



A Guide to Collaborative Advocacy on Statelessness:

How to centre communities in changemaking

A GUIDE TO COLLABORATIVE ADVOCACY ON STATELESSNESS: HOW TO CENTRE COMMUNITIES IN CHANGEMAKING

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WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

Advocacy is the act or process of influencing positive change to law, policy, practice, or public attitudes. In our work to address statelessness, this means challenging the systems and processes that harm, exclude or make stateless people and communities invisible. It means pushing for legal and policy solutions that centre rights, justice, equality, and inclusion for stateless people worldwide.

ABOUT THE GUIDE

The [European Network on Statelessness](#) (ENS), [Statefree](#), and [Apatride Network](#) co-created this Guide in response to conversations with the communities affected by statelessness in Europe that we work with. Stateless people often tell us they feel absent from advocacy spaces. They want to know how to lead and engage in meaningful advocacy and to promote advocacy spaces that respect and value lived expertise.

ENS initiated a [joint pledge](#) at the [2023 Global Refugee Forum](#) to explore these questions and develop a Guide for collaborative advocacy on statelessness. Statefree and Apatride Network joined the pledge, and we have worked together to co-draft and co-develop this Guide. In the process, we have consulted with ENS members and statelessness-impacted communities, whose insights, experiences, and priorities are at the heart of the Guide.

The Guide builds on other resources, including:

- The [Community Speaker Policy](#), co-developed by ENS with its community group, which outlines standards for ethical engagement of individuals with lived expertise of statelessness as speakers at events;
- [Storytelling Guidelines](#), co-created by ENS, Apatride Network, and Statefree, which offer guidance on how to tell stories of lived experience in empowering and non-extractive ways.

While personal storytelling is a powerful tool, community members expressed a desire to move beyond this to lead and contribute to advocacy efforts that are strategic and impactful. We hope this Guide will help us to achieve this goal together.

Who is the Guide for?

The Guide is for:

1. **Individuals and communities** impacted by statelessness who have never participated in advocacy before, or who are already engaged in advocacy but want to deepen their knowledge and skills;
2. **Allies** (such as NGOs, lawyers, UN agencies, and other activists) who want to implement more participatory and ethical approaches to statelessness advocacy;
3. **Institutions** (such as national governments, regional institutions and intergovernmental organisations) who have the power to effect change and wish to engage more effectively and ethically with affected communities.

SECTION I: MEANINGFUL AND COLLABORATIVE ADVOCACY ON STATELESSNESS

In this Section, we explain the key principles of meaningful and collaborative advocacy on statelessness, as identified by our community members. For allies and institutions, these principles should be embedded in your practice when working on statelessness. For stateless people trying to engage with allies and institutions, you should look out for these key principles and aim to have open and honest conversations about them before agreeing to work together.

WHAT IS STATELESSNESS?

The international legal [definition](#) of a stateless person is someone who is “*not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law.*” In simple terms, this means someone who has no nationality. It is difficult to count people who are not recognised by any State so data on the size of stateless populations is unreliable, but there are millions of stateless people around the world. Many stateless people are denied fundamental rights like the right to education, employment, healthcare, identity documentation, and political participation.

WHAT IS ‘LIVED EXPERTISE’?

We use the term ‘lived expertise’ to refer to the expertise gained by having lived through something personally. In this Guide, we mean someone who has experienced, or is experiencing, statelessness or undetermined nationality, or who has a close family member who is impacted (e.g. a stateless child), or who represents a community impacted by statelessness (even if they themselves are not stateless). Stateless people are diverse. Some people may not self-identify as being stateless, even if their experience fits the legal definition. When working with someone, always ask them how they would like to be identified.

WHAT IS ‘MEANINGFUL AND COLLABORATIVE ADVOCACY’?

Meaningful and collaborative advocacy goes beyond more traditional top-down approaches to advocacy. It is not about working *for* stateless people, it is about working *with* impacted individuals, communities, and other stakeholders to centre lived expertise. It is also about shifting power so that those directly affected by the issue can lead and inform change.

This can start with ‘self-advocacy’ – standing up for your own rights, or those of friends and family members. Your personal experience of statelessness is a powerful starting point for advocacy. But self-advocacy can be a long and isolating journey. This Guide encourages advocates with lived expertise to draw on this to inform collaborative, collective advocacy that seeks to address shared concerns, broader systemic issues, and secure rights for the wider community. This journey can transform personal struggle into collective power, aiming for change that benefits many.

KEY PRINCIPLES FOR MEANINGFUL AND COLLABORATIVE ADVOCACY

In consultation with statelessness-impacted communities, we have identified [6 key principles](#) for meaningful and collaborative advocacy on statelessness. They are all important to ensure that when stateless people engage in advocacy, it is not out of obligation, but out of choice; not in isolation, but in solidarity; not in tokenism, but in shared power.

