



# TOGETHER WE DID!

A reflection on the impact of the  
COVID-19 Emergency Statelessness  
Fund (CESF) Consortium

COVID-19  
EMERGENCY  
STATELESSNESS  
FUND

**CONSORTIUM**



**As a CESF Committee Member, I have noted great initiatives undertaken by Consortium members around the world. These include paralegal community outreach, door-to-door awareness raising, radio shows educating people of their rights, podcasts and interviews targeting stateless communities, documentaries showcasing the exclusion of stateless people and direct support through providing food rations and other emergency relief. These innovative projects have been driven by community-led organisations to speak directly to affected communities and support them to raise their voices."**

Mustafa Mahmoud Yousif  
Senior Program Manager  
Citizenship Namati

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**THIS REPORT IS DEDICATED TO THE MANY PEOPLE WE KNOW AND DON'T KNOW, DOING UNSEEN WORK, AMIDST GREAT CHALLENGES AND INSECURITIES, WITH LITTLE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OR REWARD.**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In March 2020, as the world was trying to make sense of and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, stateless communities were not part of the equation. They were not even part of the conversation to determine what should and should not be in the equation. As governments across the world faced deeply challenging decisions on protecting public health while averting starvation and warding off economic disaster, it was increasingly evident and predictable, that in times of crisis, states were embracing a “citizens first” approach. Denied nationality and deprived basic rights and welfare, the stateless were already marginalised before the crisis. They now faced even greater, life-threatening marginalisation, with potentially disastrous consequences.

At this time, the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion (ISI) began receiving distress calls from partners – community groups, movements and networks led by stateless people – who were experiencing first hand, the life-threatening cost of excluding stateless people. It became evident that there was an urgent need for funding for local groups to serve their communities amidst the crisis, while preserving their own institutions, and for solidarity, coming together, drawing strength, inspiration and learnings from each other. The idea of an Emergency Response Fund to support a community of statelessness actors at the frontline of the crisis emerged. ISI conducted an intense two months of needs assessment, consulting, conceptualising, fundraising, and setting up the structure and modalities and targeted outreach, launching the the COVID-19 Emergency Statelessness Fund (CESF) in June 2020.

The CESF was set up as a targeted and time-bound initiative to raise and channel resources to, strengthen capacities of and work in partnership with NGOs and citizenship rights activists at the frontline of the COVID-19 crisis. A Consortium model was developed with an intentionally responsive and adaptive approach led and informed by local need and leadership with an overarching supportive framework developed. The aim of all interventions supported would be to identify and work towards a systemic solution. However, where urgent humanitarian needs were identified by partners on the ground and there were no other means to address them swiftly, humanitarian relief could also be provided, offering short-term relief while working towards structural solutions.

The fund was administered by ISI, with a dedicated CESF Committee established – comprising individuals directly affected by statelessness, civil society representatives, advocates, humanitarian actors and grant makers – to advise and offer oversight, as well as being responsible for decision-making to approve larger grants. 18 groups received EUR 356,000 to implement projects in 17 countries, addressing the COVID-19 impact on stateless people’s right to nationality, documentation and legal status, right to health, equality and non-discrimination, civil and political rights and socio-economic rights, through various strategies including:

- **Community outreach:** awareness raising through interviews, focus groups, podcasts, radio programmes, documentaries etc.
- **Paralegal support** to navigate access to documentation and COVID-19 relief measures.
- **Research and mapping** stateless communities, human rights abuses and the impact of COVID-19.
- **Advocacy for inclusion** of stateless people in COVID-19 relief efforts and other services.
- **Advocacy for law and policy change** to address structural discrimination and exclusion.
- **Emergency humanitarian support** as an interim relief measure.

The collective work of the CESF Consortium delivered invaluable comparative insights into the way COVID-19 disproportionately impacted stateless communities and those whose nationality is at risk. CESF members documented how existing structural discrimination heightened and came to light as a result of the pandemic, how state responses either directly or indirectly discriminated against the stateless and how the every-day deprivations that stateless people face, now had life and death implications. Their work also served as a testing ground of ideas and innovations, of what can and must be done in response efforts.

This report documents the impacts of and perspectives from each CESF member’s project in the form of a series of Consortium Heroes profile pieces. It also draws together the lessons learned from the Consortium experience as a whole, both in terms of the issues addressed as well as the strategies and approaches adopted. It is informed by direct inputs from CESF members and peer conversations, as well as the findings of a [CESF Independent Evaluation Report](#) completed by external evaluators in October 2022.

The report documents how the CESF and its learnings can pave the way for a future in which this type of thoughtful and impactful collaboration between donors, global NGOs, regional, national and community groups will become more common, more long-term and even more effective.

The Consortium stands as a powerful testament to the change that can be achieved – big and small – through collective community action, resilience and solidarity. The work of the CESF was carried out in very challenging, and at times, dangerous contexts, with many Consortium members exposed to real risks – an extension of the types of risks that citizenship rights activists and stateless communities face in ‘normal times’, with the added challenge of COVID-19 layered on top. The solidarity and support that Consortium members received when they were facing their own emergencies and crises, helped them get through. The CESF also strengthened the financial resilience of all its members at a crucial time, when groups were facing significant funding challenges and as their communities depended on them for more support. CESF grants were a lifeline for many NGOs and community groups, who’s very survival was under threat due to the wider funding climate.

Consortium members contributed to changes in law and policy, better documentation and services for their communities, better awareness and acknowledgment of the challenges faced by government authorities and UN agencies and stronger community organisation. The structural impact of this work will endure beyond the crisis sparked by the pandemic. The work of the CESF Consortium also sharpened our understanding of the nexus between structural discrimination and statelessness, with the COVID-19 crisis serving to surface long-standing and sometimes hidden challenges. Through their collective insights and active knowledge exchange, the Consortium identified a number of key steps to strengthen protection and inclusion of stateless people, informing the development of a [Roadmap for Change](#): a practical 3-step framework for resolving and addressing the structural discrimination and exclusion of stateless people, during times of COVID-19 and beyond. The Roadmap, published in June 2021, aims to inform and guide the necessary inclusive responses of multiple stakeholders, urging them to take certain actions to:

1. **Check for institutional blind-spots**
2. **Include, consultant & engage in dialogue**
3. **Build back better**

The co-designed model developed through the CESF allowed for locally responsive programmes to be developed within a broader framework of trust and practical support through peer learning and collaborative action. One of the lessons generated by the work of CESF members on the ground, across an array of contexts, is the role of trust as an integral component of meaningful inclusion and how trust can be built. It showed how stepping up support for locally designed and driven, but internationally connected initiatives that place the real needs and priorities of stateless people at the centre, will be key to Building Back Better. Another key element of the Consortium approach has been the centring of stateless people, not as platitude or in a formulaic way, but as an integral component of the modus operandi within the CESF. Moreover, the structural-humanitarian coordinated approach allowed for practical responses to urgent need while providing a solid basis for evidenced-based advocacy initiatives built on first-hand knowledge and understanding which strengthened the impact of engagement with decision-makers and stakeholders for change.

The approach taken and model adopted, with sustainable resourcing, can shape longer-term and scaled up activities towards making an even greater impact. The report closes by discussing the replicability of the CESF Consortium and ways in which it can be built on and expanded. It presents the priority issue areas identified by CESF members for further and future work, while also discussing some of the challenges ahead. The lack of mainstream recognition of the benefit of supporting the statelessness field in general and stateless led organisations/ stateless individuals in particular, and the absence of dedicated avenues to enable donors to meaningfully contribute to the work of stateless led and community groups, is of significant concern. Promoting the right to nationality, protecting the rights of stateless people and addressing the root causes of statelessness in a sustainable and impactful way over the long-term, will only be possible with the strategic and long-term support and solidarity of the donor community. Looking ahead, beyond the pandemic, the Roadmap for Change that the CESF has generated can be both a guidepost and a call to action for governments, UN agencies, NGOs, donors, affected communities and others to find new ways of working together in more equal and meaningful partnership.

# STATELESSNESS & COVID-19

## Responding to a Crisis Within a Crisis

“

When other NGOs and organisations were postponing or withdrawing their activities due to COVID lockdowns, our project continued to provide support as the needs were critical at that moment. Our project was implemented in a crucial moment where the Rohingya people were looking for COVID-related information and protective measures and were keen to protect themselves and their families.”

Rohingya Women's Development Network,  
member of the CESF Consortium

### THE CESF AT A GLANCE

In March 2020, as the world was trying to make sense of and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, stateless communities were not part of the equation. They were not even part of the conversation to determine what should and should not be in the equation. As governments across the world faced deeply challenging decisions on protecting public health while averting starvation and warding off economic disaster, it was increasingly evident and predictable, that in times of crisis, states were embracing a “citizens first” approach. **Denied nationality and deprived basic rights and welfare, the stateless were already marginalised before the crisis. They now faced even greater, life-threatening marginalisation, with potentially disastrous consequences.**

However, the global pandemic also presented a **unique opportunity** to raise visibility, address the structural causes of statelessness, and secure lasting change, through working directly with stateless people and being accountable to them. The **COVID-19 Emergency Statelessness Fund (CESF)** was set up to do exactly this. The Fund's purpose was to support research-based action advocacy, by those civil society groups and activists that were already well positioned to have an impact, at the same time connecting these groups in a global Consortium. While the focus was on **structural solutions**, the Fund could also be used to provide **stop-gap humanitarian relief** to those in acute need.

“

Central to ISI's vision is involving and empowering stateless people to take the lead in advocating for the right to nationality, and to reverse the historical trend of using stateless people to play tokenistic roles... When the pandemic hit and ISI began to organize their COVID response, we felt it was critical to support. ISI's fund combines addressing both emergency needs and structural problems. For humanitarian funders who might focus more narrowly on relief, it's critical to also understand the structural issues that need to be addressed.”

CESF Donor, Martin Dunn,  
Dunn Family Foundation

The Consortium was initiated by the Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion (ISI) in June 2020, and it was brought to a close in December 2022. Through the CESF, **EUR 445,000** was raised and disbursed as follows:

- **18 groups** (stateless led organisations, national NGOs, national and regional networks) received a total of **EUR 356,000** to implement projects in 17 countries, engage in Consortium activities and join global advocacy efforts.
- The balance **EUR 89,000** was spent by ISI to help partners design projects, provide bilateral support to partners, coordinate the Consortium and lead global advocacy efforts.

In addition to this, ISI spent **EUR 55,000** of its institutional funds to administer, fundraise for and manage the CESF, bringing the total expenditure to **EUR 500,000**.

### THE CESF TIMELINE

#### MARCH 2020

- WHO declares COVID-19 to be a global pandemic.
- Various partners send SOS messages to ISI about impact on stateless communities and grassroots organisations.

#### APRIL 2020

- ISI explores setting up an emergency response fund.
- [As the World Washes its Hands](#) op-ed published.

#### MAY 2020

- [Stateless in a Global Pandemic](#) Briefing Note published.
- [In Solidarity With the Stateless](#) Joint Statement published.
- [Stateless Last?](#) Webinar held.
- Brought immigration raids and detentions in Malaysia to attention of Special Rapporteurs, resulting in [intervention](#).

#### JUNE 2020

- [Stateless in a Global Pandemic](#) Impact Report published.
- COVID-19 Emergency Statelessness Fund (CESF) Launched.

#### JULY 2020

- First Scoping Awards granted to partners in India, Kenya, Malaysia & Nepal and Exceptional Award to North Macedonia.
- Report submitted to Committee on World Food Security and UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food.

#### SEPT 2020

- CESF Sub-Committee approves first Action Awards to partners in Central Asia, Dominican Republic and Kenya.
- First CESF Consortium meeting held for all partners.

## HOW AND WHY THE CESF BEGAN

(March – June 2020)

At around the time that the WHO first declared COVID-19 to be a global pandemic, ISI began receiving distress calls from partners – community groups, movements and networks led by stateless people – who were experiencing first hand, the life-threatening cost of excluding stateless people.

- The Citizenship Affected Persons Network (CAPN) in Nepal, reached out when 40 stateless families were facing a real risk of starvation due to being excluded from state food aid.
- Groups in Malaysia raised concerns about immigration raids targeting stateless people, and COVID-19 outbreaks in immigration detention centres, where large numbers of stateless people were being indefinitely held.
- Community groups in Kenya and Bangladesh sent SOS messages when their funding was slashed. Donors were prioritising COVID-19 emergency responses, and the reallocation of funds was putting the very existence of small, financially insecure, but crucially important community groups at risk.

The ISI team felt duty-bound to respond. It set up a dedicated [COVID-19 response](#) to strategically leverage ISI's position (as the sole NGO working on the right to nationality globally), networks (communities, activists, NGOs and academia) and expertise (research, advocacy, training and technical knowledge etc.), to lead and coordinate a joined-up civil society response to the crisis. In particular, ISI collected data, strengthened capacity and conducted advocacy to:

1. Ensure government, UN, NGOs and other stakeholders are better equipped to identify, protect and reach all stateless people in their COVID-19 responses, including healthcare and relief programming.
2. Call out and demand accountability when stateless people are targeted and pushed further to the periphery – including through hate speech, arbitrary detention and discriminatory denial of healthcare and other services.
3. Stand in solidarity with stateless people, ensure their voices are heard and strengthen connections among statelessness actors to enhance joined-up action.

Initial steps included:

- [Gathering information](#) from partners and through research and maintaining a spotlight on the COVID-19 impact on the stateless through [op-eds](#), [Monthly Bulletins](#), a [Briefing Note](#) and [Rapid Response Report](#).
- Coordinating global civil society advocacy by convening meetings with regional and global actors, developing a [joint civil society statement](#) and hosting a dedicated [webinar](#).
- Consulting with partners on taking concrete action to strategically address the challenges faced by stateless communities.

In May 2022, ISI published a Briefing Note - [Stateless in a Global Pandemic](#). Drawing on responses to a Global Appeal for information, it identified **seven key areas of concern**:

1. Health & wellbeing
2. Survival & livelihoods
3. Hate speech & xenophobia
4. Border closures & movement restrictions
5. Insecurity & detention
6. New risks of statelessness
7. Sustaining engagement on statelessness.

It became evident that information gathering, advocacy and awareness raising alone was insufficient. The desperate need was funding for local groups to serve their communities amidst the crisis, while preserving their own institutions, and for solidarity, coming together, drawing strength, inspiration and learnings from each other. The idea of an **Emergency Response Fund** to support a **community of statelessness actors at the frontline of the crisis** emerged. Although a new endeavour and approach for the organisation, ISI felt poised and ready to take on the challenge of leading this initiative in the face of such immense need. ISI undertook consultations with donors, partners, stateless communities and those with experience in emergency response, or in the setting up and running of consolidated funds. Through these conversations, ISI puzzled out how to construct and implement a Fund, received pledges of support from donors and gained new allies who were willing to share their expertise to make this work. After an intense two months of needs assessment, consulting, conceptualising, fundraising, setting up the structure and modalities and targeted outreach, the CESF was launched in June 2020.

