma and Sinti in Italy 2008; Sigona 2007). The remainder, especially those Roma coming from former Yugoslavian states are deemed to be particularly vulnerable to statelessness. Sweden reports 30,305 cases (out of a population of 10 million), but this number includes persons who are registered as of “undermined” nationality. In the migration context, it is of interest to note that where further mapping has been undertaken, it showed that large proportions of those identified as stateless were actually born in the mapped European country. This contradicts the common assumption that most stateless persons in Europe ‘arrived’ in the continent from other parts of the globe (UNHCR 2012).

Even in this more “technically-equipped” context, there are notable cross-country methodological differences in how stateless persons are enumerated. For instance, Germany and the Netherlands do not include, in their counts, individuals registered as of “unknown nationality”, while Sweden does. As already noted in Section 4.1.4, challenges on data collection procedures and methodologies have also been flagged by a mapping study conducted in the United Kingdom in 2011 Kingdom ([UNHCR and Asylum Aid 2011](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2331502420907028)). Although the study could rely on multiple sources of data on statelessness, the report concluded that there was nevertheless “a problem in recording and categorising stateless persons”, in particular because of a “confused and overlapping” use of the categories of stateless, unknown and unspecified nationality across different datasets.

Middle East and North Africa

According to the 2019 UNHCR Global Trend report, Syria, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Iraq report stateless populations of more than 10,000 persons. Several other countries are believed to host considerable stateless populations, but do not report reliable figures (e.g., Libya, Lebanon and the UAE).

Before detailing available information for the region, it is crucial to mention that UNHCR data do not include stateless Palestinians due to their particular legal status and position with reference to UNRWA. For this reason, we describe their situation in a dedicated section below.

The main current pathways into statelessness in the Middle East and North Africa region relate to the decolonisation process, patriarchal and discriminatory nationality laws. This latter route is often linked to the “pursuit” of a strong Arab national identity that over time led to the arbitrary exclusion of population segments and minority groups (e.g., Iraqi and Syrian Kurds).

Cases of interest in this region are:

Lebanon: besides the problem of Palestinian stateless refugees, there are many other cases of statelessness in the country. These often originate from failures of registration systems at the time of the first enumeration of inhabitants in the country as well as from a gender-imbalanced nationality legislation (the law does not allow Lebanese women to transmit nationality to their children). However, estimates are not available, and the last census was conducted in 1932.

Libya: policies of ‘Arabisation’ implemented under the Gaddafi regime likely created statelessness among certain minority populations the country. The three most likely affected communities are the Berber (Amazigh), the Tuareg and the Tebu (Van Waas 2013).

UAE: stateless persons in the UAE are known as Bidoon and are mostly descendants of nomadic groups in the Arabian Peninsula, which failed to register as citizens at the time of state formation. While the UAE governments reports around 10,000 Bidoon within its territories, independent analyses suggest the figure to be between 20,000-100,000 (US Department of State 2013; Emirates Centre for Human Rights 2013).

Saudi Arabia: like the UAE, Saudi Arabia has a large nomadic Bidoon population. UNHCR in 2019 reported 70,000 stateless persons in Saudi Arabia, but it claims this number to be “under verification with the government of Saudi Arabia”. The country is also known to host a large, but unspecified number of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar, many of whom may be stateless (US Department of State 2013b).

Stateless Palestinians: statelessness among Palestinians is inevitably connected to the broader issue of Palestinian statehood and nationality. Not only it is not clear who can be considered a Palestinian national, but the existence of a dedicated UN agency – UNRWA – which provides data on some, but not allPalestinians in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (in particular, the agency provides support to “persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict”) further complicates the count.

While the total number of Palestinians registered with UNRWA is close to 5.6 million, it is not straightforward to determine how many of them are stateless. For those in Lebanon and Syria, there are no naturalisation options, which implies that they can mostly be considered stateless. In Jordan, this differs because most Palestine refugees acquired Jordanian nationality under the country’s 1954 Nationality Law. However, after Jordan disengaged from the West Bank in 1988, not only did Palestinians residing in the West Bank lose Jordanian nationality, but the situation of Jordanians of Palestinian origin who resided in countries outside Jordan became ambiguous (e.g., those in Kuwait, who subsequently returned to Jordan during Iraq’s occupation of Kuwait in 1990, have reportedly experienced problems confirming their Jordanian nationality and are likely stateless) (HRW 2010; ISI 2014)).