1. Valuing lived experience as expertise

Stateless people across Europe tell us they feel frustrated at being excluded from spaces where decisions are made about their lives. Meaningful and collaborative advocacy centres those with lived expertise not just as storytellers, but as active participants shaping initiatives from the outset. This means being able to set priorities, co-develop key messages, and participate equally in shaping strategies and evaluating impact. Lived experience is not merely an accessory to advocacy, it is genuine expertise, rooted in personal and collective realities, and should be valued on an equal footing with professional, academic, or institutional knowledge.

2. Taking an intersectional approach

Statelessness is not a single, uniform experience. It intersects with other aspects of identity and circumstance, such as race, gender, class, age, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity, migration status, and geography. These intersections can create unique and compounded forms of marginalisation and discrimination. They also create unique insights and valuable expertise. Lived realities of statelessness are diverse and complex so advocacy efforts need to be nuanced and intersectional in their approach.

3. Telling stories ethically

When shared ethically and with profound respect for the individual, stories can be powerful tools in the toolbox as part of a wider advocacy strategy. Ethical storytelling means ensuring that individuals have full control over their own narratives and the right to withdraw or set limits on their use at any time. For more guidance on this, see our [Storytelling Guidelines](#), which offer practical advice for individuals telling their stories and for organisations seeking to employ ethical storytelling in their work.

4. Prioritising safety and mental wellbeing

A continuous commitment to the safety and mental wellbeing of people with lived expertise involved in advocacy is a vital principle for meaningful and collaborative advocacy. Working on an issue you are impacted by personally can be emotionally and psychologically demanding. Public-facing work can pose risks such as exposure to online abuse, persecution, or risks to the safety of family members. Trauma-informed support systems should be in place to ensure everyone feels safe with risk assessments, signposting to support services, debriefing sessions, and flexible and responsive planning allowing people to withdraw their participation without pressure. Some people may need additional support to participate safely. Don't assume: ask what people might need.

5. Building a foundation of trust

Effective advocacy requires trust between all stakeholders involved. This means encouraging open and ongoing communication (including after the project is completed), honesty, clarity of roles, and a clear understanding of expectations and limitations. It also means practising active listening, genuinely hearing and responding to concerns and feedback from all stakeholders, especially those with lived expertise. There should be a culture of respect for diverse backgrounds and

communication styles, and a commitment to following through on actions, as well as addressing any issues promptly and fairly.

6. *Engaging in self-reflection*

All individuals and organisations involved in advocacy are encouraged to engage in continuous self-reflection. This means consciously examining assumptions, biases, motivations, and power dynamics in the advocacy space. For institutions and organisations seeking to partner ethically with affected communities and individuals with lived expertise, this is vital. Self-reflection helps us to recognise power imbalances and how they may unintentionally be impacting advocacy efforts, improving accountability and trust between all stakeholders.

EXAMPLE: VALUING LIVED EXPERIENCE AS EXPERTISE

ENS supported community members to take part in a high-level policy meeting on childhood statelessness. Before the meeting, participants were briefed on its purpose, how the process worked, and their potential impact. Crucially, they were not required to share only personal stories but were empowered to make statements as they felt comfortable, including providing evidence or proposing systemic improvements. As a result, some individuals chose not to mention their personal stories at all, instead focusing on compelling evidence from their community and concrete recommendations for change. Participants felt in control, confident, and able to put forward solutions. They also reported afterwards that the policy process was now clearer to them. Dedicated debriefing sessions ensured that contributors knew exactly what impact they had made in the policy process.

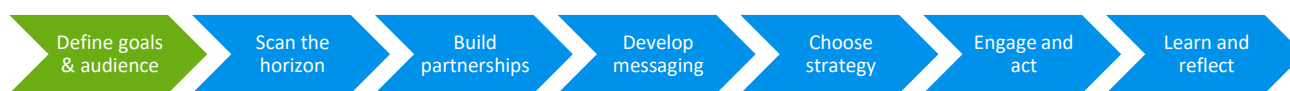
In the following Sections, the Guide will explore how these key principles can inform actionable steps for individuals, communities, allies, and institutions to engage meaningfully, ethically, and collaboratively in advocacy on statelessness.

SECTION II – FOR INDIVIDUALS: THE ADVOCACY JOURNEY

This section is aimed at individuals and communities with lived expertise on statelessness. It turns our key principles into actionable steps to support you wherever you are on your journey from self-advocacy to meaningful collaborative advocacy. In this section you can find our [‘Step-by-Step Guide to the Advocacy Process’](#) followed by ‘Barriers to advocacy’ and tips on how to overcome them, and a section on [‘Looking after yourself’](#).