**OCT  
2020**

- [Together We Can](#) Webinar held.
- [Videos](#) showcasing Consortium projects produced.
- Awards granted to partners in Bangladesh and Montenegro.

**NOV  
2020**

- Awards granted to partners in India, North Macedonia and Rohingya community.

**JAN  
-  
MAY  
2021**

- Awards - Malaysia, Nepal and Rohingya community.
- Midterm Review of CESF conducted by CESF Committee.
- All Consortium members receive small 'Advocacy Awards'.

**JUNE  
2021**

- [Together We Can: The COVID-19 Impact on Stateless People & A Roadmap for Change](#) launched.
- [Building Back Better](#) joint civil society statement issued.
- Award granted to partner in North Macedonia.

**JULY  
-  
DEC  
2021**

- Targeted advocacy with WHO, UNHCR, OHCHR, Gavi, various states and other key stakeholders
- Awards granted to partners in Kuwait, Lebanon, USA, Malaysia, Montenegro, Asia-Pacific, Pakistan and Rohingya group.

**MAY  
2022**

- CESF Wrap up activities begin.
- Consortium members receive small 'Wrap-Up' Awards.
- External evaluators recruited.

**OCT  
2022**

- [CESF Independent Evaluation Report](#) submitted by external evaluators.

**DEC  
2022**

- Together We Did Report compiled
- CESF formally brought to a close.



## HOW THE CESF WAS ORGANISED

The CESF was set up as a targeted and time-bound initiative to raise and channel resources to, strengthen capacities of, and work in partnership with NGOs and citizenship rights activists at the frontline of the COVID-19 crisis. The Consortium model was developed with an intentionally responsive and adaptive approach, led and informed by local need and leadership with an overarching supportive framework developed. The aim of all interventions supported would be to identify and work towards a systemic solution. However, where urgent humanitarian needs were identified by partners on the ground and there were no other means to address them swiftly, humanitarian relief could also be provided, offering short-term relief while working towards structural solutions.

The fund was administered by ISI, who also provided coordination, facilitation, capacity building and practical support. A dedicated **CESF Committee** was established to be responsible for decision-making to approve larger Action Awards, as well as advising on smaller Scoping and Exceptional Awards upon request, facilitating a mid-term review of the performance of the CESF and providing an oversight function. The CESF Committee comprised a mix of individuals directly affected by statelessness, civil society representatives, advocates, humanitarian actors and grant makers.

80% of all funds raised were directly awarded to partners at the frontline of the crisis. Established NGOs, stateless-led groups, community organisations, and exceptionally, individual activists, were eligible to receive support. Decisions were made transparently and under set criteria, with priority afforded to those with less access to mainstream funding.

20% of funds were drawn on by ISI to: provide knowledge support, capacity development, networking and strategic collaboration to all Consortium members; directly support the peer learning, sharing and capacity development activities of the Consortium and lead and coordinate global awareness raising and advocacy efforts. ISI offered genuine partnership through this approach. For every CESF partner, ISI committed staff time and resources to be able to work together to achieve impact, gradually growing this international Consortium of partners. ISI did not draw on the CESF to cover any institutional overheads related to its COVID-19 response nor towards costs directly associated with administering or fundraising for the Fund.

## Awards under the CESF

- **SCOPING:** small awards (max EUR 5,000) to understand needs and develop strategies to address them.
- **ACTION:** larger awards (max EUR 25,000) towards research, capacity building or advocacy.
- **EXCEPTIONAL:** small awards (max EUR 5,000) to cover exceptional circumstances.
- **ADVOCACY:** additional awards (EUR 1,500) to Consortium members for global advocacy inputs.
- **WRAP-UP:** additional awards (EUR 1,550) for Consortium members to participate in evaluation and lessons learnt process.

## Consortium Activities

While each Consortium project was implemented independently (as a collaboration between each partner and ISI), the Consortium also shared a common online forum, regularly meeting to exchange updates and build solidarity, strategising and implementing global advocacy actions, and serving as a space for the sharing of expertise and peer learning. Capacity building workshops were organised for the Consortium on a range of topics (based on needs assessment), as follows:

- **SEPT 2020** The **first CESF Consortium meeting**, at which partners presented the situations they were dealing with, their project ideas, lessons learned and brainstormed on ideas for collaborative action.
- **NOV 2020** A **research workshop**, facilitated by an external research expert to share tips on constructing research methodologies and conducting research.
- **JAN 2021** A follow up **research workshop**, where partners could further brainstorm their research methods and share general project updates.
- **MARCH 2021** An **outreach and communications workshop**, where partners discussed advocacy and outreach priorities in their countries and regionally; and ISI presented on communications and social media.
- **APR 2021** A discussion on **pro-bono assistance**, led by law firm DLA Piper, on how to find and approach a pro-bono firm, the types of assistance firms can offer, and how to maintain relationships with firms.
- **MAY 2021** An **advocacy workshop**, led by an advocacy expert, who focussed on how to engage governments, followed by a discussion led by ISI, relating to advocacy plans around the upcoming Impact Report.
- **DEC 2021** A media workshop facilitated by one of the CESF Committee Members.
- **MARCH 2022** A workshop on **monitoring and evaluation**, including how to report on impact and lessons learnt.
- **APR 2022** A follow up **advocacy workshop** to deepen discussions with partners about engagement.

In addition to the Workshops, ISI also worked bilaterally with some Consortium partners to support them in their fundraising efforts and to offer advice on strengthening administrative processes and other areas of institutional development.

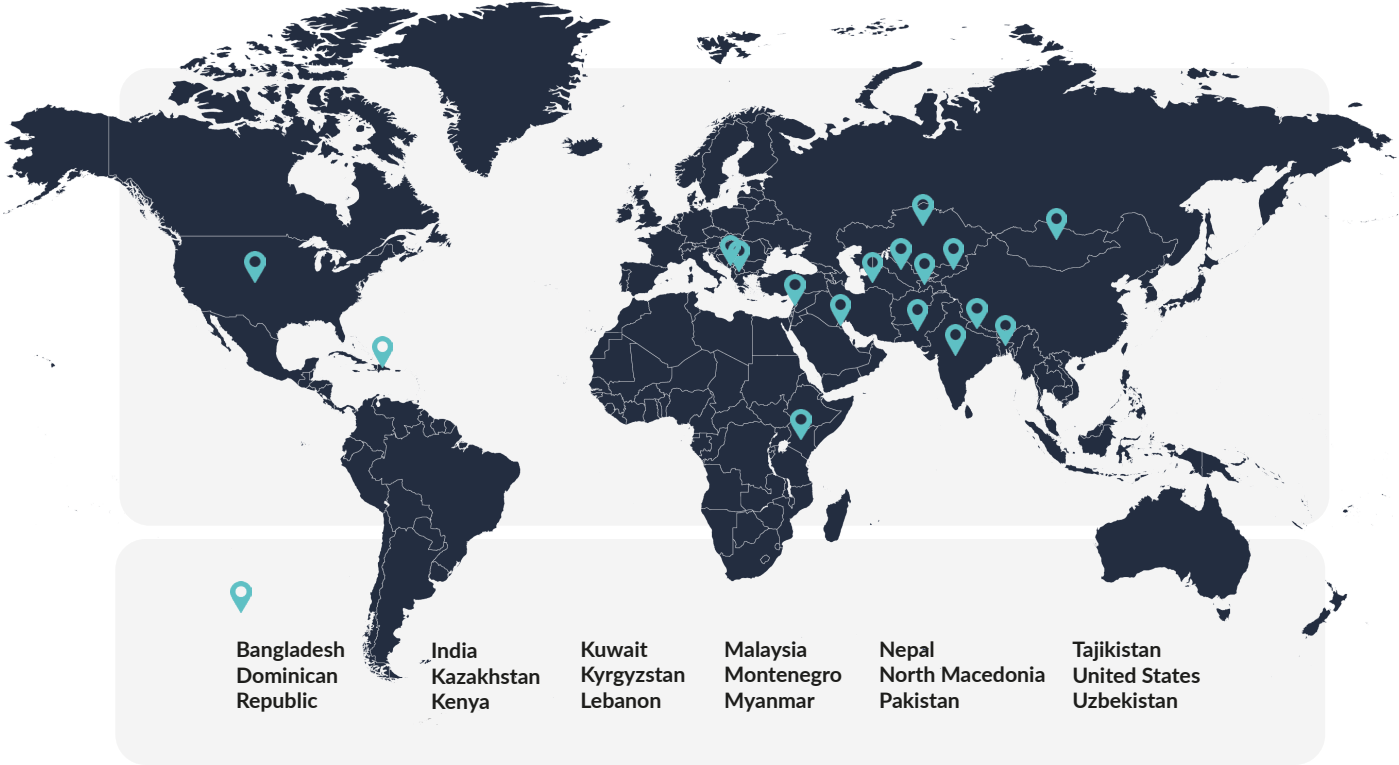
**THE SCOPE AND REACH OF THE CESF**

When the CESF was launched in June 2020, Funds totalling USD 155,000 had been pledged by the Oak Foundation, Dunn Family Charitable Foundation and the American Jewish World Service. Through concerted fundraising, a total of EUR 445,000 was raised. Additionally, ISI contributed EUR 55,000 of its institutional funds to administer the CESF.

As a crisis response instrument, the Fund was set up as a time-bound operation. It was initially envisaged to operate until the end of 2021, with an interim review in early 2021. As it became evident that the pandemic would continue to have an ongoing impact, the operational period of the Fund was extended until December 2022, with a rigorous evaluation and lessons learnt process built into the wrap-up process.

18 groups received EUR 356,000 to implement projects in 17 countries, addressing the COVID-19 impact on stateless people's right to nationality, documentation and legal status, right to health, equality and non-discrimination, civil and political rights and socio-economic rights through various strategies including:

- **Community outreach** in the form of awareness raising through interviews, focus groups, podcasts, radio programmes, documentaries etc.
- **Paralegal support** to navigate access to documentation and COVID-19 relief measures.
- **Research and mapping** to collect data on stateless communities, human rights abuses and the impact of COVID-19.
- **Advocacy for inclusion** of stateless people in COVID-19 relief efforts and other services.
- **Advocacy for law and policy change** to address structural discrimination and exclusion.
- **Emergency humanitarian support** as an interim relief measure.



The collective work of the CESF Consortium delivered invaluable comparative insights into the way COVID-19 disproportionately impacted stateless communities and those whose nationality is at risk. CESF members documented how existing structural discrimination heightened and came to light as a result of the pandemic, how state responses either directly or indirectly discriminated against the stateless and how the every-day deprivations that stateless people face, now had life and death implications.

# CONSORTIUM HEROES I

## FAMILY FRONTIERS - FIGHTING FOR EQUAL NATIONALITY RIGHTS IN MALAYSIA

[Family Frontiers](#) (FF) was initially established as the Foreign Spouses Support Group (FSSG) in 2009 by two non-citizen mothers who experienced insurmountable difficulties in raising their Malaysian children within the country. Since 2015, they expanded their advocacy to also combat Malaysia's gender discriminatory nationality law and support Malaysian women who could not pass their citizenship to their children born abroad.

### Scoping and Action Awards (EUR 25,000)

The project aimed to address challenges faced by Malaysian binational families caused by gender discriminatory nationality laws. The issues included family separation, unequal citizenship rights of Malaysian women and their overseas-born children, access to COVID-19 vaccines, risk of arbitrary arrests and detention of non-citizen spouses and increased socioeconomic marginalisation due to restrictions to employment and xenophobic sentiments. Project objectives included:

- Using project research findings to develop and disseminate materials and tools to increase awareness on the unique challenges faced by Malaysian binational families during COVID-19.
- Diversifying support streams and accessibility to information among the beneficiary community.
- Conducting targeted advocacy of key stakeholders, through strategic litigation and other methods.

READ MORE ON COVID-19  
IMPACTS IN MALAYSIA [HERE](#)

### Impact

- Successful strategic litigation before the Kuala Lumpur High Court, supporting the cases of six Malaysian mothers on the issue of unequal citizenship rights. Family Frontiers [won the case](#), with the judge ruling in September 2021 that the word 'father' in the impugned provision is to include the mother. As a result, the children of the plaintiffs and other women in a similar situation would be entitled to citizenship by 'operation of law'. The landmark case led to widespread, nationwide discourse and support on the issue. Key ministers (including the [Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development](#), [Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), [de-facto Law Minister](#) and [Minister of Communications](#)), and various [Members of Parliament](#) from both sides of the floor stated their public support for equal citizenship rights of Malaysian women. The Home Minister and Law Minister also announced their commitment to a [Constitutional amendment](#) on the matter. However, the government appealed and in August 2022, the Court of Appeal, in a 2:1 decision, overruled the High Court. FF has now appealed to the Federal Court, which (at the time of writing) is yet to hear the case.
- Successful engagement with the Malaysian government, leading to an agreement to allow foreign spouses to return to the country, resulting in hundreds of family reunifications since June 2020. This included successfully advocating for:
  - Non-citizen spouses and their children to renew or apply for visas and permits without having to leave the country;
  - Non-citizen spouses and their children (including those without LTSVP) to enter Malaysia upon approval from Immigration;
  - The setting up of a systematic online application portal for non-citizen spouses and children of Malaysians to appeal to enter or exit Malaysia; and
  - The reduction of [quarantine requirements](#) for non-citizen spouses in the East Malaysian state of Sarawak who had already undergone quarantine in west Malaysia.
- Successfully advocating against the detention (and deportation) of two non-citizen spouses, which were both [ruled unlawful](#) by the Courts, which [ordered their release](#).
- [Initiating](#) conversations and campaigns on access to vaccinations for [non-citizens](#).

### Future Plans

FF is now working to build public and bipartisan support for a Constitutional amendment to concretise the Kuala Lumpur High Court decision by engaging as many MPs, political parties and cabinet members as possible and amplifying campaign messaging and content to increase public discourse and pressure on the issue of equal citizenship. FF is also taking forward the appeal to the Federal Court. **With sustained financial support, FF will be able to lead these efforts in collaboration with other partners in Malaysia and globally.**

## DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE INITIATIVE – BUILDING A NATIONALITY NETWORK IN INDIA

The [Development and Justice Initiative](#) (DAJI) works to empower marginalised communities (stateless, at risk of statelessness, refugees, displaced and minorities) in India to access rights and services and protect their freedoms. DAJI offers community mobilisation, education, training, humanitarian support, campaigning, network building and advocacy initiatives to sensitise officials and strengthen rights protection.