With regards to those outside UNRWA mandate (i.e., Palestinians outside the countries mentioned above), the vast majority can be found in Gulf countries, Egypt and Iraq and fall under the UNHCR refugee mandate. There is also a considerable group of Palestinian refugees living in Europe, but it is hard to determine their status. In some countries, Palestinians are merely registered refugees, in some others their categorisation also defines them as stateless. Importantly, in most Arab countries Palestinians cannot be granted nationality and this implies restricted recognition for their children.

Lastly, Palestinians falls under the UNHCR stateless protection mandate. Not all Palestinians are in fact refugees (i.e., not displaced by hostilities of 1948 and after) living in UNRWA’s areas of operation. For instance, estimates suggest that about 400,000 and 1.8 million non-refugees Palestinians live in Gaza and in the West Bank, respectively. There are then also other Palestinians who may have moved out of current Palestinian territories, but not for humanitarian reasons (e.g., study, work) who are likely to fall under UNHCR statelessness protection mandate.

Stateless Sahrawi: The Sahrawi population, a group of people living in the Western part of the Sahara Desert, have a condition similar to that of Palestinians. Their legal status is often blurred because of the status of Western Sahara itself. While the so-called Polisario Front, which has established itself as a government-in-exile, has proclaimed the independent statehood of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, only a few governments worldwide officially recognise its existence. It is hence unclear whether a person can actually be recognised with Sahrawi nationality (US state Department 2007). For these reasons, extrapolating how many Saharawi are stateless is difficult. It is likely though that a large part of the 115,000-190,000 persons living as refugees Algeria and Mauritania could be considered stateless (ISI 2014).

Americas

The Americas currently reports the lowest number of stateless persons globally. Of the countries reporting statistics to UNHCR, all but 262 were located in Canada (3.790 cases) and just 3 countries are marked with an asterisk (i.e., there is information of further statelessness issues but no reliable data). As such, this region appears to host the smallest number of people affected by statelessness. This is likely connected to the advantages of a *jus soli* approach to nationality (the norm in the Americas) with regards to statelessness and its inheritability, and to the facilitated naturalisation procedures put in place in the continent in recent years.[[25]](#endnote-26)

A relevant case in this region is that of the US, which is still marked by an asterisk in UNHCR tables. Several mapping exercises have been done in the country. The most recent, published in early 2020 concluded that approximately 218,000 US residents are potentially stateless. However, the study also includes persons who are ‘at risk of statelessness’, making it more difficult to align this data with the global statistical reporting that refers to people who are stateless or of undetermined nationality (Kerwin et al. 2020).

# 6. Estimation methods of stateless and other hard-to-measure populations

Estimating a country’s stateless population is difficult for the reasons detailed above, including the absence of coherent definitions between and within countries, limited availability of dedicated legal screening and statistical bureaus/institutions, failures of existing ones, and government unwillingness to collect information. Lack of clarity around data sources is mirrored in the estimation procedures used by governments to produce figures on the issue. Methodologies are often not disclosed or only summarised in publicly available documents.

In general, previous strategies to estimate the number of stateless persons within a particular population appear to focus on ‘direct’ estimation strategies, deriving estimates explicitly from stateless counts available from censuses, surveys or other data collection efforts. In contrast, there appears to be minimal work on indirect estimation – that is, trying to estimate the size of stateless populations based on incorporating information about other demographic processes within a population. Additionally, existing strategies appear to focus on deterministic techniques rather than estimation within statistical or probabilistic frameworks, which limits the ability to combine different types of potentially useful information from different sources, adjusting or reweighting based on errors or biases, and gives little indication of the uncertainty around estimate. However, estimation techniques applied in other fields, such estimating other hard-to-reach populations, or demographic models more broadly, may be useful to consider in motivating potential future work in estimating stateless populations.

In this section, we briefly review existing methods of estimating stateless persons. We also discuss statistical techniques used in other areas of demographic and population estimations that show potential in the context of stateless populations. Given the focus on direct estimation techniques to date, in Appendix A we also briefly summarise novel data collection strategies that aim to collect better data on populations that are traditionally hard to measure.