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO THE ADVOCACY PROCESS

You have identified an issue impacting your community and you want to do something to change it. What now? Our step-by-step guide takes you through a series of seven practical steps to plan, execute, and learn from your advocacy efforts. Advocacy is rarely a linear process and there are many different approaches. Having a plan will help you keep a clear sense of purpose and consider how to move forward if you face challenges.

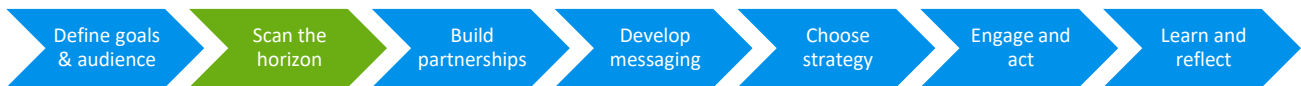


STEP 1: DEFINE YOUR GOALS AND AUDIENCE

What do you want to achieve and who can make change happen?

Before deciding what action to take, you need to understand the problem you want to fix, its causes, and realistic solutions. You then need to refine your goals and think about who you need to influence to make change happen.

- **Do your research:** What is the problem you want to fix? What information is available about this issue? What is causing the problem and what feasible solutions are there? Which laws, policies, practices are relevant to this problem? Who makes decisions in this area? What are your community’s needs? Gather evidence to answer these questions and inform your planning. Do your own research if nobody else has.
- **Define the problem and how to fix it:** Based on this research, identify and define the specific problem and the feasible solution or solutions you want to advocate for.
- **Make sure your goal is SMARTER:** Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound, Evaluated, Reviewed. Think about an overarching goal and some shorter-term milestones to help get you there.
- **Identify your target audience:** Based on your research, who has the power to implement your desired change? This could be a national government authority, a local council, a parliamentary committee, a regional institution, UN agency, or civil society platform.

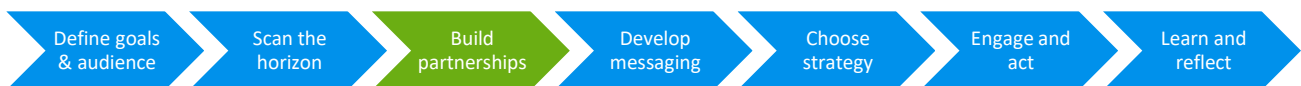


STEP 2: SCAN THE HORIZON

What could affect your success?

Horizon scanning is a simple way to look ahead and anticipate the external and internal factors that could help or hinder progress towards your goal. It can help you spot opportunities (e.g. a policy consultation, a strategic court case, or a relevant news moment) and risks (e.g. backlash, funding cuts, or shifting priorities) so you can plan realistically and keep people safe. Horizon scanning works best when it is repeated. Build in a quick check-in to update your plan as circumstances change.

- **Set a timeframe:** are you scanning for the next few months, a year, or more?
- **List the spaces where change happens:** e.g. parliament, ministries, courts, local authorities, regional institutions, media cycles, and community forums.
- **Gather information:** follow key institutions' agendas, consultation calendars, press releases, credible journalists, and trusted civil society briefings.
- **Check in with your community and partners:** what are people seeing and experiencing on the ground?
- **Track what might change your plan:** new elections, budget cycles, new policy measures, major court decisions, or sudden crises.
- **Decide what it means for your advocacy:** does this factor create an opportunity, a risk, or a need to adapt your messaging or tactics? Think about political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental factors. Once you have identified the key factors, note what you will do about them: what opportunities will you act on, what risks will you mitigate, and what assumptions need to be kept under review.



STEP 3: BUILD PARTNERSHIPS

Who can help you achieve your goals?

Working together with others who share your concerns can give you access to more ideas, resources, decision-making spaces, and leverage more support for your goals and objectives.

- **Identify your allies:** Who else is working on this issue? Who could you collaborate with to strengthen your advocacy? Think about other groups who face similar challenges and how

they have overcome them. What are other people already working on? Could you offer your support to strengthen these efforts and avoid working duplicating existing efforts?