### Scoping and Action Awards (EUR 25,000)

The project aimed to empower communities at risk of statelessness to access COVID-19 relief, social protection services and legal aid. DAJI also helped launch the [Right to Nationality and Citizenship Network](#) (RNCN) during the scoping phase of the project. In 2019, more than 1.9 million people, predominantly of Bengali ethnicity, were excluded from the National Register of Citizens (NRC) nationality verification exercise, and deprived of their nationality. Many of them were subsequently excluded from COVID-19 relief. RNCN and DAJI undertook several documentation, research and advocacy efforts related to inclusive COVID-19 responses and social security; the child's right to nationality and NRC inclusion and on fair and just trial procedures before Foreigners Tribunals. The project engaged and advocated with several stakeholders, including the Office of the NRC Coordinator in Assam, the National Human Rights Commission and UN agencies including UNHCR and UNICEF. DAJI developed a [report](#) and [film](#) documenting the impact of COVID-19 on stateless people as key advocacy and awareness raising materials.

READ MORE ON COVID-19 IMPACTS IN INDIA [HERE](#)

### Impact

- Strengthened community mobilisation to support more than 5,000 stateless people to access COVID-19 relief by working with health service providers, authorities and elected representatives, and providing health service providers with the personal protection equipment and sanitisers they lacked.
- 85 families impacted by statelessness, detention and loss of livelihoods were supported by direct humanitarian relief including food, sanitisers and PPE.
- More than 800 individuals without the required documentation were supported to get vaccinated.
- 55 elected representatives in local government were trained on their role to ensure community members have access to COVID-19 response schemes and social security schemes.
- A survey was conducted in fifteen villages in Assam, through which it emerged that close to 70% of children aged 5-18 did not have birth certificates. This was raised with UNICEF and UNHCR.
- Rapid response to flooding that led to the displacement of over 10,000 people and created the risk of loss of documentation for stateless people. Their documents were scanned and safely stored electronically.
- More than 55 people fighting their cases before Foreigners Tribunals were given free legal support.
- Three released detainees were supported to successfully challenge rigid police reporting requirements.
- Four trainings were provided to strengthen lawyers' capacity in relation to the discrimination and procedural issues they face, and how to document these for advocacy purposes.

### Future Plans

DAJI will continue to expand its archive of oral testimonials of stateless people narrating their experiences of discrimination and arbitrariness in the citizenship verification processes. It will continue to provide legal aid and training to support those impacted by statelessness and facilitate awareness raising campaigns and advocacy. **With sustained funding, DAJI will be able to continue to lead the fight for a just citizenship regime in Assam.**

## MUSAWI - PIONEERING STATELESSNESS WORK IN PAKISTAN

[Musawi](#) (meaning 'equality' in Urdu and Arabic) was established in 2018 and is comprised of legal and public policy specialists. Headquartered in Lahore, Pakistan, Musawi offers research, monitoring and evaluation, law and policy review, communications, impact assessment, strategic litigation, advocacy, capacity building and training assessments.

### Action Award (EUR 13,000)

Until the initiation of this project, there was little research or information on stateless demographics in Pakistan. This project sought to advocate for the rights and inclusion of stateless people in Pakistan, exploring the impact of COVID-19 on these communities and identifying priority areas for future intervention by understanding community experiences and challenges during the pandemic. A [report](#) on the impact of COVID-19 on stateless communities was developed. The report increased awareness and avenues for advocacy on stateless communities at the local and national levels and provided insights and information to support future interventions at regional and international levels. The project contributed to bridging a gap between relevant stakeholders (government and non-governmental) and stateless communities, developing a more effective and inclusive strategy for COVID-19 response.

### Impact

- This project generated new data and consolidated existing information on COVID-19 and statelessness, including on problems with documentation and registration, health, education, employment, relief etc. Academics shared that prior to the launch they did not know who stateless people were, of their presence in Pakistan or the existence of specific issues they face.
- A roundtable discussion created space for effective dialogue and an understanding of the need to address specific issues that stateless people face. Lawyers, journalists, academics, activists, human rights advocates etc. mapped out their respective roles through developing national legal and policy frameworks, supporting awareness raising, knowledge and data and building access to essential services and opportunities.
- The project resulted in increased visibility of stateless communities in Pakistan which has also given clarity to those who previously could not distinguish between stateless people and refugees in Pakistan.
- The report and launch resulted in select community members voicing a desire to be part of more conversations on improving their conditions and legal status in Pakistan. This work strengthened Musawi's relationship with stateless communities and their capacity to engage with them in the future.

The Musawi team observed:



The knowledge generated from the mapping study has created space for evidence-based advocacy and made it easier to have conversations with government and INGOs regarding stateless communities in Pakistan. This is particularly important because previously, if you raised questions like “what about stateless communities, how are we incorporating them in the response plan”, the government and INGOs would respond with “they are not a significant population or there isn't much data on this, but they will be covered overall”.

### Future Plans

Musawi intends to continue to disseminate statelessness data; support research and dialogue on citizenship rights for stateless communities; supporting regular multi-stakeholder gatherings to discuss challenges, interventions and explore ways forward for stateless communities by developing a local network / alliance of experts working on statelessness in Pakistan. **With sustained funding support, they plan to develop national legal and policy frameworks on statelessness by supporting advocacy at federal and provincial levels and advocate for access to essential services and opportunities for stateless communities.**

## COUNCIL OF MINORITIES - A SPACE TO RAISE STATELESS VOICES IN BANGLADESH

The [Council of Minorities](#) (CoM) is a human rights organisation that works to establish the rights of different minority communities in Bangladesh. Since 2013, the organisation has been working to promote the rights of the Urdu-speaking formerly stateless people who live in urban slums and 'camps' around Bangladesh.

### Action Award (EUR 25,000)

This project conducted field research to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on the Urdu speaking community, and then implement activities to provide the community with assistance they lack due to structural discrimination. Research findings were used to train paralegals and volunteers to become 'rights defenders', who undertook casework to assisted community members through legal procedures. CoM carried out door to door outreach, 110 community group meetings, one national seminar and distributed multiple publications on COVID-19 and its impacts. Their work facilitated access to essential government services and provided support to formerly stateless, stateless and those at risk of statelessness people. CoM collaborated with legal organisations, engaged with key stakeholders including District Commissioners and representatives of local government, the National Human Rights Commissions, The Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation, MPs and relevant UN agencies. The project focused on COVID-19 relief, but also raised concerns regarding Bangladesh's 2016 Draft Citizenship Bill.

READ MORE ON COVID-19  
IMPACTS IN BANGLADESH [HERE](#)

### Impact

- Prior to the project, those living in camps were not very aware of COVID-19, its effects and various precautions that can be taken to protect oneself. Through door-to-door outreach, over 11,500 people were informed about COVID-19 related sanitisation and precautionary measures. These activities resulted in communities beginning to actively use PPE and maintain social distancing.
- CoM organised four advocacy meetings which resulted in camp members receiving emergency government relief and the distribution of food.
- They directly assisted 582 people access COVID-19 vaccinations and educated over 11,500 people on vaccinations.

### Future Plans

CoM aims to engage in advocacy on the implementation of a landmark 2008 High Court Judgment which recognised the community's right to citizenship, to protect citizenship rights and work towards the permanent rehabilitation of camp dwellers in Bangladesh. CoM has also established a think-tank to work on citizenship rights of the community. **With sustained funding, CoM will be able to implement its advocacy strategy and continue to serve the community.**

## CITIZENSHIP AFFECTED PEOPLES NETWORK - FOSTERING SOLIDARITY AND RESILIENCE IN NEPAL

Formed in 2015, the Citizenship Affected Peoples's Network (CAPN) is a movement comprising over 1800 people affected by Nepal's gender discriminatory nationality law. CAPN finds creative and powerful ways to raise the voices of affected people, strengthen their resilience and lobby for equal citizenship rights and the eradication of statelessness.

### Scoping and Action Awards (EUR 25,000)

The project aimed to respond to the impacts of COVID-19 on stateless people and spread awareness about statelessness in Nepal. This was done primarily through the production and publication of a podcast series. The Network also established a dedicated helpline to offer psychological and legal services to affected people and engaged in advocacy efforts for equal citizenship rights.

READ MORE ON COVID-19  
IMPACTS IN NEPAL [HERE](#)

### Impact

- Ten podcast episodes were recorded, featuring people with lived experience of statelessness and other experts. The podcasts help give voice to and strengthen community among stateless people in Nepal.
- With support from Nationality For All (see below), CAPN developed its strategic plan, organised its first in-person annual meeting, laid down a roadmap for change and built strategic alliances with partners.

- Legal and psychosocial counselling was provided to CAPN members who had endured significant challenges in the context of COVID-19.
- CAPN members received legal training resulting in increased knowledge and understanding of the issue.

### Future Plans

CAPN will focus on expanding its membership and establishing district committees with focal points and supporting staff in different provinces. It will also map affected persons and build the capacity of its members, through implementing 'Lived Experience Fellowship' and 'Leadership Development' programmes. **With sustained funding, CAPN aims to work with fellow organisations to achieve constitutional reform and the adoption of gender equal citizenship policies.**

## NATIONALITY FOR ALL - SUPPORTING THE CITIZENSHIP RIGHTS COMMUNITY IN ASIA

[Nationality For All](#) (NFA) is a regional organisation that aims to promote the right to nationality and other rights of all people affected by statelessness in the Asia-Pacific region, through strategic and long-term partnerships with stateless led organisations, grassroots groups and national NGOs.

### Action Award (EUR 25,000)

NFA set out to action the roadmap of the '[Together We Can](#)' report, by supporting four Asia-Pacific [CESF Consortium](#) Partners (CAPN (Nepal), CoM (Bangladesh), DAJI (India) and FF (Malaysia)) to implement the Report's country specific calls to action. NFA engaged in a series of consultations with partners to provide short-term and long-term planning support.

### Impact

- NFA's work with **DAJI** has allowed them to reflect on their institutional priorities and work on organisational strategic plans to address statelessness. NFA also conducted on a study titled 'Legal Validity of the NRC process and its effects on statelessness.' With DAJI, NFA aims to help DAJI form a coalition of affected people, that will advocate on behalf of the community.
- NFA's support of **FF** centred around helping with their international media support strategy and related media outreach. NFA further helped them to develop a social media activism manual and co-implemented a social media advocacy workshop for affected mothers. NFA further supported FF's fundraising efforts reviewing a concept note for the Julia Taft Fund.
- NFA's support to **CoM** included assisting with institutional reflections and planning to prepare a first draft strategic plan. NFA also supported the development of a research paper titled 'Right to Nationality and the Risk of Statelessness of the Urdu Speaking Community of Bangladesh'.
- NFA's support culminated in the incubation of **CAPN** for one year to help build their capacity, register their organisation, write and adopt organisational policies and hire personnel. NFA supported CAPN's strategic planning and strengthened their expertise on citizenship laws and policies. They supported CAPN's fundraising, helping them secure support from the Julia Taft Fund and the KIOS Foundation Fund. NFA also supported CAPN in the implementation of their own CESF Action Award. As a result, CAPN are better placed to operate as an organisation and pursue its agenda.
- This project also had a significant and positive impact on NFA itself. Being a relatively new regional organisation, the project helped solidify regional advocacy, strengthen relationships and lay the foundation to form a regional alliance on statelessness.

Reflecting on this, NFA observed:



We are in a better position to understand the needs, capacity, interests and challenges that our partners have been facing. We also have a better understanding of how organisations led by affected people work and the benefits they can have along with their challenges. This can be replicated in global advocacy to strengthen the meaningful participation of stateless people and provide more visibility to stateless-led organisations.”

### Future Plans

In the short-term, NFA plans to support its partners to finalise their strategic plans, and to complete a regional mapping of statelessness. **In the long term, with sustained funding, NFA's advocacy plans include the formation of a regional alliance on statelessness and strengthening regional and global civil society movement building.**

# IMPACT & ROADMAP FOR CHANGE



The impact report ... draw[s] much-needed attention to matters affecting stateless persons in these challenging times. We welcome your partnership in this regard and commend your advocacy for the human rights of vulnerable communities.”

Filippo Grandi,  
UN High Commissioner for Refugees

## RESEARCH AND RESOURCES TO SPOTLIGHT STRUCTURAL DISCRIMINATION

The work of the Consortium has given us insight into how the pandemic unfolded, how states and societies responded and how stateless communities and those whose nationality is at risk, have been affected. **The work of Consortium members serves as a rich source of information and evidence to better understand the impacts of the pandemic and the structural discrimination at the root of the exclusion and marginalisation of stateless communities. This work also served as a testing ground of ideas and innovations, of what can and must be done in response.**

## EVIDENCE BASED ADVOCACY: THE TOGETHER WE CAN REPORT AND ROADMAP

In June 2021, the CESF Consortium published the [Together We Can Report](#). Grounded on information and experiences shared by Consortium members in 13 countries, this report documented many **hard-hitting impacts of the pandemic on stateless people**. It also showcased important initiatives by stateless groups and set out a [roadmap for change](#). Key findings included:

- Rights violations against the stateless were exacerbated by the pandemic, with **life and death implications**.
- Lack of citizenship, precarious legal status and lack of documents impact access to **relief, healthcare, vaccinations, work & justice**.
- Lazy and cynical narratives have been rehashed to **scapegoat, blame and punish stateless people for the spread of the virus**.
- High costs and fear of authorities further obstruct **access to life-saving healthcare**, undermining public health.
- Government, UN and other agencies have generally **failed to recognise and address the specific challenge of statelessness**.



This report reminds us that stateless people were among the most vulnerable before COVID-19 hit the world, and remain so during the pandemic, as their conditions worsen. This, once more, should move us to action. If we want to truly leave no one behind, we ought to ... expand global and regional capacities to meet the needs of stateless people and make inclusion and integration a reality for everyone”.