## 6.1 Statelessness-specific estimation methodologies

In general, there is a lack of documents detailing countries’ specific methodologies (or potentially useful methods) for estimating stateless population. Most of the scant existing work focuses on sampling strategies, on enumeration, and on existing data triangulation, and has been done predominantly in settings where technical capacities are high and/or where governments have put the issue at the forefront of their agenda. Once data on stateless populations are collected, estimates of the size of populations appear to be directly taken from the data, with the potential for some *ad-hoc* adjustments based on expert knowledge or other knowledge gleaned from qualitative studies.

Existing country-specific mapping exercises (see paragraph 4.1.4 above) – most of which were conducted under the supervision and/or with the support of UNHCR – appear to follow very similar strategies, and do not seem to employ estimation techniques beyond direct estimation from the data available. In their methodological sections, these reports generally claim the use of a mix of desk-based analysis of existing quantitative data and texts with qualitative discussions with stakeholders and interviews with stateless persons. None of these mapping studies collected new data as part of their research and hence do not provide indications on data gathering. As mentioned above, these studies also do not apply particular statistical estimation methods, but tend to be more focused on data cross-checking and triangulation. More generally, there is limited detail with respect to the methodological procedures taken in each study.

With regards to suggested, but not yet fully implemented methodologies, in a recent paper, Kerwin et al. (2020) developed a procedure to produce estimates and profile the characteristics of US residents who are potentially stateless or at risk of statelessness. The devised methodology incorporates quantitative and qualitative approaches. First, they suggest circulating a survey asking non-identifying details about stateless individuals (causes, immigration benefits, possession of national identity documents, and basic demographic information like age, place of birth, ethnicity, race, religion, and languages spoken) to large legal and refugee service networks that (are believed) would be likely to provide services to stateless persons. They suggest this should be followed by in-depth, semi structured interviews (including questions on demographic background, causes of statelessness, immigration status, migration history, conditions before and after coming the move, among others) with those identified as stateless or potentially at risk of statelessness. They next propose to move to the review and selection of datasets likely containing information on the groups identified via the qualitative analyses. In their particular study, the authors used information on profiles of persons who were at risk of statelessness to extract likely population numbers from the American Community Survey, and compared them with immigration and refugee-related administrative data. Kerwin et al. (2020)’s article is possibly the most detailed available description of a research methodology that can be used in the US context to estimate stateless persons. However, as in the US there are no official designated administrative registries or data sources on statelessness (see endnote 10), the article does not discuss statistical estimation techniques that can be used with extant data.

While designing and running in-depth interviews to ascertain risk of statelessness is outside the scope of this project, the philosophy of identifying persons who are at risk of statelessness in a particular country could still be applied and used to help obtain estimates. For a given origin country (for example, the US), a systematic review could be carried out of migrants from all possible origin countries as to whether or not they could potentially be stateless, based on laws and conditions in both the origin and destination countries. Existing estimates of international migration flows (e.g., from the United Nations World Population Prospects) and stocks (e.g., from the American Community Survey) could then be used to obtain estimates of the likely size of the population at risk.

## 6.2 Estimation methodologies applied to other population groups

While existing literature on estimating stateless populations is limited, turning to the estimation of population groups, including traditionally hard-to-measure populations, or population groups in data-sparse settings, may be useful in building up a suite of potential techniques to explore the stateless case specifically. In particular, we reviewed strategies used to estimate (i) undocumented migrants, (ii) nomadic/pastoral groups, (iii) homeless persons and (iv) IDPs. Among ‘hidden populations’, these are arguably most similar (sometimes even overlapping) to stateless persons (Marpsat and Razafindratsima 2016). In addition, we describe existing demographic and statistical techniques that have been used in population estimation more broadly.

### 6.2.1 Residual methods

Residual methods are commonly used to estimate total migrant flows, or migration flows of a certain type, where the data on different types of migration is not readily available. For example, data on subnational migration flows are often not available, but the difference between an ending and starting population size, after accounting for births and deaths, implies some measure of net migration.

In terms of hard-to-reach populations, official estimates of undocumented migrants are often estimated based on a residual method, using administrative/censual data. In short, it takes as its starting point the foreign-born population recorded in a given census and then deducts an estimate of the foreign-born population here legally. The difference is an estimate of the number of unauthorised migrants.