- **Take an intersectional approach:** How does statelessness interact with other issues that allies are working on e.g. poverty, children's rights, refugee rights, women's rights, LGBTQI+ rights? Could you partner with others to bring your statelessness goals more effectively to your target audience?
- **Identify and engage prospective partners:** From the allies you identify, who do you want to work with and who might you approach for more general support? Do you want to form your own group, build a coalition with multiple partners, or work with a smaller number of partners? Consider who you already know and start some conversations. Not everyone will be able to get involved, but they might know people who could.
- **Establish shared goals and agree roles:** Once you have your group together, you need to agree shared goals and objectives to ensure you are all on the same page. Different partners might have different priorities and positions so be open and honest at an early stage to identify any concerns. Play to each other's strengths. Agree roles and responsibilities to prevent confusion, manage expectations, and ensure accountability.
- **Maintain communication:** Maintain regular communication to stay on track. Build in regular meetings for reflection and learning. Address any issues that arise early on and set-up channels for dealing with any problems. Take advantage of any training opportunities that partners can offer e.g. mediation or facilitating difficult conversations.
- **Commit to our key principles for meaningful and collaborative advocacy:** Make sure that partners understand and are committed to the key principles from the outset. You don't want to invest your time in building partnerships with organisations who then make you feel like they are using you to tick a box. Build partnerships with those who allow you to lead.



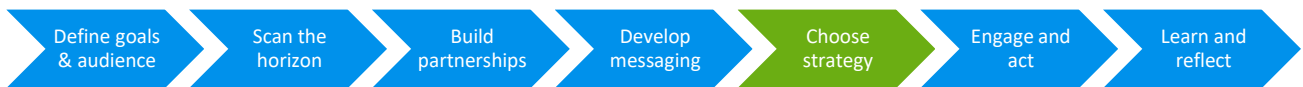
STEP 4: DEVELOP YOUR KEY MESSAGES

How are you going to persuade your target audience to effect change?

Working together with your partners, think about what your audience needs to hear, what they can realistically do, and what will move them to act. Clearly communicate the change you want to see and your proposed solutions. Think about the different audiences you need to influence and the different ways you might reach them.

- **Develop your key message:** What is the most important message or ask that you want your audience to remember? This could be a specific change to law and policy, or the impact this change would have on your community. Tools such as a '[Message House](#)' can help you organise your key messages into a clear, structured format: your core message is the roof, your supporting messages are the pillars holding it up, and your key facts and research are the foundations.

- **Adapt your messaging for different audiences:** In [Step 1](#), you identified your target audiences. Looking at your core message, think about your different audiences and develop supporting messages that are tailored to each audience. For example, a government minister might respond better to messaging around human rights obligations, whereas a community leader might respond better to how people’s lives are affected by the issue.
- **Adapt your messaging for different situations:** Similarly, you will want to adapt your messaging for different types of [advocacy strategy](#). If you are speaking to the media, or campaigning in public, you might use different messaging than when you are in a one-to-one meeting with an institution or responding to a consultation.
- **Ethical storytelling:** A personal story can be a powerful tool for advocacy. However, the spokesperson must be supported properly, have full control over their own narrative and the right to withdraw or set limits on their story’s use at any time. Contributors might prefer to share evidence or recommendations rather than their personal story, and that’s ok! If storytelling is part of your approach, see our [Storytelling Guidelines](#) for more practical guidance, and remember our [key principle](#) on telling stories ethically.



STEP 5: CHOOSE YOUR ADVOCACY STRATEGY

How will you achieve change?

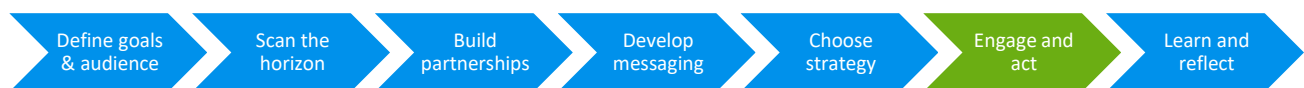
Consider the most effective method(s) to deliver your message to your target audience and achieve your goal. Most advocacy strategies use a mix of approaches, so choose the combination that fits your goal, the decision-makers you need to influence, the context you are working in, and what feels safe and sustainable for your community. Think about the level of change you want (a small practice change or a long-term legal reform), how quickly change is needed, and what resources and allies you have.