Santino Severoni,  
Director of Global Health and Migration, World Health Organisation

### Report Launch Events in 2021

- 15 JUNE** • Briefing for Diplomats & UN Agencies
- 17 JUNE** • [Impact Report global launch](#)
- 18 JUNE** • [Dominican Republic launch](#)
- 21 JUNE** • [Asia Pacific regional launch](#)
- 29 JULY** • [India launch](#)

### Media & Audio-Visual Coverage & Materials

- [Millions of stateless people left behind by COVID-19 vaccine campaigns.](#)
- [London opens vaccine clinic for undocumented migrants after report exposes COVID-19 impact on refugees.](#)
- [Refugees in India, elsewhere, hit hard by COVID-19 impact – rights report.](#)
- [Stateless people face COVID-19 scapegoating, persecution and exclusion.](#)
- Podcast entitled “Who gets forgotten when we all get vaccinated?”
- Statelessness in a Pandemic.
- [New report on the impacts of coronavirus on stateless people lays out a roadmap for change.](#)



## KEY OUTPUTS BY CONSORTIUM MEMBERS

In documenting the impacts of COVID-19 on stateless communities and sharing the experiences gained through the projects that they developed in response, Consortium members also produced a wide array of materials. Here is a selection:

### MONTENEGRO

Video: [“Stories of the Invisible”](#) and report on [“Roma with Unregulated Legal Status in the Time of Pandemic COVID-19”](#).

### INDIA

Video: [“Assam Detention During the Pandemic”](#) and report on [“Marginalised and Impoverished in Assam”](#).

### DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Report on [“COVID-19 Impacts on Haitian Migrants and their Descendants on the Southern Border of the Dominican Republic”](#).

### KUWAIT

Report on [“Nothing But a Pen and a Word: Voices from the stateless Bidoon community in Kuwait during the COVID-19 pandemic”](#) also available in Arabic [here](#).

### KENYA

Blog article on [“Kibos Land Evictions – The History of Nubians in Kibos”](#).

### CENTRAL ASIA

Report on [“The Status of Stateless Persons in Central Asia during the COVID-19 Pandemic”](#) (available in Russian).

### NEPAL

Podcast on [“The State of Statelessness”](#) (available in Nepali).

### BANGLADESH

[Beneficiary Interview](#).

### MALAYSIA

[Official Communication from the UN Working Group on Discrimination Against Women and Girls to the Government in Malaysia – the result of the official complaint submitted by Family Frontiers to the UN Working Group on gender-discriminatory citizenship law](#).

### LEBANON

Report on [“Supporting Stateless Maktoum to Obtain the COVID-19 Vaccination”](#).

### PAKISTAN

Report on [“The Impact of COVID-19 on Stateless Communities in Pakistan”](#).

### NORTH MACEDONIA

Video: [CESF Project from North Macedonia](#)

## RESILIENCE AGAINST THE ODDS

The work of the CESF was carried out in very challenging and at times dangerous contexts, with many Consortium members being exposed to real risks. Despite taking available precautions, several Consortium members themselves contracted COVID-19 as a result of exposure through their work, or had to adapt their plans due to serious community outbreaks and related lockdowns. Many others faced risks that were not directly related to COVID-19, but which further complicated their operations. The following are all examples of **different challenges and risks faced**:

- Two Consortium members endured targeted hate speech campaigns, both online and offline, due to their activism on women’s rights and against racism respectively.
- Two Consortium members faced police intimidation because of their work to protect minorities and refugees, and in particular, for exposing arbitrary arrests, detentions and efforts to deport stateless people.
- One community supported by a Consortium member endured state-sponsored evictions and the destruction of their property, while another was targeted in a similar manner, by thugs who acted with impunity.
- One Consortium member had its office vandalised and damaged, in reprisal to its human rights work.
- One Consortium member was personally targeted by local gangs and had to go into hiding, for the role they played in assisting community members to report gang violence and intimidation.
- Several Consortium members had to find ways around increasingly repressive state legislation, aimed at cracking down on civil society space and making it more difficult for NGOs and community groups to operate independently.
- One Consortium member went into hiding due to the breakout of war, and another had to adapt plans due to a military coup.

Many of these experiences are illustrative of the types of risks that citizenship rights activists and stateless communities can be exposed to. The challenge presented by COVID-19 is layered on top of existing ones. There has been no respite or ‘amnesty’ to deal with COVID-19 before returning to the everyday problems people face. This, as with any meaningful response must be cognisant of the bigger picture – the histories of injustice and exclusion, the everyday violence, the intergenerational disadvantage and discrimination that contextualise and shape the lived experience of the stateless and those whose nationality is at risk. Piecemeal ‘solutions’ which do not address the underlying problems, or only address part of them, may make for good headlines, but will not have a lasting impact.

This is also why the Consortium approach was so important. The **solidarity and support** that Consortium members received when they were facing their own emergencies and crises, helped them get through them. In some instances, ISI was also able to directly intervene, to organise safe houses or emergency funding for Consortium members at risk.

**The CESF strengthened the financial resilience of all its members at a crucial time**, when groups were facing significant funding challenges even as their communities depended on them for more support. CESF Funding was a lifeline for many NGOs and community groups, whose very survival was at risk, due to the difficult funding climate they faced.



When we received this funding, we didn't have enough operating costs even for one-month. We were in the process of wrapping up the organisation and giving up our office space. When CESF gave us the scoping award (in 2020) it literally saved and sustained us over 2021."

Family Frontiers Malaysia,  
CESF Consortium Member

Importantly, through the work of the CESF, ISI and others were able to introduce Consortium members, especially in Nepal and North Macedonia to new donors and channel bilateral funding for their work. The focus on continuing to find sustainable funding for Consortium members to continue their work after the closure of the CESF, has been crucial.

**Community resilience** was a big focus across CESF projects. Many of the projects included an element of providing psycho-social support to community members, strengthening their economic resilience, and creating platforms to showcase their talents and achievements. The podcasts produced by CAPN (Nepal) aimed to strengthen community resilience through spotlighting the accomplishments of stateless people, while the project also offered psychosocial support directly to members of the community. Micro-finance provided to stateless community members by DxD (Dominican Republic) helped strengthen the financial resilience of community-based entrepreneurs. The project carried out by RWDN (Rohingya group) worked towards community resilience by ensuring Rohingya communities had access to information on COVID-19, its effects and preventative measures. The project in Bangladesh, carried out by CoM, also built community resilience by helping the community to access government services and address community issues through the implementation of a successful advocate system.

## AN ENDURING IMPACT

The Consortium stands as a powerful testament to the change that can be achieved – big and small – through collective community action, resilience and solidarity. Consortium members have contributed to changes in law and policy, better documentation and services for their communities, better awareness and acknowledgment of the challenges faced by government authorities and UN agencies and stronger community organisation. **The structural impact of this work will endure beyond the crisis sparked by the pandemic.** Further, the approach taken, with sustainable resourcing, can shape longer-term and scaled up activities towards making an even greater impact.

### FIVE COMMON CHALLENGES ACROSS CESF FOCUS COUNTRIES

1. The insidious impact of 'lack of documentation' in all areas – from access to relief, healthcare and vaccinations, to being able to work in safe and non-exploitative jobs and access justice.
2. The rehashing of 'lazy, cynical narratives' to scapegoat and blame stateless minorities for the spread of the virus and impose punitive and discriminatory lockdown measures.
3. The combined impact that high costs and fear of authorities have on stateless communities accessing life-saving healthcare, and the knock-on detriment to public health.
4. The failure by governments, UN and others, to recognise the specific challenge of statelessness and tailor policies to address this challenge in order to reach stateless communities.
5. The lack of any respite for stateless communities regarding the challenges, complications and insecurities they already faced daily, with the pandemic adding a new set of challenges on top of these existing issues.

### FIVE EXAMPLES OF ACHIEVABLE CHANGE

1. By supporting paralegal and community work, affected groups can receive much needed assistance and information in their own language, to access documentation, rights and services.
2. By successfully advocating for reforms to immigration regulations and consular support, family unification, legal status and equal rights can be strengthened.
3. By providing micro-finance loans and other assistance to stateless people, resilience can be strengthened, while countering negative stereotypes and narratives about these communities.
4. By taking mental health seriously, silences and stigmas can be broken, and stateless people can be given access to mental health professionals. Awareness of the mental health impact of lockdowns on wider society also creates an opportunity to generate empathy between non-stateless and stateless people, who endure debilitating restrictions even in 'normal' times.
5. By reversing perspectives on lack of documentation, instead of a barrier to accessing rights and services, the point of contact with relevant authorities can be used to grant access and offer assistance to obtain documents.

## KEY IMPACTS OF THE CESF

### Direct Assistance

- More than 12,000 people were educated on COVID-19 health precautions and vaccinations.
- Around 7,000 individuals and 2,000 families received direct humanitarian support across six countries.
- More than 2,500 people received assistance to access vaccines across four countries.
- 1,000 people received legal support across four countries.

For example: in India, DAJI supported more than 800 individuals without the required documentation to get vaccinated, while more than 10,000 stateless people had their documents protected during flooding by ensuring these were digitally scanned and stored. In North Macedonia, Bairska Svetlina offered legal support to over 400 community members, enabling them to exercise their right to social assistance and access state relief during the COVID-19 crisis. In Bangladesh, RWDN supported stateless

Rohingya refugees in 34 camps with the provision of direct support through the distribution of hygiene and sanitation and carried out COVID-19 awareness raising in more than 160 community sessions.

### **Structural Change**

- In ten countries, government officials and decision-makers were actively engaged on structural challenges.
- Four governments included stateless communities within their vaccination or humanitarian responses.
- One government relaxed its quarantine-related policy which disproportionately affected non-citizen spouses.

For example: in Lebanon, the Minister of Health announced that the Ministry would accept hospital admissions connected to COVID-19 and simplified the vaccination procedures for stateless people. In Malaysia, key ministers and various members of Parliament stated their public support for equal citizenship rights of Malaysian women.

### **Greater Awareness and Mobilisation**

- In eight countries awareness raising initiatives on statelessness issues and/or access to information regarding COVID-19 for stateless people were organised.
- More than 100 government officials received training on addressing statelessness and/or ensuring stateless people's access to COVID-19 responses.
- Information generated by Consortium members about the impacts on the ground was shared directly with several organisations whose work was critical to the COVID-19 global response, including the Red Cross and the World Health Organisation.

For example: in Central Asia, CANS held trainings for 41 officials on how to address statelessness and documentation issues in three regions with communities with the largest number of people with unregulated status. RWDN held four webinars on the impacts of COVID-19 faced by Rohingya communities in Myanmar, Bangladesh, India and Malaysia reaching a total of 29,400 people.

# THE ROADMAP FOR CHANGE

## A Legacy to Build On

The Consortium identified a number of key steps to strengthen protection and inclusion of stateless people, informing the development of a [Roadmap for Change](#): a practical 3-step framework for resolving and addressing the structural discrimination and exclusion of stateless people, during COVID-19 and beyond. The Roadmap aims to **inform and guide** the necessary inclusive responses of multiple stakeholders, including governments, parliamentarians, professional bodies, NHRIs, UN agencies and experts, diplomats, donors, international organisations, NGOs, grassroots groups, activists, the media and concerned members of the general public.



The roadmap offers a way forward for our allies to check their statelessness blind-spots, centre us in their actions and be accountable to us when delivering their mandates. We cannot end statelessness by ourselves. Together we must work to envision a world where nobody is deprived of nationality based on their race, sex, gender or religion. A world where everyone's right to nationality is protected and upheld, and where statelessness is truly relegated to the history books”.

Karina Ambartsoumian-Clough,  
Founding Member & Executive Director, United Stateless

In reflecting on the impact of the CESF Consortium as a whole, in addition to generating meaningful impact at a time of great need for the communities they serve, Consortium members have also jointly produced invaluable lessons to guide further work on statelessness. The documentation of such a rich diversity of projects designed to respond to the real needs of stateless people at a time of crisis, combined with the distillation of key learnings into the **Roadmap for Change**, creates a powerful toolbox for future efforts.

TOGETHER WE CAN: A ROADMAP TO ADDRESS  
THE COVID-19 IMPACT ON STATELESS PEOPLE

### 1 CHECK FOR INSTITUTIONAL BLIND-SPOTS

We invite states, UN actors, humanitarian groups and other stakeholders to engage in careful **introspection**, check for **institutional blind-spots**, and **review and reform** policies and practices to **ensure that stateless people are prioritised, their particular contexts and needs are understood and addressed and they are not excluded or left behind** through:

- **Strengthening awareness** of the issue at all levels;
- **Acknowledging** historical failures;
- **Collecting and sharing information** on statelessness and nationality rights deprivations and
- **Resourcing** the enhancement of capacities, collaborations and funding.

### 2 INCLUDE, CONSULT & ENGAGE IN DIALOGUE

We invite activists and NGOs to **make their expertise available** and those in positions of power, to have **open consultation** and **meaningful and constructive dialogue** with affected communities, and commit to **including stateless people on equal terms** by:

- **Consulting** with activists and affected communities;
- **Building trust** and strengthening solidarity with stateless communities;
- **Meeting the needs and priorities** of affected communities and ensuring their meaningful participation and
- **Facilitating wider discourse** within society and institutions on equality, inclusion and the right to nationality.

### 3 BUILD BACK BETTER

We invite all actors to learn the hard lessons that the pandemic has taught us and invest in **future-proofing**, ensuring a **lasting commitment to breaking down the pervasive injustice, indignity, inequality, deprivation and exclusion that stateless people face**, focusing on:

- **Implementing reforms** to address discriminatory laws, policies and practices;
- **Redressing** the intergenerational disadvantage and legacy of statelessness;
- **Being accountable** to stateless communities and activists;
- **Monitoring** the performance and progress of states;
- **Ensuring access to justice and reparations** for stateless people and
- **Sustainably investing** in inclusive societies.

# CONSORTIUM HEROES II

## CENTRAL ASIAN NETWORK ON STATELESSNESS - ACTING IN UNISON ACROSS CENTRAL ASIA

The [Central Asian Network on Statelessness](#) (CANS) is a network of organisations in Central Asia that promotes dialogue, raises awareness and provides legal services to prevent and reduce statelessness. The CESF project is led by Ferghana Valley Lawyers Without Borders (FVLWB), a Kyrgyzstan based NGO and active member and secretariat of CANS.

### Action Award (EUR 25,000)

The project aimed to raise awareness about the situation of stateless people in the COVID-19 pandemic through conducting baseline research to map out the exclusion of stateless people, and those without legal status, within Central Asia. Stateless groups in the region face exclusion due to a combination of deep-rooted, structural discrimination, lack of awareness and administrative gaps. More than 120 stateless people were interviewed, and 12 focus groups (with 134 stateless people) were conducted in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Research findings were collated in a [Report](#), which includes case studies and recommendations to governments. Research results were used for advocacy and information campaigns to engage decision-makers; raise awareness within stateless communities and those without legal status, and among the public. The report was sent to relevant governments and shared with 38 national and international stakeholders. CANS held three roundtables for government, civil society and media representatives, marking the beginning of the advocacy campaign along with capacity building for CSOs; improved coordination among government and CSOs; and awareness-raising on statelessness issues regarding COVID-19. CANS also organised two open lectures for 33 Law student.