In the US, the method is used to calculate the ‘flow’ of unauthorised migrants by the difference in the numbers of foreign-born between two census dates (for more see: US Census Bureau 2020). Conversely, in the UK, the methodology is based on ‘stock’ data (thereby including people who have the legal right to remain in the country, but have not yet been granted settlement) (for more see: Home Office 2004).

Estimates generated from this method have been questioned for reasons that would likely emerge too if applied to stateless persons, including the fact that undocumented migrants have incentives not to cooperate with government surveys and have non-at-random missing responses on relevant questions (e.g., place of birth)[[26]](#endnote-27).

### 6.2.2 Population accounting methods and cohort component projection models

One class of traditional demographic models for tracking the size of populations over time rely on the ‘population accounting identity’ – that is, we know that in general, the size of a population in a particular year must be the size of the population last year, plus births, minus deaths, plus in-migrants, minus out-migrants. Ignoring measurement and other data errors, there are no other ways that populations can be created or removed, so this identity must hold true.

The population accounting identity is the basis of cohort component projection methods, which estimate the size of cohorts of populations moving through time based on changes in fertility, mortality and migration (Watcher 2014; Siegel and Swason 2004). Cohort component models could conceivably be used to estimate the size of any type of population of interest, assuming that the information on the size of the ‘jumping off’ population (i.e., the initial population size, preferably by age and sex), and associated demographic rates are available. For example, cohort component models are used by UNHCR as a basis of the so-called Demographic Projection Tool, which projects populations of persons of concern under UNHCR mandate disaggregated by age, sex, origin and population type within a 3-year projection timeframe (Alburez-Gutierrez and Segura 2018). More broadly cohort component methods can be combined with a residual method-type approach to estimate migration flows in hard-to-reach populations (for example, Saikia et al. 2016). As discussed above, while often data are available on population counts, births and deaths, reliable data on migration are often missing. Within a cohort component framework, taking the difference between a population projected forward based on fertility and mortality and another observation size of the end population size gives an estimate of the net migration flows. Fazel-Zarandi et al. (2018) combined a residual and cohort component-based approach to estimate undocumented migration flows into the United States from Mexico. However, the projection approach was based on limited data are relatively strong assumptions and as such it was difficult to know whether the resulting estimates were any more reliable than those based on the residual method (Capps et al. 2018).

Cohort component methods could possibly be useful in the context of estimating stateless populations. For example, in the case of a historical event that caused a large number of people to become stateless, we could potentially estimate the size of these populations over time using cohort component methods, making some assumptions about the size of the starting population size, and the demographic rates over time. The main limitations here are: 1) how viable is it to get reasonable assumptions about the population sizes and components of interest; 2) how can measurement error and other uncertainties be taken into account; and 3) how can other direct estimates/observations of stateless populations be reconciled and incorporated into the cohort component framework?

More generally, one of the main drawbacks of cohort component methods is that they are relatively data intensive. To carry out in a deterministic framework, data on all components by age and sex are required. Because of this, traditional cohort component methods are often not viable in settings where data are sparse or unreliable. In these cases, simplified methods of population estimation and projection, such as interpolation, assuming constant rates or shares across time (Swanson and Tayman 2012). Alternatively, recent methodological work in population estimation and projection has focused on extending traditional demographic methods to be within probabilistic frameworks, in particularly using Bayesian methods.

### 6.2.3 Bayesian statistical methods

As mentioned above, traditional demographic methods suffer from several drawbacks in the context of estimating hard-to-reach populations or populations where the data available are sparse or unreliable. Combining information from multiple data sources that may measure different outcomes and have different types of errors is challenging, and often requires ad-hoc adjustments to data and estimates. Relatedly, different types of uncertainty around estimates (based on both data and model sources) are difficult to quantify and communicate. However, there is scope to extend traditional demographic methods to be considered within Bayesian probabilistic frameworks, which provide a mechanism to overcome some of these issues.

Briefly, Bayesian methods are powerful in the context of demographic estimation for several reasons (Bijak and Bryant 2016). Firstly, considering population processes in a probabilistic framework explicitly accounts for the uncertainty in the underlying processes of births, deaths and migration events. Secondly, the use of a Bayesian framework provides a natural way of combining different sorts of information into the one framework – assumptions based on traditional methods could be encoded as priors, which are then updated based on available data; assumptions or observations of various components can be included with varying degrees of uncertainty, which encode beliefs about how reliable the information is. Finally, these frameworks naturally combine data-based and model-based uncertainty, and produce uncertainty bounds around resulting estimates which reflect both sources.