- **Inside-track engagement with decision-makers:** This focuses on influencing policy and practice through direct relationships and dialogue, including by requesting meetings, sharing briefings, responding to consultations, offering training, and drafting guidance or policy. It's important you are clear on your ask and what success looks like, identify who really has influence, keep written records and follow up, avoid tokenistic invitations by agreeing roles and expectations in advance, and think about accessibility so community members can participate fully. See: [Statefree's Digital Case Assistant](#).
- **Parliamentary advocacy:** This focuses on influencing elected representatives and legislative processes by briefing politicians and advisers, giving evidence to committees, proposing amendments, getting parliamentary questions tabled, engaging during elections and manifesto cycles, and building cross-party champions. For this to work, timing matters, and politics plays a key role. It's important to keep messages accurate and consistent and consider whether visibility could increase risk for some community members. See: [Statefree's Parliamentary Breakfast](#).
- **Influencing systems and practice:** Sometimes law and policy protect rights, but procedures, guidance, and everyday practice create barriers. This approach could involve documenting barriers, meeting with service providers, proposing practical solutions, offering training, co-designing guidance and accessible information. It's important to think about realistic, practical solutions when using this approach and to protect confidentiality when sharing examples. See: [Apatride Network's work on advancing structural inclusion](#).
- **Research and evidence-building:** Compelling evidence can strengthen the case for change and shift the debate, making your ask harder to ignore. This approach could involve peer research, collecting case studies ethically, mapping law and policy gaps, and producing briefings, reports and analysis that translate issues into clear recommendations. It's important to be clear what the evidence is for and how it will be used, minimise harm and protect anonymity, and share findings back with participants and communities to avoid extractive practices. See: [ENS's policy series on Roma statelessness in the Western Balkans](#).
- **Public awareness and narrative change:** This approach focuses on shifting how statelessness is understood by decision-makers, professionals, communities, and the wider public. It can support (but does not replace) policy and legal strategies. It involves developing compelling messages, engaging with the media, running social media campaigns, and inviting the public to take specific actions (e.g. petitions or joint letters). It may also involve creating films, public art, music, poetry or theatre which helps your campaign to resonate with wider audiences, or collaborating with musicians, artists or sportspeople who have a public profile. It's important to consider how public visibility can bring risks to safety and ensure community members remain in control of their narratives. See: [ENS's Stateless Journeys campaign](#).
- **Grassroots/community organising:** This focuses on strengthening community voice, leadership, and participation, building collective power. Activities might include creating safe spaces for connection, identifying shared priorities, developing peer support and skills, and running community workshops. For this approach to work, accessibility is essential (think about e.g. language barriers, location, childcare, digital access), and mental

wellbeing and safety must be a key consideration, alongside the other key principles in [Section I](#). See: [Statefree and ENS's joint conference in Berlin](#)

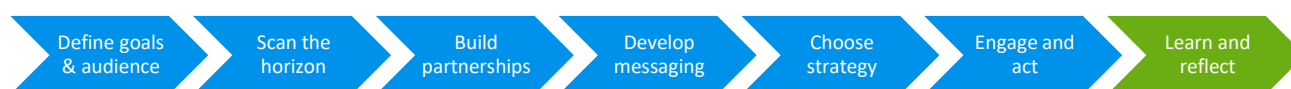
- **Strategic litigation and legal advocacy:** Litigation and legal action can challenge unjust laws, policies, or practices and set precedents, using the law to drive change, but it is often a lengthy (and costly) process. This approach involves identifying suitable strategic cases with legal partners, submitting third-party interventions, documenting patterns of rights violations, holding institutions to account, and using legal outcomes to support policy change and training. For this approach to work, resources, technical expertise, timeframes and expectation management are essential considerations. See: [Statelessness Case Law Database](#) and [Litigation Toolkit](#).
- **International and regional advocacy:** This approach focuses on influencing change through international and regional bodies, norms, and monitoring processes. For example, submitting information to UN and regional monitoring mechanisms, engaging special rapporteurs and treaty bodies, participating in regional forums, and using international standards to strengthen national advocacy. Processes can be slow and sometimes complicated, so finding partners with relevant expertise can help. It's important to plan how you will follow up on submissions and ensure these inform local and national level activities. See: [ENS Submissions](#)



STEP 6: ENGAGE AND ACT

After choosing your strategy (or combination of strategies), map the activities you will undertake into a plan, who will lead each activity, and what support and resources are needed, what is your timeframe, how is each activity contributing to your milestones and overarching goal. Build in time for preparation, relationship-building, monitoring, learning, and follow-up. Keep checking that your approach remains aligned with the key principles in [Section I](#) and remember to build in time for reflection, learning, and adjustment if needed.

- **Be persistent but adaptable:** Advocacy often takes time. Be persistent in your efforts but also willing to adapt your strategy if circumstances change or new opportunities arise. Build in time to reflect and to re-check your horizon scanning.
- **Play to your strengths:** Maybe your strength is public speaking, whereas your partners' strength is getting inside the room with decision-makers. Or your strength is writing compelling arguments, while your partner's strength is their media contacts. Work collaboratively to ensure the effectiveness of your advocacy.



STEP 7: LEARN AND REFLECT

What worked, what didn't, and what can you do better next time?

Advocacy doesn't end when a particular activity concludes. Following up is essential for ensuring your efforts have a lasting impact and for transparency with those who participate.