READ MORE ON COVID-19  
IMPACTS IN CENTRAL ASIA [HERE](#)

### Impact

- A key achievement was the inclusion of stateless people in state vaccination programs across Central Asian countries, which was achieved through direct advocacy with government and humanitarian actors.
- CANS provided legal aid to 500 stateless people and those without documentation, on legalising their status and applying for citizenship/documentation. More than 130 people received a positive outcome.
- CANS organised 16 outreach mobile visits in remote communities in the Southern oblasts to increase community awareness of nationality and legal identity issues and to provide legal support.
- With the government of Turkmenistan and UNHCR, CANS held an International Conference on the Elimination of Statelessness in Central Asia, where CANS shared report findings and states shared good practices and developed strategies to address remaining statelessness issues concerning COVID-19.
- CANS held three trainings for 41 officials of the local registry and administrative offices on addressing statelessness and documentation issues in Leilek, Batken and Kadamjai Districts.

### Future Plans

CANS intends to continue their work in the region, organising effective dialogue and exchange of information and experience in order to try and prevent and reduce statelessness. CANS also plans to connect with other regional networks working on statelessness to strengthen and facilitate cross-learning and relationships with statelessness stakeholders around the world.

## OUMMAL - VACCINATING STATELESS MAKTOUM IN LEBANON

Oummal plays the role of mediator between people eligible for health coverage, the hospitals and public guarantors, in order to identify and overcome challenges faced by those not covered by health insurance schemes. Access is ensured either through enrolment with Oummal's Ministry of Public Health complementary health programme, or through complaints received via a data and call centre.

### Scoping Award (EUR 5,000)

The Project aimed to guarantee access to vaccination and medical insurance to stateless people in Lebanon during the COVID-19 pandemic. This required working in close partnership with Lebanese healthcare authorities to include stateless people in the vaccination platform (IMPACT), and to assist them with registration challenges due to lack of identity documents, receiving appointments for vaccines, following-up with healthcare staff post vaccination and arranging booster shots. Significantly, Oummal had to advocate for the right of stateless people to be vaccinated and ensure that the registration platform does not discriminate against stateless people or refugees with missing papers.

### Impact

- The project assisted 1,202 stateless individuals with their identity documentation, registration under the vaccination platform (IMPACT), and access to vaccinations via Oummal's mobile clinic and the Rahhal Hospital.
- The team successfully advocated for national health cards which would allow stateless people to access healthcare services with their expenses covered by the Ministry of Public Health. This represents a significant outcome as stateless people are not covered by private or public health insurance under the Lebanese system.
- Two visits were arranged for the Minister of Health to hospitals in the northern part of the country where the highest number of stateless people live who had not received any vaccinations against COVID-19. The Minister announced that the Ministry would accept hospital admissions connected to COVID-19 and simplify the vaccination procedures for stateless people. COVID-19 infections ultimately decreased in vulnerable areas, particularly thanks to Oummal's

### Future Plans

Oummal aims to work on increasing vaccines in the Northern and Akkar regions. Further, the Minister of Public Health will visit Akkar to ensure that stateless people can access hospitals with their fees covered by the Lebanese Government. **With sustained funding, Oummal's Maktoum Aid Project will be expanded to provide legal and psychological support, implement capacity building and seek employment opportunities for stateless people.**



Your approach is very welcomed in our community, but we hope to see continuous activities and an impact that we desire since on many occasions we were promised of outcomes that never happened. We trust you especially that some of you are stateless and know exactly what it is we go through.”

Ahmad Sleiman Al Abdallah,  
Mayor of Al Knaise, Lebanon

## SALAM FOR DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS - SPOTLIGHTING STATELESSNESS IN KUWAIT

[SALAM for Democracy and Human Rights](#) (SALAM DHR) promotes universal principles of dignity, respect, democracy and human rights in the Middle East. They conduct monitoring and analysis, produces reports and policy recommendations, organises advocacy campaigns, conducts trainings and builds coalitions.

### Scoping Award (EUR 5,000)

The COVID-19 impact on the Bidoon population living in Kuwait was explored in the context of systematic discrimination and marginalisation with respect to access to healthcare, social services and economic support towards the Bidoon community. The project aimed to empower community members and leaders to advocate for themselves and to provide a bridge between national and international advocacy. It sought to determine how COVID-19 policies set out by the Government of Kuwait affected the health

outcomes of the Bidoon population. Space was also provided to members of the Bidoon community to share their experiences through participation in online forums and research efforts.

As articulated by the SALAM team:

“

This meant providing space for reflections on lockdown, community members' unique experience of discrimination and othering in Kuwait, in the hope that their voices - and the impact felt - could be projected to an international audience, including state policy makers and members or officials of intergovernmental bodies working on statelessness and human rights.”

### Impact

- The project produced a [report](#) containing the first in-depth analysis of the political, socio-economic, psychological and physical impact of COVID-19 on Kuwait's stateless Bidoon. Following its publication and launch, the report which included stateless people's reflections who took part in the entire process was used in associated advocacy.
- The direct involvement of stateless people in this work created an important blueprint for future advocacy.

As reflected by the SALAM team:

“

The project provided stateless people a platform to express their views to those outside Kuwait participants stated, in their own words, what they experienced in Kuwait and what they felt would be the most pressing solutions.”

### Future Plans

SALAM DHR intends to continue working with members of the Bidoon community. They are currently working on documenting trauma within the Kuwaiti Bidoon community, together with University College London. **With more sustained funding, SALAM DHR will increase its communication, dissemination and advocacy, build connections across stateless communities and raise awareness about the Bidoon.**

## ISKUL SAMA DILAUT OMADAL - RAISING AWARENESS ON COVID-19 FOR THE BAJAU LAUT IN OMADAL

[Iskul Sama diLaut Omadal](#) (Iskul) has operated in Omadal, Malaysia since August 2015. It is a community-led initiative that uses a participatory approach to offer basic literacy, numeracy and art classes to around 30 stateless children. They also provide meals to supplement children's diet while offering extra income to local women who prepare weekly meals for the students. Iskul aspires to build their students' skills and knowledge to become strong community leaders.

### Exceptional Award (EUR 5,000)

The project aimed to make COVID-19 information accessible to the Bajau Laut community in Omadal Island, Sabah, Malaysia. They are a migratory maritime people, many of whom are stateless or at risk of statelessness due to systemic discrimination and lack of documentation. Information on how to prevent the spread of the virus as well as on the importance of vaccination was presented through shadow play by Iskul's students. Youth were also trained to advocate for the right to health. Furthermore, Iskul worked to strengthen their relationship with the district health authority to provide input to and get more information about the vaccination roll out for the stateless community. Through the award Iskul also managed to maintain its operations as its funding had been compromised.

### Impact

- 30 Iskul students could continue their classes and learning was not disrupted.
- At least six stateless youth had the COVID-19 vaccine as part of Iskul's campaign.

- More than 100 people (students and wider community members) were informed on how to mitigate the risks of COVID-19 through hygiene awareness workshops and the production 'Omadal fights Corona'.

- Students' leadership skills were enhanced by providing training to members of the community on basic hygiene routines. Hygiene kits were provided to members of the community.

### Future Plans

Iskul's vision is to develop young leaders amongst the stateless and Malaysian communities in Omadal by equipping children with critical thinking, leadership skills and knowledge on their situation. ISKUL is also collaborating with ISI on an educational project aiming to raise children's awareness on statelessness and to empower them to be driving forces to affect change. **With sustained funding, ISKUL will be able to provide even more meaningful support to the community and support its teachers and students to access documentation and assert their right to nationality.**

- Iskul's societal contribution has been recognised by the international society as a result of their work with the CESF and beyond. The Yayasan Gamuda Foundation awarded ISKUL the [2022 Gamuda Inspiration Award \(GIA\)](#); they were awarded the [Star Golden Heart Awards 2022](#) and Iskul's co-founder was mentioned as one of the [Wiki Impact 100 Changemakers](#) creating real impacts in Malaysia.

- Health officers visited Omadal to vaccinate children.

## ELOM INITIATIVES - IMPROVING LEARNING ABILITIES AMONG REFUGEE COMMUNITIES IN MALAYSIA

[Elom Initiatives](#) (Elom) is a refugee community-based organisation, active in Kuala Lumpur since 2017. Its mission is to empower refugees with opportunities and means to reach their full potential to become productive members of the hosting society. Elom envisions a society where refugees' basic human rights are recognised and enforced, and where everyone is empowered to regain their human dignity. 'Elom' translates to 'knowledge' in the Rohingya language. Building on the adage "knowledge is power", all Elom Initiatives' projects have a learning element to them.

### Exceptional Award (EUR 5,000)

This project was designed to catalyse improved learning standards among the stateless Rohingya refugee community, through the provision of interactive e-learning alternatives. Through ICT, it aimed to create new opportunities for children and youth to reach their potential by increasing quality and accessibility of education. To respond to the way in which COVID-19 disrupted its regular education work, Elom digitalised existing education programmes and materials on English language and digital literacy. Students were able to attend online classes either from home, or at the Elom Community Centre where they were provided with IT materials and Internet connection.

### Impact

- Two classrooms were equipped with desks, chairs, white boards, books and stationary for up to 35 students.

- ICT material was installed, 50 students were enrolled to attend the Online English Programme and the Elom Community Centre was reopened.

- A curriculum with topics and skills necessary for young refugees today was developed.

- Through consultation and field visits, the needs and struggles of the community regarding access to education were mapped in order to strengthen the capacity of community stakeholders to deliver quality education and build a collaborative network among organizations to support building a learning culture.

### Future Plans

Elom aims to continue supporting local refugee youth's access to education through developing an 'Entrepreneurial Youth Programme' using online and on-site educational methods. After resuming regular English and Digital Literacy classes, it aims to add further modules on entrepreneurship, leadership, presentation, financial literacy, legal knowledge, etc. Elom Academy will also aim to provide access to quality primary-level education to 100 refugee/stateless children in Selayang, Kuala Lumpur, through a learner-responsive curriculum tailored for refugee and stateless children's needs. ELOM is also collaborating with ISI on an educational project aiming to raise children's awareness on statelessness issues. **With sustainable funding, the long-term objective is to scale-up its work into a proper e-learning platform designed to address the stateless refugee community's needs and to reach out to a broader audience.**



## ROHINGYA WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT NETWORK – GIVING VOICE TO THE COMMUNITY

[Rohingya Women's Development Network](#) (RWDN) was founded in 2016. It is one of the first female Rohingya led organisations. It works to empower women and grow female leadership in society by teaching women to harness their abilities, develop new skills and provide them with opportunities to lead.

### Action Award (EUR 25,000)

This project aimed to mobilise the Rohingya community (In Bangladesh and beyond) through capacity building and trainings to ensure they were empowered to understand COVID-19 and related health issues and implement measures to prevent its spread. Stateless Rohingya refugees in 34 camps in Bangladesh benefitted from a COVID-19 awareness raising campaign and distribution of hygiene and sanitation packages. Researchers gathered information through interviews, case studies and testimonies from affected people. Discussions with experts, researchers, scholars and Rohingya leaders helped increase dialogue about Rohingya human rights. Further, the project had a regional component, bringing these discussions to Rohingya communities in other countries.

READ MORE ON COVID-19  
IMPACTS ON THE ROHINGYA [HERE](#)

### Impact

- 20 volunteers were trained to conduct COVID-19 awareness sessions at community level. They worked with 80 religious leaders to disseminate information on COVID-19, carrying out 160 community awareness sessions and distributing 1,300 COVID-19 information posters.
- Hygiene packages were distributed to 800 women involved in training sessions and to 30 mosques in camps.
- The team conducted four webinars on the impacts of COVID-19 faced by Rohingya communities in Myanmar, Bangladesh, India and Malaysia. Prominent Rohingya figures from these countries and the diaspora led the discussions, reaching 29,400 people worldwide.
- Small-scale grants were given to two community-led organisations to empower local initiatives and further share COVID-19 awareness and hygiene materials.

Reflecting on the impact of its work, the RWDN team said:

“

What is most effective is to provide timely support and always verify with the target population their needs and their willingness to participate, learn and actively get involved with the planned activities...we have tried to focus on the ground level to provide the support with field volunteers...this increases trust, cultural appropriateness, cultural understanding and capacitated the target population.”

### Future Plans

RWDN's future plans revolve around continuing to develop their work to empower female leadership and to nurture and support community-based and locally led activities. **With sustained funding, they would be able to strengthen their operations in Malaysia, and also support women's leadership and empowerment initiatives within Rohingya communities in other countries.**

# LESSONS LEARNT



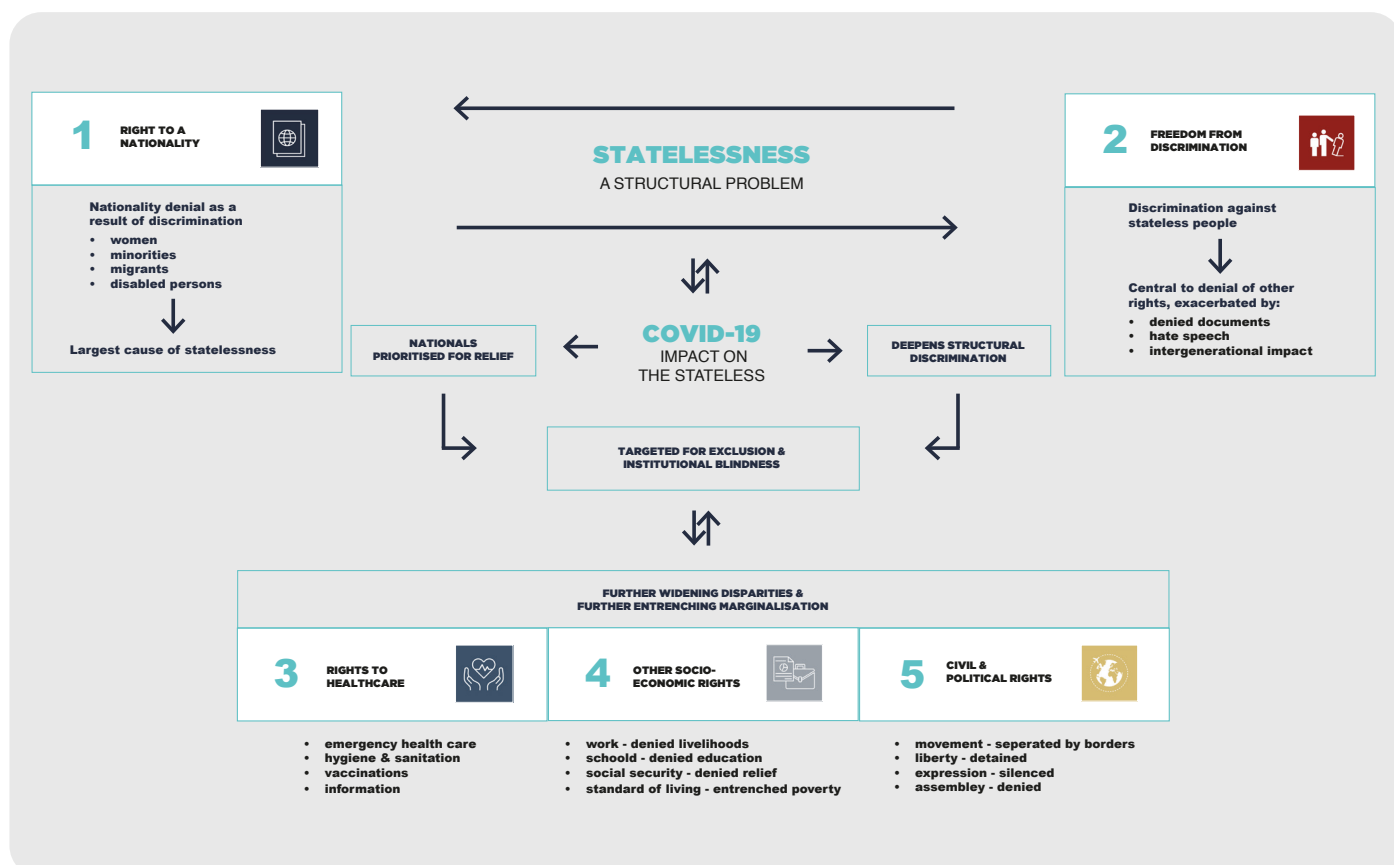
Most stateless situations globally affect minorities. Statelessness and exclusion from rights and services are one of the worse deprivations they face and there is usually a sense of apprehension about the future among stateless people. Any project interventions should not just address immediate issues, but also long term needs of strengthening community mobilisation, training to address the fear and apprehension stateless people suffer”.