Bayesian modelling frameworks have been increasingly used in demographic and global health estimation over the past decade. The introduction of Bayesian methods by the United Nations Population Division to estimate world population trends from 2010 (Raftery et al. 2012) was followed by UN and global health organisations in estimating key indicators such as child mortality, maternal mortality, and unmet need for contraception (Alexander and Alkema 2018; Alkema and New 2014; Alkema et al. 2017; Cahill et al. 2018). In terms estimation methods that focus on the full demographic identity, Byrant and Zhang (2018) discuss a general framework for population accounting at the subnational level, which relies on a relatively large amount of data being available. In more data sparse contexts, Wheldon et al. (2013) propose a method for the reconstruction of past populations. The model embeds the demographic accounting equation within a Bayesian hierarchical framework, using information from available censuses to reconstruct historical populations via a cohort component projection framework. The authors show the method works well to estimate populations and quantify uncertainty in a wide range of countries with varying data availability. More recently, Alexander and Alkema (2021) present a Bayesian cohort component projection framework for estimating subnational populations in data-sparse contexts. Using a combination of model life table and probabilistic approaches, the authors illustrate that reasonable estimates of subnational populations can be obtained using only infrequent censuses and estimates from the UN’s World Population Prospects.

Bayesian models have also been used to estimate hard-to-reach populations at smaller geographic and temporal scales. For example, McCandless et al. (2016) approached the issue for persons without a dwelling in Toronto with a hierarchical Bayesian model and data from a capture-recapture method (see more on this data collection method in Appendix A). Parsons et al. (2020) use a Bayesian framework to combine multiple sources of fragmentary information on injection drug users to obtain more reliable estimates of this population in Ukraine.

Although Bayesian methods have not been used in the context of estimating stateless population, the expansive literature showing the utility of these methods in other areas of population estimation highlights the potential for these methods going forward. In particular, Bayesian cohort component methods may allow projection of stateless populations forward in time from a historical time point, or reconstruction of past populations from more recent observations, taking into account reasonable assumptions about fertility and mortality processes. While many data sources that provide direct observations of stateless populations are likely to vastly underestimate the actual population size (for example, estimates from censuses), these observations could potentially be combined within a Bayesian framework, representing some estimate of a ‘lower bound’ of population size (similar to approaches taken in the child mortality estimation literature, see for example Alkema and New (2014)).

### 6.2.4 Other statistical methods

In terms of other statistical approaches to estimate migrants of different types, an increasing amount of work has been focused on using Agent Based Models (ABM) and other simulation models to obtain estimates of population sizes and components of population change. In brief, these methods are useful when studying how individual decisions may interact in a complex system to produce aggregate outcomes, and thus are potentially useful in demographic problems because they explicitly link the individual to the population (Gray et al. 2017).

ABMs have been applied in the study of undocumented migrants using data from surveys and official records (Carriquiry and Majmundar 2013), IDPs and disaster/climate change-affected communities (Suleimenova et al. 2017; Anderson et al. 2006; Sokolowski and Banks 2014; Kniveton et al. 2012, 2011), and even of nomadic populations and their movements (Sakamoto 2016; Nelson et al. 2020). These models provide a set of artificial agents with “properties/rules” and then observe emergent behaviour as these agents interact with one another (and the environment). ABM are considered advantageous for inferring, for instance, immigration flows as they are relatively easy to program and capable to provide *“what if”* scenarios.

However, the utility of ABMs and other individual-level simulation-based methods may be limited in the context of estimating stateless populations. In many cases, pathways to statelessness are determined by state-level policies and changes that are out of the individual’s control. Additionally, ABMs are strongly influenced by assumption about parameters and rates that affect individuals, which are largely unknown in the context of many stateless populations.

**Summary**

Estimating stateless populations involves contexts where data are limited or unreliable. Existing methods of estimating stateless populations appear to rely on direct estimates from available data, with some ad-hoc adjustments made to account for likely under-reporting of population size. While this is a challenging population to estimate, methodological work in the broader demographic literature may help to improve estimating stateless populations systematically, while also giving an indication of uncertainty around estimates. In particularly, Bayesian methods have demonstrated some success in producing estimates and uncertainty in other data sparse contexts, and are particularly powerful in demographic settings when combined with more traditional demographic models and structures.