- **Maintain communication:** Ensure regular communication with decision-makers, partners, and media contacts. Regularly assess how well your partnership is working and address any issues early on.
- **Assess your impact:** Evaluate whether your advocacy contributed to achieving your goals. Recognise that impact can be long-term and multifaceted. Additionally, assess how positive or worthwhile the advocacy project was for you or your partners.
- **Share outcomes:** Crucially, share the impact and outcomes of advocacy efforts with the participants, especially those with lived experience. This ensures that engagement is not extractive and that contributions are valued.
- **Share learnings:** It is also important to share your learnings and reflections from the project: what worked, what didn't work so well, recommendations for the future. This will ensure that you (and others) can improve your advocacy in the future.

EXAMPLE: ADVANCING STRUCTURAL INCLUSION FOR STATELESS INDIVIDUALS

Stateless individuals have historically been excluded from digital and institutional systems that require proof of nationality, limiting their access to employment, financial services, and other essentials of daily life. Apatride Network has been working to address this gap, using research, testimonies, and partnerships with legal and human rights actors to show how the absence of a "stateless" option in online forms reinforces this structural exclusion. After years of sustained advocacy, a significant breakthrough was achieved in August 2024, when UNHCR updated its application platform to include "stateless" as a selectable nationality for prospective employees. This marked an important step toward institutional recognition. It means that stateless individuals can now apply for roles within UNHCR and sets an important precedent for more equitable systems. However, this progress is not the endpoint. Apatride Network continues to advocate for other UN bodies and institutions to follow UNHCR's example, working to ensure that such changes are replicated and that structural exclusion is addressed across systems, not just in isolated cases.

POTENTIAL BARRIERS TO ADVOCACY

Advocacy isn't an easy process. There are lots of potential barriers that you might encounter. Build in time to consider these and be ready for how you might respond when they arise. Here are some examples with tips on how to overcome them.

Legal barriers: Legal advocacy can be costly, slow, and not everybody has the resources or security to get involved, particularly if you are stateless or have insecure migration status. Consider your strategy and approaches carefully. Explore a range of advocacy tools and approaches and be ready to adapt or change tack if legal action becomes too resource-intensive or risky.

Lived experience: No two experiences of statelessness are the same, and not everyone affected will self-identify as stateless. Experiences are shaped by intersecting factors such as race, gender, class, age, disability, sexual orientation, or where someone lives. These dynamics can influence how people engage in advocacy and what they need to feel safe and supported. Apply an intersectional lens when designing activities. Create space early on for the group to agree shared principles, expectations, and decision-making approaches so everyone feels valued and represented.

Burnout: Advocacy can lead to emotional fatigue, stress, and burnout, especially when it's linked to your own identity and rights. Stateless advocates may experience advocacy as deeply personal, which can make setbacks feel heavier. Build wellbeing into your advocacy plan from the start. Share the workload, set realistic timelines, and normalise taking breaks. Encourage open conversations about capacity and look out for signs of burnout in yourself and others.

Institutional barriers: Even skilled advocates may struggle to gain access to institutions, particularly if they do not have established relationships. Training and preparation help but do not guarantee that doors will open. Politics, budgets, and competing priorities can make institutions more cautious to engage and slow down advocacy efforts. Be strategic and purposeful in how you engage institutions. Try to align your issue with their priorities. Work collectively to build credibility over time. Partner with organisations that already have access and prepare clear messages to maximise impact when opportunities arise.

Language: Lack of interpretation and translation can exclude people from meaningful participation. Even when everyone speaks the same language, policy jargon can make it hard to understand discussions or contribute confidently. Plan and budget for interpreting costs from the start if possible. Prepare plain language messages and ask others to do the same. Ensure everyone feels informed and supported to participate.

Personal safety: Sometimes, speaking out about rights, discrimination, or government policy carries real risks for individuals and their families. This can affect who feels able to participate. Prioritise safety by assessing risks and agreeing on protective measures, like anonymising contributions or limiting public visibility. Make sure everyone can choose their level of involvement without pressure.

TIPS FOR LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

Advocacy is a long process and can take its toll on anyone. If you have lived experience of the issue you are advocating for, especially in the context of statelessness where you are fighting for change with few resources against institutions and states with power and money, the threat of burnout and emotional fatigue is real. You should think about this from the beginning of the advocacy process, not only when it becomes a problem.