Development and Justice Initiative,  
CESF Consortium Member

## UNDERSTANDING THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN STRUCTURAL DISCRIMINATION AND STATELESSNESS

Sometimes, it takes an unprecedented crisis to give clarity to what was hidden in plain sight. For many years, the lived experience of stateless people, academic scholarship and advocacy initiatives alike, point clearly to a strong nexus between discrimination and statelessness. **Discrimination causes and perpetuates statelessness, and stateless persons are subject to more discrimination in a vicious cycle.** As the effects of COVID-19 came into view, the Impact Report published in June 2020 articulated the discriminatory exclusion of stateless and undocumented people from COVID-19 relief and healthcare measures, the increased indirect impacts of gender discriminatory nationality laws during the pandemic and how the pandemic was being leveraged to scapegoat minority groups who are also affected by statelessness, such as the Roma or the Rohingya. These findings were reconfirmed in the Together We Can Report published by the CESF Consortium in July 2021.

Why does discrimination lead to statelessness and why are stateless people discriminated against? The answer often lies in the self-perpetuating cycle of exclusion and marginalisation that emerges through statelessness. When people are denied their right to nationality and made stateless, their equal capacity to participate in politics and democracy is violently wrenched from them. They are viewed as ‘other’ and treated as ‘less’, all justified based on their non-citizenship. The deprivation of citizenship is thus a powerful political tool of exclusion, built on the logic of differentiation between those who do and don’t belong. So, the same structures that perpetuate statelessness, also perpetuate the marginalisation and discrimination of the stateless. Stateless people experience both the indifference and the power or even violence of the state, at greater intensity than most citizens. In this context, **the exclusion and targeted marginalisation of the stateless in COVID-19 responses was not surprising. It was characteristic of how the stateless have always been treated.** The infographic captures this understanding of statelessness as a structural problem caused and perpetuated by discrimination and the deprivation of the right to nationality, and resultant consequences on other human rights, democracy and the rule of law.



The work of the CESF Consortium sharpened our understanding of the impacts of structural discrimination, with the COVID-19 crisis serving to surface long-standing and sometimes hidden challenges. It also shed light on how strategies of exclusion, often pursued for short-term populist political gain, deeply impact wider society, the rule of law and democracy. The research-based advocacy undertaken by CESF members contributed both to increased knowledge and deeper engagement with affected communities at a critical time, when otherwise this opportunity for learning and innovating solutions would have been lost. As noted by one of the CESF members in the evaluation: *“By giving us the means to fund our research, we have uncovered systemic issues suffered by the [stateless community], which have greatly exacerbated the impact of COVID-19 there. We’re a small NGO that is dependent on whatever funding we can obtain. Our report would not have been possible without this funding.”*

## **Working Towards Inclusion**

COVID-19 confronted governments with the reality of the public health imperative to provide healthcare for all – even those who had been targeted and structurally excluded from healthcare for generations. If no one is safe until everyone is safe, laws, policies and practices that make communities unsafe are to be challenged – both for the detriment they cause to individuals, and to democracy, the rule of law and society at large. This is why the Together We Can Report drew a conclusion that “it is in everyone’s interest to include everyone”.

This thinking permeated the work of the Consortium and will continue to shape advocacy to promote and protect the rights of the stateless. One of the lessons generated by the work of CESF members on the ground, across an array of contexts, is the role of **trust as an integral component of meaningful inclusion**. The structural exclusion of stateless people and related inequalities, discrimination and deprivation of access to basic rights and services, also contributes to a severe breakdown of trust between the community and the government (and vice versa). The same way structural discrimination must be addressed through law and policy reform, broken trust must be rebuilt through different strategies. Unless this is prioritised, law and policy reform will not necessarily result in meaningful inclusion.

On the one hand then, government officials who maintain discriminatory views towards stateless communities, will continue to find ways to exclude them through their decision making. On the other hand, stateless communities will not feel confident in new laws and policies which notionally give them access to what they have been deprived of for generations (often through bureaucratic and state-sponsored violence).

In Lebanon, for example, even after vaccine access was guaranteed by the Ministry, there was strong vaccine hesitance within the community, in part due to lack of trust in the authorities. In such contexts, community-based initiatives play a crucial role in reining in and reminding state officials of their legal obligations, while also working to build community confidence, raise awareness, accompany community members and support them to access the rights and services they are entitled to.

## **‘EQUAL PARTNERSHIP’, ‘CENTRING STATELESS PEOPLE’, ‘SOLIDARITY & TRUST’: MORE THAN JUST WORDS**



We are really inspired by the work of each other. We should all congratulate ourselves. It has been an inspiration to be part of the CESF.”

CESF Consortium Member

**The Consortium aimed to connect and elevate the work of all partners.** The Fund did not merely support strong projects around the world; it facilitated true collaboration between all partners. This model, based on solidarity and peer-support, **enabled us to collectively achieve greater inward facing impact (improving our expertise, organisations and activism) and outward facing impact (better serving our communities and pursuing structural change).**

The work of the CESF Consortium also proved critical to the continued effectiveness of civil society action on statelessness and the right to a nationality, in contexts where this was threatened by receding donor support or shrinking civic space. In a short time span and an exceedingly challenging environment, the Consortium delivered important lessons for the future. Stepping up support for locally designed and driven, but internationally connected initiatives that place the real needs and priorities of stateless people at the centre, will be key to Building Back Better.

## **A Responsive Flexible Model Design**

The co-designed model developed through the CESF allowed for locally responsive programs to be developed within a broader framework of trust and practical support through peer learning and collaborative action. This combination of localised approaches within an overarching support structure achieved considerable impact. The model provided a space for the exploration of solutions designed by affected communities, that most align with real needs and increase chances of innovating approaches.

ISI and partners learnt a great deal from designing, adapting and implementing the Consortium model. Several such lessons were highlighted in the [Independent Evaluation Report of the CESF](#), which was published in October 2022. The evaluation found that participants’ (partners, committee members, and ISI) experience of the model and its impact was overwhelmingly positive. The funding was made available at a particularly difficult time, helping grassroots groups to survive and respond to the various ways in which the pandemic impacted their communities.

In relation to the responsive and flexible approach adopted, the CESF Independent Evaluation Report noted:



In the context of ISI establishing and implementing the CESF, during a crisis and without having previously played a role in grant giving, the committee’s advisory and accountability roles demonstrate the extent to which ISI was taking a

thoughtful, considered, and necessarily cautious approach, open to others' input and guidance. The make-up of the committee, including stateless people, donors, and humanitarian actors, demonstrated ISI's awareness of the range of insight that could and should input into the implementation of the model and fund.

...

Particularly crucial to the success of the model was the flexibility with which it was implemented across all stages – from project design and the preparation of proposals, implementation of individual and joint activities, learning and adaptation of projects, through to budget and the provision of funds... The partnership approach to the model between ISI and the organisations receiving funds was viewed as an important part of this flexibility. This approach enabled discussions, developed common understanding, and led to flexibility to adapt to the developing circumstances faced by partner organisations. ISI managed this while also giving partners the space for their work to flourish without micromanagement”.

As noted by one Consortium member: *“During the entire process ISI treated Phiren Amenca as equal partners and did everything in their power to support and facilitate our work and activities. This was true for the first and it is for the second award. Especially during the process of writing and submitting the project, ISI's expertise came to light, redesigning our project to be the right measurement of the maximum result.”*

Thinking through in advance what strategies can be adopted to mitigate risk, while also maintaining flexibility and room for adaptation throughout the implementation of CESF projects, was especially important against the backdrop of a fast-evolving public health and socio-economic crisis. Consortium member CANS noted that *“One of the key lessons learned from the project implementation process is that it is necessary to take into account all risks, without exception, when preparing a project, despite their low level at a certain stage, and prepare a strategy to minimize them [...] it is necessary to have several plans and options for achieving the goals of the project, which, as far as possible, should be worked out at the planning level. We also believe that it is important to leave a wider platform for action in project activities and build actions on a model of flexibility, especially in the current conditions of a dynamically changing world.”*

## **A Collaborative Peer Structure**

The solidarity and relationships formed through the Consortium provided a solid foundation for the success of the CESF with the partner-based approach and its peer support structure being central to this. As set out in the CESF Independent Evaluation Report:

“

The consortium model was undoubtedly a strength of the CESF, making the work done ... more effective and better able to address the needs of marginalised groups, even with small amounts of funding.”

...

“Another successful aspect of the model contingent upon coordination was the ‘collaborative peer structure’ that connected organisations and partners, enhancing networks and knowledge sharing. One partner organisation spoke of the ‘critical development’ in their work of the creation of ‘global solidarity networks’... In particular, there were benefits of understanding statelessness situations in different country contexts and collaborating in developing responses.”

...

“The success of the model lies significantly in relationships developed, and the manner of its implementation allowed trust to build between ISI and partner organisations. ISI did a good job in making partners feel relaxed and able to share problems and jointly problem solve. This led to a positive sense of partnerships throughout.”

The establishment of trusting partnerships to seek advice and support was highlighted throughout, for example a partner in Nepal stating: *“Do not hesitate to ask for help: When we were stuck and could not move forward with the project, we were too ashamed to ask for help. Once we did that and found NFA, we were able to work ahead with great success. As a new organisation now we know that other organizations are very helpful and we will not be afraid to ask for help. Other implementing partners should consult with those who have undertaken similar projects, and not be afraid or ashamed to ask for help from ISI or other organizations to implement any activity.”*

Similarly, NFA reflected that *“this whole project is centred around solidarity and trust - solidarity on behalf of NFA who believes in, stands with, works with and advocates for its Asia-Pacific partners, and the trust of these partners that NFA will work with their best interests in mind.”*

## **Centring Stateless People**

Another key element of the Consortium approach has been the centring of stateless people, not as platitude or in a formulaic way, but as an integral component of the modus operandi within the CESF. **Many of the Consortium members were groups led by people impacted by the issue, but those organisations that did not have lived experience leadership also centred community outreach and engagement as a necessary way of operating.** As noted by Consortium members in Malaysia: *“It is crucial to build trust and rapport with community members. Family Frontiers has been working towards community engagement gradually over the past few years. When we filed the case and the community was needed more than ever in the campaign, we received great enthusiasm and openness to participation from community members. This enabled the mobilisation of mothers to self-advocate for equal citizenship and to take up active roles in the campaign.”*

Similarly, the CESF consortium member working in Kuwait also reflected how *“setting the agenda and giving Bidoon a platform to speak their minds was the most effective and impactful way of communicating with them and determining the best course of action.”* In Lebanon, the direct communication and involvement of stateless people was further facilitated by the project being managed by a stateless person who worked with the community to look for pragmatic solutions.

The CESF Independent Evaluation Report also highlighted the importance of, and success with which the Consortium centred stateless people:



Broadly, the involvement of communities and grassroots organisations with lived experience in the design and implementation of projects, with the provision of some training and support, had an impact on those community members with capacity building and skills enhancement. This has strengthened their capacity to do their statelessness work on the ground, and to feed this work into coordinated advocacy initiatives”.

## **PURSuing STRUCTURAL CHANGE WHILE MEETING HUMANITARIAN NEED – A NEW THEORY OF CHANGE**

The work of the Consortium deepened our understanding of the structural nature of the exclusion and marginalisation faced by stateless communities. It also forced us to think differently about ‘change’ and about the often artificial and unhelpful siloing of ‘human rights’ and ‘humanitarian’ intervention. The aim of the CESF was to identify and work towards systemic solutions targeting structural change. The Fund was not intended to meet humanitarian needs for stateless people. However, given the nature of the COVID-19 crisis, the model adopted for the CESF provided that *“where humanitarian needs are identified by partners on the ground and there are no other means to address them swiftly, humanitarian relief can also be provided...in order to offer short-term relief while working towards a structural solution”*. The criteria for projects under the fund reflected this dynamic, with baseline conditions that projects, partners and activities must operate within the framework of wider structural statelessness issues, with the possibility to address humanitarian needs where this contributed towards systemic solutions.

As noted in the CESF Independent Evaluation Report:



This fund was particularly well placed because it had the humanitarian angle, but also the wider advocacy and structural aspects. These after often not addressed through the same funding streams but is a useful approach in the circumstances to do so and demonstrated how the two aspects interact to improve outcomes.”

...

“The success of the model is inevitably steeped in the sought outcome of structural solutions for statelessness issues” [...] “Partner organisations were keen to provide examples of the way in which they were able to use the model and fund in the contexts in which they were working.”