# Appendix A. Data collection strategies for hard-to-reach populations

Various data collection strategies exist to obtain valid statistical information on hard-to-reach groups, which can then be employed in direct estimations of such populations. We identified four broad categories of methods in extant literature. The next sections succinctly describe each.

Sampling methods

Sampling techniques represent the most typical approach to obtain data on unique human population given that collecting census-type of information on such groups is impractical in terms of costs and complexity of the exercise and prone to bias due to their inherent characteristics (e.g., lack of known residential address). The literature proposes several sampling-based methods for estimating the size of hard-to-reach populations and Marpsat and Razafindratsima (2016) for detailed overviews). These include:

* Two-phase sampling (Kalton (2009): at the first stage, a filter survey is administered to a large sample. This allows members of the target population to be identified. At the second stage, the real sample of interest is selected using information from the filter survey. This technique is clearly expensive to implement and is more useful for stable and relatively identifiable groups (e.g., impractical for homeless persons, but more applicable to IDPs if these are known to be non-mobile and settled in clusters).
* Time-space sampling/Area-based sampling: These methods use spatial locations to estimate hidden groups. Time-space sampling focuses on areas/locations known to be visited by the population of interest exclusively or more often than by the rest of the population (e.g., services providing meals, accommodation, clean clothes to the homeless/refugees) and uses them as sampling frames. This sampling strategy also pays attention to the frequency of visit to the location (for applications of the method, see: Marpsat and Firdion 2018; Ardilly and Le Blanc 2001; Pollack et al. 2005; MacKellar et al. 2007). The main issues with this sampling-based strategy relate to accessibility to the areas/places of interest, weighting and establishing frequency of visit.

Area-based sampling techniques, conversely, seek to extrapolate the number of people in a known area to a larger area. The two most well-known applications of area-based estimation methods are the T-square and the quadrant sampling methods, both borrowed from ecology (for more, see: World Food Program 2009; Koedam 2015).[[27]](#endnote-28) These methods have been applied to estimate the size of people living in refugee camps and of disaster-affected groups in reasonably well-defined areas (e.g., Brown et al. 2001; Grais et al. 2006; NRC 2002).

* Respondent-driven sampling: similar to snowball sampling (getting individuals to refer those they know, who in turn refer those they know and so on), this method first seeks to generate a convenience sample of the population to be studied. This then is used to facilitate contact with other individuals of the right kind to be selected and interview (Heckathorn 1997). Differently from snowball sampling, however, this strategy is compounded by the use of mathematical weights accounting for first-stage interviewee’s social network. Weighting is necessary to obtain estimators unbiased by a first round of selection that is non-random. Desirable properties of this method are that it is cost-effective, quicker than other methods and, importantly, that it can be combined with institutional data to estimate the size of the hidden group (Zhang et al. 2014). By contrast, its main limitations relate to the characteristics of the specific target population (e.g., if relevant people have very poor social networks they may have lower probability of being reached in the first, but also subsequent stage, it is necessary that the persons know each other in their capacity as members of the population of interest, among others).
* Network scale-up: this technique utilises information collected in general population household surveys to extrapolate information on the size of ‘hidden’ or ‘hard-to-reach’ populations, e.g. populations at increased risk for HIV. Instead of asking about the respondent’s own behaviour, this method asks about the behaviour of the respondent’s acquaintances. Based on the average number of individuals that respondents know in hidden populations and the average personal network size, the proportion of people in the most at risk population is estimated (WHO 2010; Beaudry 2017; ILO 2017). Inference from network data in hard-to-reach populations.). As other methods above, this strategy is contingent on individuals’ own network and on self-reporting/disclosure attitudes.

At-site data collection methods

All site methodologies require knowledge of where the groups tend to cluster as well actual visits to such locations by the data collectors.