- **Look after yourself.** At the most basic level, this can look like taking breaks, getting outside, or calling a friend after a difficult meeting.
- **Identify potential risks.** Will you be asked to recount your story repeatedly? Do you feel comfortable doing public speaking? Which institutions are you targeting and who might be difficult to deal with? If you have irregular migration status, would you feel more comfortable being anonymous?
- **Build your support system.** Work collaboratively, don't do it all yourself. Find peer support groups (such as ENS, Statefree and Apatride Network's community groups) or form your own. Who is best placed to take on different parts of the work? Who can you call when things are tough? Are there mental health professionals or counselling services who can support your work? What resources do you have available? Who can you debrief with?
- **Find a creative outlet.** Music, creativity or physical activity can be a way to release stress and ground yourself when everything else feels unstable, and can even be a survival strategy.
- **Step away.** Life happens, the external landscape changes, and not every collaboration works out. If you, or others you're working with, need to take a break or step away from advocacy, this is ok. It's not always easy, but it is ok.
- **Celebrate the wins, however small.** Big wins take time, so celebrate the small wins along the way. Shout about what you've achieved. This will help with motivation and morale.

You are not alone, and your mental wellbeing cannot be left entirely to self-care. When you work collectively, there is a shared history, experience, and memory that can support resilience and healing. Groups working collectively should create space for learning, healing, and reflection, and embed mental health and trauma-informed approaches into their work, to strengthen and sustain the advocates they work with.

In the next Section, we will explore how allies and institutions can meaningfully engage with stateless advocates and embed mental health support in their practice.

SECTION III – FOR ALLIES AND INSTITUTIONS: WORKING WITH STATELESS ADVOCATES

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY ‘ALLIES AND INSTITUTIONS’?

In this Guide, when we refer to institutions, we mean those who hold decision-making power such as national governments and their ministries (e.g. Interior or Justice ministries), local authorities (e.g. municipalities or local councils), parliamentarians, the judiciary (courts and judges), and regional institutions like the Council of Europe and European Union and their various agencies and bodies. Allies include non-stateless-led civil society organisations and alliances (like ENS and many of its members), academics, activists, donors, and international organisations like UNHCR, UNICEF, and OSCE.

For allies and institutions, meaningful and collaborative advocacy begins with a genuine commitment to the principles set out in [Section I](#), and with taking responsibility for putting those principles into practice. Collaboration is not a one-off consultation or an add-on to existing work, it requires reflection on power, transparency in decision-making, and accountability for how people affected by statelessness can participate and share ownership. While awareness and intention have improved in recent years, significant gaps remain between stated commitments and the reality in practice.

Ongoing barriers include stateless people being invited to share personal or traumatic experiences without being involved in decision-making, conducting consultations without clarity on how input will be used, and lack of financial or other support to ensure those with lived expertise can engage in advocacy. This section offers practical guidance for allies and institutions on how to move beyond symbolic inclusion and create advocacy spaces where stateless advocates can meaningfully lead, influence agendas, and drive change on their own terms.

HOW TO BREAK DOWN BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION

Stateless advocates often start from a disadvantaged position due to, for example, insecure residence status, restrictions on employment, concerns for safety, past experiences of trauma, and limited access to networks and decision-makers. Moving beyond tokenism requires deliberate action and a shift in power dynamics. Allies can play an important role in helping to break down barriers to participation, and institutions can facilitate this by consciously adapting policy and decision-making processes to make them more accessible.



By seeing people with lived expertise and representatives of impacted communities not as ‘beneficiaries’, but as valued partners and leaders, institutions and allies can transform their work from well-intentioned to truly impactful.

Here are some practical ways that institutions and allies can break down barriers to participation.

- **Provide funding and capacity-building resources:** Ask the people you are working with what they might need. Offer funding, training, and other resources to build the capacity of stateless advocates. Ensure that costs for attending meetings, engaging in research, consulting on legal

or policy proposals, and other activities, are adequately resourced, ideally through long-term support that is not linked only to individual events or engagements. Stateless advocates are often volunteering their time and expertise without the infrastructure of an organisation or salary to support them.