“Indeed, participants reported the model supported new programming and existing work at a critical time and strengthened their ability to do advocacy. This work emphasised the fact that activism can be as effective in emergency periods, when it is particularly important to ‘counter the toxic narrative’ and raise awareness on statelessness issues. Partner organisations tied this into public health and community development outcomes that they witnessed.”

The structural-humanitarian coordinated approach allowed for practical responses to urgent need while providing a solid basis for evidenced-based advocacy initiatives built on first-hand knowledge and understanding which strengthened the impact of engagement with decision-makers and stakeholders for change. As different Consortium members reflected:



The possibility of giving relief food in a human rights project...allowed us to address urgent needs caused by Covid 19... [but] it was a short time to have an advocacy goal, thus the need to have a longer life cycle of the project.”

“It enabled us to highlight the exceptional situation, to have humanitarian funds and do some research that enabled us to go to policy and advocacy.”

In thinking about these differing aspects of the fund, a CESF Committee member suggested conceptualising structural change as a ladder, in which humanitarian impact is a rung of a ladder from which steps are built to lead to systemic impact. By approaching it in this way, as a holistic interaction between these approaches, the model was able to bridge the sometimes sharp division between people who do service, and those who support systemic change and advocacy. Furthermore, by doing so the model managed to bring in and meaningfully include more actors with lived experience, that a stricter emphasis on advocacy may have left behind.

Significantly, **this approach helped generate stronger commitments from government and humanitarian actors, to provide humanitarian relief (economic, healthcare, food etc.) to stateless people who had previously been excluded – highlighting the importance of pursuing this dual strategy.** The work of Phiren Amenca/Walk with Us illustrates the impact of using research-based advocacy which identified and focused attention on the humanitarian need of the Roma community as a basis for the active engagement of decision-makers, leading to faster resolution of the legal status of cases. In Lebanon, Oummal’s direct work to assist 1,202 stateless people with documentation, registration and access to their own piloted mobile vaccination clinic formed the foundation of targeted meetings with the Minister of Health who later announced that stateless people can be ensured hospital admissions connected to COVID-19 and a simplification of the process to access vaccinations. In North Macedonia as well, Bairska Svetlina successfully used its direct humanitarian and practical support to more than 1,000 members of the Roma community to engage and develop relationships and advocacy work with the Ministry of Justice, Assembly of the Republic of Northern Macedonia, Advisor of the Prime Minister for Roma Inclusion and International Initiative for Roma Integration.

# CONSORTIUM HEROES III

## NUBIAN RIGHTS FORUM – PARALEGAL SUPPORT FOR KENYA'S STATELESS

The [Nubian Rights Forum](#) (NRF) is dedicated to promoting the rights of the Nubian community by assisting stateless people with their applications for identity and citizenship documents. NRF advocates for law reform and also trains and supports community-based paralegals to help those at risk of statelessness navigate the Kenyan legal system.

### Scoping and Action Awards (EUR 25,000)

The project aimed to monitor and respond to human rights violations and documentation challenges faced by the Nubian community during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through evidence-based advocacy, NRF challenged arbitrary and discriminatory vetting processes that hinder Nubians' acquisition of identity documentation. The project also raised awareness about statelessness and the impact of COVID-19 through community and media outreach utilising local TV and radio stations and social media.

In collaboration with Kibera Food Drive, the project provided food relief assistance to those denied access to COVID-19 state relief measures. The project also helped affected Nubians who were forcefully evicted from their houses and land due to development of a [railway station](#) in Kisumu County. Finally, the project provided legal support and mental health support to those who suffered human rights abuses during the pandemic. This included one on one interactions between the affected community members and NRF's mental health officers. The aim of these sessions were to try and ease the pressure individuals felt and the difficulties they went through as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

READ MORE ON COVID-19  
IMPACTS IN KENYA [HERE](#)

### Impact

- Through a weekly radio show, NRF spread awareness about statelessness and disseminated information about COVID-19. Through dedicated social media work, NRF grew their supporter base and reached thousands of people on platforms including Facebook and Twitter. This platform strengthened public education on Kenya's digital ID system which was deemed 'illegal' by the Kenyan High Court due to issues related to data privacy and protection of minority communities at risk of statelessness.
- NRF gathered information on how the pandemic affected Nubians to strengthen its advocacy messaging and strategy going forward.

Reflecting on the project's humanitarian work, NRF said that

“

Stateless communities experienced challenges in accessing government services such as free vaccination due to lack of identification cards, access to food reliefs as identity cards for verification is required. Through the CESF, we managed to support the Nubian community in Kibos who were forcefully evicted from their houses in the middle of the night by the Kenya Railway Cooperation. Most families lost their properties, and the emergency fund came at very good time allowing us to support over 100 families in Kibos.”

### Future Plans

After general elections in August 2022, NRF aims to work with the new Government and other relevant partners and stakeholders to push for full recognition of the Nubian, Somali, and Pemba communities. In particular, NRF will collaborate with the National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR), to ensure inclusion of Nubians is implemented as per the recommendation of parliamentary report of 2021. NRF further aims to engage regionally with partners in Uganda, Tanzania and the East African Nationality Network, focusing on exclusions as a result of the digital ID rollout, sharing their experiences of litigation.

## **BAIRSKA SVETLINA - A HELP DESK FOR THE ROMA IN NORTH MACEDONIA**

Based in North Macedonia, [Bairska Svetlina](#) works to strengthen capacity of Roma communities, improve their socio-economic status and education, and build skills of young Roma activists. With strategic access to the community, Bairska Svetlina aims to help Roma enjoy basic human rights while promoting their inclusion and integration within society.

### **Exceptional, Scoping and Action Awards (EUR 20,000)**

Statelessness and the lack of a registered civil status and personal documentation undermines access to basic social and economic rights for many people in Macedonia, most prominently within the Roma community. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the issues faced by the community. Already viewed as outsiders, excluded and discriminated against, the Roma faced heightened anti-Gypsyism, livelihood challenges and denial of state relief and vaccinations. Bairska Svetlina unpacked and documented the systemic reasons behind the exclusion of the Roma community in the context of COVID-19. Functioning as a Help Desk, they offered information and legal advice to support community members to access government food cards, help packages and documentation and to understand quarantine regulations. A vaccination campaign was organised in cooperation with the Red Cross, Center for Public Health and Bair-Bitola Joint Project for Roma Inclusion. By documenting cases of exclusion, Bairska Svetlina expanded their evidence database and utilised it in advocacy targeting government and humanitarian actors.

**READ MORE ON COVID-19  
IMPACTS IN NORTH MACEDONIA [HERE](#)**

### **Impact**

- Through the Exceptional Award, the Bairska Svetlina office which was destroyed in a hate crime, was rebuilt.
- Bairska Svetlina offered legal support to over 400 community members through the Help Desk, enabling them to exercise their right to social assistance and access to state relief during the COVID-19 crisis.
- The establishment of a vaccination point led to the vaccination of over 100 community members in three days.
- The project provided more than 400 relief packages with support of the Red Cross and commercial groups.
- Through the Help Desk, Bairska Svetlina also assisted in other areas such as accessing citizenship, personal documentation, education, healthcare etc. More than 1000 members of the Roma community in Bitola benefited from this support.
- Bairska Svetlina established a networking system and developed relationships with authorities dealing with statelessness and documentation including the Ministry of Justice, Assembly of the Republic of Northern Macedonia, Advisor of the Prime Minister for Roma Inclusion and International Initiative for Roma Integration.

### **Future Plans**

Given that the Help Desk office is becoming increasingly recognisable amongst the community as well as local and national institutions, **with sustained funding, Bairska Svetlina will be able to continue and expand its scope to provide documentation assistance to community members in Bitola and other municipalities, while advocating for reform.**

## **WALK WITH US - PHIREN AMENCA - "REBORN" IN MONTENEGRO**

Roma Youth Organization "Walk with us- Phiren Amenca" acts in the best interest of the Roma and Egyptian community (RE) in Montenegro, monitoring policies and engaging in the areas of employment, education, housing, health, legal status, safety and equality. It aims to integrate and actively engage RE youth within Montenegrin society, strengthen institutional capacities and reduce negative attitudes and discrimination against the community.

### **Scoping and Action Awards (EUR 20,000)**

The project, "REborn", focused on creating sustainable cooperation with influential actors, including state institutions and other relevant organisations, to shine a light on intergenerational statelessness in the RE community and contribute to addressing the community's needs which were disproportionately

**READ MORE ON COVID-19  
IMPACTS IN MONTENEGRO [HERE](#)**

impacted by COVID-19. Unresolved documentation is a decades-long problem that the community live with, furthering their marginalisation and discrimination and disproportionately affecting RE children. The project built on a mapping exercise and information exchange, which unpacked the community's exclusion from COVID-19 relief efforts and painted a comprehensive picture of statelessness within the country. "REborn" focused on expanding advocacy outreach to include local governments and disseminating knowledge and tools on statelessness among Roma CSOs and community members. The project also piloted a legal aid programme and hosted multiple meetings with donors.

### Impact

- Through the publication of a [Case study](#), Phiren Amenca established themselves as a voice of the community and a credible source of information for local and international stakeholders.
- The pilot legal aid program offered support to 30 Roma families - 20 more than originally envisioned - resolving the legal status of at least 30 people and attracting new donors such as the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC).
- Phiren Amenca established direct communication with the central unit of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, enabling faster resolution of legal status cases of the RE community. This formed the basis of a legal aid programme, which had a great impact on the community and helped establish new ties with donors.
- Phiren Amenca is now seen as a credible partner by UNHCR and the Ministry of Internal Affairs and is regarded by the RE community as a source of professional and financial support. It is thus well positioned to further its advocacy, legal assistance and community support work.

### Future Plans

With sustained funding, Phiren Amenca will continue its legal support programme and provide sustainable legal and financial support to the RE community. They also aim to create a database containing information on legal status cases to ensure faster and better-quality data generation to ensure tailored solutions for new cases.

## UNITED STATELESS - UNDERSTANDING THE COVID-19 IMPACT ON STATELESS PEOPLE IN THE USA

[United Stateless](#) (USL) is a stateless people led organisation whose mission is to build and inspire community among those affected by statelessness, and to advocate for their human rights. USL connects, encourages, and empowers a community of stateless people in the United States, raising awareness, educating, and advocating for their human rights, and for law reform to introduce a path to citizenship for the stateless.

### Scoping Award (EUR 5,000)

The project aimed to qualify and map the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on stateless people within New York City (NYC), home to the second largest stateless population in the U.S. and the epicentre of the US COVID-19 outbreak. However, due to low response rates, the geographical area of the project was broadened to include the entire United States. USL's goal was "To have a better understanding of the situation of stateless individuals in the United States in order to better advocate for their needs both during Covid and more broadly." The project confirmed the struggle stateless individuals faced during the pandemic, particularly in accessing medical care, employment, basic needs and legal status. Project findings informed the awareness raising and advocacy work of USL.

### Impact

- The project contributed to wider USL advocacy initiatives, including a commitment in December 2021 by the Department of Homeland Security to define statelessness and create a Statelessness Determination Procedure.
- US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) held a public Listening Session on 8 March 2022 to include stakeholders' contributions on terms and definitions of statelessness in the US law. USL participated and shared their knowledge on the right to a nationality and what should be done to address statelessness in the USA.

USL reflected that project research findings:





Mirrored the vulnerability and struggles that stateless individuals in the US face. This will help us show more data behind our advocacy work on why statelessness needs to be addressed.”

### Future Plans

USL plan to publish its CESF research in a peer-reviewed journal, while sharing findings within its networks. With sustained funding, USL aims to establish a pathway to the right to a nationality for stateless people living in the United States. The team envisage continuing to liaise with the US Government to recognise statelessness, establish a statelessness determination procedure, and assist stateless people in the country, stating that “Our biggest strategies have been continued networking and using opportunities to talk with everyone we can about statelessness.”

## DOMINICAN@S POR DERECHO - SOCIAL INCLUSION FOR THE STRUCTURALLY EXCLUDED IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

[Dominican@s por Derecho](#) (DxD) is a platform of nine groups with a long history of service in the Dominican Republic in human rights, education, health, sustainable development, strategic research and litigation. Since Sentence 168-13 in 2013, which denationalised tens of thousands of Dominicans, mainly of Haitian descent, this platform helped Dominicans of Haitian descent advocate for social inclusion, community development and better working conditions as well as access to civil registration and the right to Dominican nationality.

### Action and Exceptional Awards (EUR 27,000)

The project aimed to document and map cases of those who had been excluded from state relief, to better understand evolving needs and develop appropriate longer-term engagement strategies for the DxD Platform. This included pro-active follow-up to a Presidential Decree paving the way for the naturalisation of those born to irregular migrants in the Dominican Republic and never registered. The project sat within, and contributed to, a wider study on the impact of COVID-19 that involved mapping the impact of disruption to civil registries during the pandemic.

**READ MORE ON COVID-19 IMPACTS IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC [HERE](#)**

### Impact

- The project assisted 130 families who had been excluded from state's assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly with humanitarian aid, food support, first-hand information on COVID-19 and how to prevent the spread of infection. As the team observed, “The humanitarian aid was modest but enabled continued ongoing accompaniment of disadvantaged communities to better understand their needs.”
- The DxD Platform carried out multiple advocacy and legal activities, including assisting to obtain identity documents. This was in response to project research which “indicated that access to civil registration was difficult before COVID-19, but the pandemic added an extra layer of difficulty to the issue.”
- Amidst challenges, the DxD Platform engaged with international and regional mechanisms such as the Inter-American Human Rights Commission and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The results emerging from these advocacy and legal actions provided the base for further advocacy work.
- Due to lack of documents, precarious legal status, unemployment and impacts of COVID-19, stateless people were not eligible for state social protection. The team therefore helped set up nine small-scale enterprises “To demonstrate the capacities of the stateless [...] demystifying the charge that “others” are a drain on state resources.”
- The DxD Platform also successfully advocated for stateless people to access vaccines.

### Future Plans

The DxD Platform aims to further engage in policy dialogue with the Dominican authorities. September 2023 will mark the 10th anniversary of the landmark ruling 168-13 which denationalised thousands of Dominicans, mainly of Haitian descent. **With sustained funding, the Platform will aim to carry out multiple activities to raise awareness, engage different stakeholders and advocate for people's right to a nationality, including within a sub-regional context.**

# WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS



Our recommendation is to expand the consortium and encourage as much engagement between partners as possible. We are far stronger together”.

CESF Consortium Member

## **BUILDING AND EXPANDING ON THE WORK OF THE CONSORTIUM**

COVID-19 clearly illustrated how structural discrimination and marginalisation of stateless people results in significant real-life consequences on equality, dignity and rights. In turn, the CESF highlighted the potential impact that creative and collaborative community-centring models can have on humanitarian and structural challenges. As such there is both the need and potential to build on the CESF to address broader underlying factors leading to statelessness and the associated human rights violations affecting stateless people.