* Participatory mapping: this strategy relies on inviting a group of the target population to sketch a map of the entire community on the ground or on a large paper. The catchment area is the geographical area from which all the people attending a service come (IFRC 2007).
* Screening U-5: this method assumes that the number of children under five within a population represents a given percentage (15-20 percent) of the total. By counting or estimating the number of under-fives, it should be possible to estimate the total population.
* Capture-recapture method: this strategy is based on catching and marking a random and representative sample of the target people and then “releasing” it back into the population. Next, another random sample of the target population is taken, and the number of marked and unmarked people is counted. A key assumption of this strategy is that the population of interest will be stable over the observation period, i.e., that there will be no in/out-migration. Furthermore, it assumes that samples are independent and that everyone in the target population has an equal chance of being selected. See Fisher et al. (1994), Sudman et al. (1988) and Williams and Cheal (2002) for applications to homeless persons and mobile populations such as migrant agricultural workers.

Counting methods

1. Numeration methods used for hard-to-reach populations include head or/and habitation counts, censuses, registration and initial reports/D-forms. While these methods are widely used for relatively small (under 10,000) groups affected by natural or man-made disasters living in locations with discrete boundaries (e.g., camps, tented settlements), none of them is applicable to correctly enumerate stateless persons.

Remote estimation methods

* Delphi method: this strategy seeks to bring together a group of experts who go through various structured and anonymous rounds of question-and-answers aimed at collecting educated guesses about the size of specific population groups size to ultimately arrive at an estimate on the final round (Dalkey 1969). The Delphi method seeks to overcome the disadvantages of conventional committee action, by applying anonymity and looping feedback. This method is particularly appropriate when the number of experts is high, mathematical methods are either too costly, time consuming or difficult to interpret, or when political differences/frames of reference, terminologies may hinder effective communication (Henderson 2009).
* Mobile phone network data: this technique relies on mobile phones SIMs position to obtain information on movements of hard-to-reach groups. Such data have been used to track the movement of people before/after earthquakes and during the cholera outbreaks (Bengtsson et al. 2011).