The [CESF Independent Evaluation Report](#) identified the benefits, impact, and replicability of the CESF and provided recommendations on how to strengthen the model for use in future emergency and non-emergency contexts. The evaluation found the innovative model to be applicable to other human rights contexts, notably the consortium’s approach to partnership, its collaborative peer structure, and its responsive flexible modality. These combined elements allowed both local-level development and adaptation of programmatic work as required, while creating a supportive overarching framework based on peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchange. The [Roadmap for Change](#) developed through the CESF is reflective of the approach taken by the CESF in centring and being accountable to stateless people while connecting across borders to strengthen solidarity, visibility and impact.

The structural-humanitarian coordinated approach, which linked direct service provision and support to advocacy strategies and interventions, was found to be a basis for greater intersection and partnership between human rights and humanitarian actors. There is considerable potential to expand this work further, particularly in relation to an issue such as statelessness, where structural discrimination underpins socio-economic and political exclusion, this dual approach was seen as both ground-breaking and necessary.

The evaluation also outlined that from a donor-perspective the CESF could inform funding models which ensure local creative autonomy to develop and respond programmatically, as well as strong accountability, transparency and learning, while reducing overly onerous structures. Given the success of the CESF as a time-bound emergency response with only limited funding (500,000 EUR total expenditure), there is much that can be drawn from this experience to inform longer-term or larger-scale pooled funding or consortium models that pursue structural change on statelessness and the right to a nationality – or indeed on other pressing human rights issues.

Protecting the right to a nationality and the human rights of stateless people is becoming an ever-greater challenge, in the face of increased authoritarianism, growth of the security state and populism, xenophobia and racism. And with discrimination being the most significant driver of statelessness, precipitating the exclusion of minority groups from citizenship all around the world, there is a need for greater coordinated and collaborative efforts to address this. While there are important grassroots-level initiatives ongoing in several countries to address systemic discrimination as a cause (and consequence) of statelessness, there is a lack of resourcing and opportunities for peer learning and joined-up engagement to distil promising practices that could inform the wider statelessness field, and to advocate for structural change. Building on the success and lessons learned from the CESF to shape longer-term initiatives could be highly impactful. For example, a global consortium on statelessness and discrimination could be established, linking up and directing resourcing towards NGOs and citizenship rights activists at the frontline of the struggle against systemic discrimination so that they can work both locally and together to challenge exclusion and promote social justice for stateless people and those at risk of statelessness. Donors, UN bodies, NGOs and activists are encouraged to engage with and support conversations to establish such longer-term initiatives.

## **PRIORITIES FOR THE FUTURE**

Given the time-bound, emergency response nature of the CESF, Consortium members focused primarily on the structural barriers to inclusion that manifested in the context of the pandemic, with life-threatening consequences. While several of the issues taken forward by Consortium members were continuations of their pre-pandemic work (adapted to the COVID-19 emergency context), some groups had to deprioritise their existing programming to make room for their emergency response.

In order to understand what types of issues they would like to prioritise – not in an emergency context but for the long-term – as the CESF came towards its conclusion, Consortium members were asked where there is the greatest need with regards to the long-standing and ongoing impacts of structural discrimination faced by their communities. Through a short survey that presented eleven thematic areas for consideration, work to address documentation problems came out as the highest priority. This reflects the clear nexus between (lack of) citizenship, (lack of) access to documents and (lack of) enjoyment of other rights and services, that was visible across the experiences of the CESF consortium projects. The following order of prioritisation emerged in terms of other issue areas for future work:

- **Highest priority:** Documentation
- **High priority:** Health; Education; Access to Justice; Work/Employment; and Detention
- **Medium priority:** Gender-Based Violence; Human Trafficking; and Access to Banking/Financial Systems
- **Low priority:** Land/Property Rights; Climate Change

Ultimately, it is states that are obligated to, and have the means to address such issues at a structural level, in order to meaningfully promote and protect the right to nationality and the rights of stateless people. The work of community activists, NGOs and other stakeholders in these areas can shape, influence and inform state action in this regard.

### **A Closer Look at Needs: Health & Education**

As the CESF Consortium's activities were winding down, the issues of health and education – two of the areas identified by CESF Consortium members as a high priority for ongoing and future work – were unpacked further through an additional research and consultation process. The aim was to better understand how statelessness affects enjoyment of these rights, in order to contribute to a stronger evidence-base for related interventions and programming.

Rebecca Yang, a graduate student of the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health conducted her practicum research among CESF Consortium members, looking at the impact of statelessness on health equity and the social determinants of health. She carried out desk research in late 2021 and then key informant interviews in Kenya and Montenegro (in person), as well as the Dominican Republic and India (online) during the first half of 2022. Her research showed that the discrimination, stigmatisation and economic marginalisation experienced by stateless communities adversely impact their health – including by contributing to poor living conditions and high levels of anxiety. These factors were aggravated by COVID-19 pandemic restrictions that disproportionately impacted the livelihoods of stateless populations and led to increased prejudice against these communities in contexts where minorities were used as scapegoats for the public health crisis. Health access was a problem across all countries, due to discriminatory treatment, documentation requirements, and real or perceived costs (including of seeking private medical care out of fear that approaching public health providers might lead to arrest, detention or deportation). The interviews uncovered examples of how people without nationality or documentation were deprioritised or treated differently – such as in Montenegro where patients without legal status could not be registered in electronic medical record systems, adversely affecting the continuity of care. The array of real and perceived obstacles faced by stateless people were widely understood to disincentivise them from utilising health services, which may in turn have been a contributing factor to vaccine hesitancy among some groups – even once vaccine programmes were opened to include people without citizenship or documentation.

During the second half of 2022, ISI's Children's Programme team, supported by students from the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, conducted a round of consultations on the right to education with 13 CESF Consortium members. Interviews covered four main areas: the official state position on education for children and the obstacles stateless children face; entry requirements for registration and the role of documentation; alternative forms of education for stateless children; and the COVID-19 impact on stateless children's access to education. All partners pointed to a variety of significant short and long-term implications for children such as, denial of access to higher education; lack of motivation to study; falsification of documentation; high drop-out rates; child/early marriage disrupting education; being forced into expensive and inferior private school options; being issued unrecognised diplomas and degrees; discrimination against girls; and low self-esteem and self-worth. Partners also shared good practices to address these challenges, including providing education on citizenship and rights, confidence-building exercises and building trust within the community. At the end of these consultations, the group discussed several activities and opportunities that could be employed to further elevate and bring visibility to the issue at national and international levels through, for example, advocacy policy briefings.

## **INVESTING IN COMMUNITY – FUNDING STATELESSNESS WORK FROM LOCAL TO GLOBAL**

The potential for building on and expanding the impact of and lessons from the CESF Consortium, by investing in and linking up community initiatives, is significant. Around the world, in CESF project countries and beyond, hundreds of grassroots and stateless led groups have emerged from stateless communities through self-organising and community mobilisation. These groups serve their communities through various strategies, while also fighting to place their issues on national agendas and to take them to the international community. Such groups often operate in extreme precarity; in hostile legal, political, social and economic environments; amidst threats to their security, and while struggling to provide for themselves and their families. These groups should be at the centre of statelessness discourse and agenda setting, as they have experienced first-hand, the impact of statelessness. They understand and often represent the needs and demands of their communities.

However, grassroots and stateless-led groups have historically had very limited representation at global level, where agenda setting has been dominated by UN Agencies, western NGOs and academics. Many such groups have been exploited, used in tokenistic ways to 'front' the fundraising drives of bigger agencies, or to serve as unacknowledged 'fixers' for researchers. Financial insecurity is a significant (though not the only) challenge faced by these groups. For example, almost 80% of 66 participants in a recent survey,

named 'fundraising' as one of the top challenges they face in working on statelessness. While most community groups across all fields – particularly those operating in hostile environments – face significant financial challenges, there are structural issues which underpin the financial exclusion of stateless-led groups, further disadvantaging them. For example, for many such groups, financial exclusion stems not only from the fact that they cannot register their organisations and comply with state regulations, but that the individuals themselves are undocumented, and can even be criminalised for their lack of legal status.

Barring a few notable exceptions, statelessness has not been fully understood or prioritised by the donor community. It remains a peripheral issue, which often falls between the gaps of more established donor priorities. Statelessness, though, intersects with many (if not all) the biggest global challenges we face including development, migration, discrimination, democracy and the rule of law, peace and conflict, women's rights, child's right and climate justice. As such, statelessness pervades and further exacerbates many of the challenges that donors rightly prioritise. It is a cross-cutting issue, which must be factored in when addressing other global challenges. It is also a challenge and field in its own right, with its own expertise, dedicated advocacy and activism, which must be supported.

The CESF model with its collaborative peer structure and flexible modality meant that projects were able to develop at the local level and programme work could be adapted as necessary. This combined with the supportive nature of the Consortium which allowed for peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchange paved the way for a successful programme which significant impact at the local level as detailed in the three 'Consortium Hero' chapters of this report.

The CESF model highlighted how a relatively small amount of money can go a very long way, examples of this can be found across the CESF projects. If this could be achieved in a time-bound emergency response, the potential for impact through supporting such groups with long-term, sustainable funding - unrestricted funds and more autonomy and power to set their own agenda – will be all the greater. As articulated in the CESF Independent Evaluation Report:



**The overarching sentiment throughout the evaluation was that the CESF was a step towards addressing the overlooking of statelessness as an issue to fund. It moved in that direction both directly through its implementation, as well as in its opening up of wider donor discussions.”**

The CESF was a time bound initiative put in place to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, but it ultimately taught us that urgent and concerted action is needed to promote the right to nationality, protect the rights of stateless people and address the root causes of statelessness at all times, be they of relative stability, or of crisis. The lack of mainstream recognition of the benefit of supporting the statelessness field in general and to stateless led organisations and stateless individuals in particular, and the absence of dedicated avenues to enable donors to meaningfully contribute to the work of stateless led and community groups is of significant concern. Promoting the right to nationality, protecting the rights of stateless people and addressing the root causes of statelessness in a sustainable and impactful way over the long-term, will only be possible with the strategic and long-term support and solidarity of the donor community.

## **FOLLOWING THE ROADMAP FOR CHANGE**

A key outcome of the Consortium's work was to inform the co-design the [Roadmap for Change](#) for resolving and addressing the structural discrimination and exclusion of stateless people. Building on the work of partners, the Roadmap provides a practical 3-step framework to inform and guide states, organisations and institutions to develop and implement inclusive responses by:

1. Checking for Institutional Blind-Spots
2. Including, Consulting & Engaging in Dialogue
3. Building Back Better

The Roadmap provides a way forward in identifying and addressing fundamental structural and systemic barriers faced by stateless populations, ensuring they are centred in all initiatives. The Roadmap for Change operates in several unique ways. Firstly, it provides a critical framework to conceptualise the historic and root causes, challenges and barriers confronting stateless populations to ensure their right to a nationality and the rights flowing from this. As a practical tool, the Roadmap helps to guide and inspire dialogue and to shape and develop strategies, approaches and interventions to address the systemic exclusion, deprivation, discrimination and marginalisation of communities. And lastly, it operates as a *modus operandi* to inform practical ways of working with affected communities and key stakeholders.

In Bangladesh, for example, the Roadmap informed the strategic planning process of an emerging Think Tank, while in Central Asia it was integrated into advocacy messaging. Reflecting on how the Roadmap helped target advocacy efforts in India, Consortium member DAJI said: *“The roadmap was translated into local languages for dissemination and our advocacy focused on institutional blind spots in the legal architecture of citizenship to identify where we need to put energies to address them”.*

In Nepal the Roadmap provided a starting point to critical conversations to help shape CAPN's work: *“During our strategic planning meeting, we had a long conversation based on the ‘Roadmap for Change’. It was important to check the blind spots of the institution and the individuals leading the organization. As a newly registered organization the roadmap provided a foundation for us to begin our conversation. We also discussed how we can further strengthen the participation of other stateless persons in the country in our work”.*

## **Roadmap Call to Action**

It is critical that the work ahead to catalyse action to address the structural and systemic barriers faced by stateless people embeds and expands the use of the Roadmap by multiple stakeholders: governments, political parties, professional bodies, NHRIs, regional organisations, UN actors, diplomats, donors, international organisations, NGOs, grassroots groups, the media and concerned members of the general public. The starting point is a belief that change is within our grasp, and can be achieved through creative, committed and courageous action. Together we can and must address the structural discrimination underlying statelessness and protect the rights of stateless people and their right to a nationality.

Standing together, the CESF Consortium members urge all stakeholders to:

1. Reflect on, engage and act to internalise and implement the **Roadmap for Change**; exploring its application within organisational missions, strategic planning, activities and monitoring, evaluation and learning processes.
2. Engage with the Roadmap as a tool to inform, shape and guide institutional responses to statelessness and exclusion by promoting and supporting dedicated, intersectional and joined-up action to protect the rights of all vulnerable groups, including stateless people.
3. Use the Roadmap to inform approaches to research, advocacy, activism and engagement on statelessness.
4. Appoint focal points with responsibility and resources to mainstream statelessness, ensuring it is duly considered in all programming, and to collaborate with external partners and stakeholders.
5. Use the Roadmap as a practical tool to analyse gaps and develop inclusive policies and programmes.
6. Ensure a centring of communities and individuals directly affected by statelessness in the conversations, consultations and actions that relate to their interests. As such, take steps to centre stateless activists, communities and NGOs, draw on their expertise and insights, involving them in finding solutions, supporting their independent work and remaining accountable to them at all times.
7. Ensure the change we seek is both meaningful and sustainable, strengthening the right to nationality and rights of stateless people, but also improving the ways we work with each other and are accountable to each other.

The old ways are not adequate and we have failed to rise to meet the immense challenges before us. This is therefore a call to action for governments, UN agencies, NGOs, donors, affected communities and others to find new ways of working together in more equal and meaningful partnership.

The CESF and its learnings have paved the way for a future in which this type of thoughtful and impactful collaboration between donors, global NGOs, regional, national and community groups, will become more common, more long-term and even more effective. Such work can only emerge through a willingness to take risks, an ability to think beyond boxes and a commitment to centre stateless people, as set out in the Roadmap for Change.

This future is not inevitable, but it is possible, and we are closer to it because the CESF has demonstrated this possibility in no uncertain terms. Together We Did, and together still, we have a long way to go.

COVID-19  
EMERGENCY  
STATELESSNESS  
FUND

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**CONSORTIUM**