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1. # Endnotes

   Under the 1951 Refugee Convention, stateless persons were only conceptualised as *also* refugees (i.e., individuals who were denied of national rights as a result of their race, religion, membership in a particular social group or political opinion) and hence were to receive protection as refugees. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. Though, there are historical examples of populations inside their state of nationality who could have been described as *de facto* stateless (Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees 1946). The most well-known example – German Jews – is described in Section 3.8. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. For instance, the 2010 expert meeting on The Concept of stateless Persons under International Law in Prato (“2010 Prato Conclusions”), argued that Article 1(1) of the 1954 Convention should consider as *de jure* stateless rather than *de facto* “some populations who have difficulty securing proof or recognition of their citizenship, even if it is not formally denied to every individual within that population on the basis that certain state practices ought to be seen as prima facie evidence of the state not considering them as nationals”. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. It is also worth mentioning that in recent consultations, UNHCR Expert Group on Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Statistics (IROSS 2021) proposed the collection of data not only on persons meeting the *de jure* definition of stateless and on persons with undetermined nationality, but also on a third, optional, category – stateless-related people – comprising people who were previously stateless, the children and family members of people who are currently stateless. Given that the category is listed as optional and a decision in this regard has not yet been taken, we do not discuss it extensively in this review. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. A third way of acquiring nationality, usually applied later in life, is the so-called *jus domicilii* (by residence). According to this alternative, nationality can be granted by a given state following recognition of one’s bond with that particular state (for instance because of habitual or permanent residence, marriage or adoption by a national of that state). This latter principle usually provides ground for naturalisation. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. Examples include Haiti (Constitution of the Republic of Haiti 1987), Sudan (Citizenship Act 1957), Malawi (Citizenship Act 1966) and India (Citizenship Act 1955). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
7. As in Belize (Nationality Act 1981) or in Haiti (Constitution of the Republic of Haiti 1987). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
8. The latter term is more common in media and political discourses, while the more neutral term “undocumented migrant” is customary in international law. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
9. Examples of this are documented in Japan, the Philippines and Iran (Committee on the Rights of the Child 2004, 2005). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
10. For the US, these can be accessed at: <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/>. Note that there is no formal status determination procedure to identify stateless individuals in the US, nor there is any official government data-tracking source. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
11. See: <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/> [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
12. Information on measurements and estimation procedures are contained in a number of sparse documents (e.g., UNHCR Handbook for Registration, 2014 Handbook on Protection of stateless Persons, and 2011 Guidance Document on Measuring statelessness). [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
13. See: <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/> [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
14. UNHCR’s statistical reporting on statelessness focuses on avoiding double counting. For this reason, its statistics exclude a considerable group of persons who, according to international law, are considered stateless, but who fall under the protection categories of other UN Agencies (at present, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinians, known as UNRWA), and of other UNHCR protection mandates (such as refugees, IDPs or asylum seekers). These individuals are therefore not included in these data, but counted elsewhere. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
15. Figures in the database generated by the same sources and methods are in many cases annotated with different methods and sources. For example, data from census data are in some years and for some countries correctly categorised as censal data, but then are presented as UNHCR estimates or government registration in others. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
16. Data and reports are all available at: [https://www.unhcr.org/search?comid=56b079c44andandcid=49aea93abaandtags=globaltrends](https://www.unhcr.org/search?comid=56b079c44&&cid=49aea93aba&tags=globaltrends) [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
17. For Uzbekistan, the new data comes from updated government statistics on statelessness during Uzbekistan’s reporting to the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
18. See: “Uzbekistan’s stateless people”, UZnews.net, 15 January 2008. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
19. In 2013, Kazakhstan’s Ministry of Justice has reportedly estimated the presence of 21,000 stateless persons in the country (see: United States Department of State 2013c). In the 2009 national census by the Agency of Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 57,278 persons self-identified as stateless, though data are not considered fully reliable (UNCHR 2012b). [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
20. Automatic acquisition of nationality is reserved for members of 135 recognised ‘ethnic nationalities’ of Myanmar. The Rohingya and some other ethnic groups have been excluded from this list following the implementation of the 1982 Citizenship act. According to the law, most Rohingya could technically still naturalise ( via a ‘lesser’ form of citizenship with limited attached rights). However, naturalisation is rare due to discriminatory implementation of the law and (related) lack or loss of documentation. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
21. The UNHCR figure for the number of persons under its statelessness mandate in Myanmar is based on household surveys conducted in three townships in north Rakhine state in 2010, then adjusted to population birth/death rates. As such, it accounts only for stateless Rohingya found in that part of the country. The figure therefore does not include stateless Rohingya in other townships in Rakhine state, nor stateless Rohingya elsewhere in the country. Other sources report a total estimate of at least 1.33 million Rohingya in Myanmar (1.08 million of whom are in Rakhine state) (see: See, for instance, Human Rights Council Resolutions A/HRC/19/L.30 of 20 March 2012; A/HRC/22/L.20 of 15 March 2013; and A/HRC/25/L.21 of 24 March 2014., Fortify Rights, Policies of Persecution. Ending abusive state policies against Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, February 2014.) [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
22. The breakdown is Myanmar: 600,000; Bangladesh: 854,704; India: 17,730; Indonesia: 582; Malaysia: 99,292; Thailand: 121. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
23. 人民网, “统计局:中国1300万人没户口 绝大多数为超生” 人民网 People, 10 May 2011. Available at: <http://politics.people.com.cn/GB/1026/14523741.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
24. Examples include the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, particularly those of mixed Eritrean-Ethiopian origin or parentage and those of Eritrean origin in Ethiopia, and the more recent secession of South Sudanfrom Sudanin 2011. Here statelessness is likely to affect mainly persons of South Sudanese origin still resident in Sudan, whose Sudanese nationality has now been removed by law (estimated 300,000 – 350,000). [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
25. For instance, in 2019, Colombia granted nationality by birth to 28,500 children with undetermined nationality born in Colombia to Venezuelan parents displaced abroad. Similarly, although the Dominican Republic still shows an asterisk remains in the table, the country has taken steps since 2014 to provide facilitated naturalisation to persons of Haitian descent. Before the 2014 legislation though it counted about 200,000 stateless persons of Haitian origin. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
26. For full official tabulations, see: <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/methodology/sample-size-and-data-quality/item-allocation-rates/> [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
27. The T-square method was first developed in ecology to establish the spatial distribution and density of trees and plants in a large area. The method has been used to estimate human population size, particularly in emergency settings, by measuring the distance between a random point and an occupied house/settlement and counting the total number of individuals in that settlement. Quadrat sampling is also borrowed from ecology. Under this method, a small specific study area is divided into equal-sized squares. Representative units in each specific quadrant are then sampled. Their characteristics and numbers are then extrapolated to a larger area. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)