- **Acknowledge lived experience as expertise:** Create spaces where people's real-life insights whether drawn from personal experience or shared community concerns are valued on an equal footing with learned expertise or institutional knowledge. Involve stateless advocates from the very beginning of any project or policy process, offering a clear role in shaping direction and influencing decisions.
- **Champion community leadership:** Let communities lead initiatives and respect their decision-making power throughout the advocacy process. Recognise that while there are increasing opportunities for stateless advocates to participate, a gap often exists between their knowledge and understanding of the context and that of allies and institutions.
- **Build trust and long-term relationships:** Invest time in building authentic relationships based on mutual respect, active listening, and cultural sensitivity. Reflect on past engagements, learn from them, debrief and actively seek and act upon feedback, ensuring that individual engagements are not one-off, but lead to sustained impact.
- **Remove barriers to participation:** Consider and proactively remove structural barriers such as inability to travel, caring responsibilities, lack of digital access, and language barriers. Allies can build related costs in funding applications, and institutions can offer resources such as interpreters, or online/hybrid participation. Allies can support stateless advocates to connect and build relationships with institutions who they may not be able to access by themselves.
- **Ensure fair recognition and remuneration:** Value people's time, effort and knowledge. Actively work to remove structural barriers to payment and recognition for stateless advocates' contributions, acknowledging previous inequities. This includes ensuring timely payment and offering alternative compensation methods if needed, navigating issues like work permits or lack of access to bank accounts.
- **Put in place safety and support measures:** Implement robust systems to ensure the safety and well-being of stateless advocates, including signposting to psychological support services, legal advice, and risk mitigation strategies. This involves working with stateless advocates and all partners to carry out risk assessments, and jointly devising strategies to mitigate identified risks. Perhaps your institution offers support services to staff and volunteers that could be extended to stateless advocates you are working with? Consider what policies and procedures you have in place for safeguarding and trauma-informed approaches to advocacy and working with those with lived expertise.
- **Address power imbalances:** Who adjusts to whom? Individual advocates shouldn't need to use the language and customs of institutions to effect change. How can institutions (and allies) make their work more accessible to those working outside their 'system'?

HOW TO WORK COLLABORATIVELY TO ACHIEVE CHANGE ON STATELESSNESS

There are many ways to achieve change, and you will have your own areas of expertise, strengths, and ideas. We have learnt some important lessons about how to achieve change on statelessness in Europe and offer you some tips on how to address law and policy gaps, mainstream statelessness, and develop cross-border cooperation in a meaningful and collaborative way with stateless advocates.

Addressing legal gaps



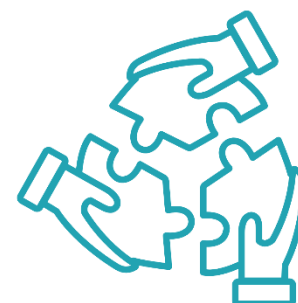
Statelessness often arises or persists because of gaps or flaws in the law. In many cases, international standards have not been fully written into national law or applied in practice. Allies and institutions can help by identifying these gaps and advocating for legal and policy changes to fix them.

Stateless people are often the first to identify and experience these problems first-hand. They are often the first to identify where laws or systems are not working and where bureaucratic barriers arise. Their lived expertise can inform policy briefs and discussions. They can share testimony and review proposed reforms, helping to ensure solutions are realistic and effective in practice.

By involving stateless advocates, abstract legal ideas can be turned into changes that make a real difference in everyday life.

Mainstreaming statelessness

The issue of statelessness cuts across many policy areas, such as migration, asylum, human rights, discrimination, child protection, social inclusion, and development. Individual experiences of statelessness are shaped by factors such as race, gender, disability, age, class, and geography. Allies and institutions can help mainstream statelessness by actively integrating it into wider policy discussions and decision-making rather than addressing it in isolation. This means recognising where different policies may exclude, disadvantage, or simply overlook stateless people, and ensuring that statelessness is considered from the outset in policy design, implementation, and review.



Meaningful involvement of stateless advocates is essential to this process. Stateless people are often best placed to identify how legal frameworks, administrative systems, and service provision intersect, and where they fail in practice. Allies and institutions can involve stateless advocates by co-designing training for policymakers and service providers, inviting them to act as trainers or speakers in cross-sector workshops, and supporting them to contribute to policy briefs that show how statelessness connects to issues such as gender inequality, minority rights, disability, or poverty. This work must be done in ways that ensure stateless communities continue to lead the conversation and are not sidelined or tokenised.

By embedding lived expertise across institutions and policy areas, mainstreaming efforts can lead to more coordinated, inclusive, and effective responses that prevent discrimination and address statelessness sustainably.

Developing cross-border cooperation



Statelessness often spans borders, especially where people move between countries or where laws, procedures, and nationality rules differ. Addressing these situations requires cooperation between States and institutions at regional and international levels. Allies and institutions can support this by working together across borders to share knowledge, align approaches, and develop joint responses to complex cases. Without coordination, differences in law and practice between countries can leave stateless people falling through the cracks or facing repeated barriers as they move.

Stateless advocates can play a vital role in shaping effective cooperation. Their experiences can reveal how inconsistent policies and administrative practices affect people in practice and where systems fail to connect.

Allies and institutions can involve stateless advocates by:

- including them in regional dialogues and working groups.
- inviting their input into policy recommendations on harmonising practices.
- supporting cross-border networks of stateless communities to strengthen knowledge and build a movement for change.

Institutions should establish secure and ethical information-sharing mechanisms, invest in multi-country projects, and work towards greater consistency and harmonisation of law, policy, and practice, particularly within regional frameworks such as the European Union.

Involving stateless advocates helps ensure cross-border cooperation responds to real needs and leads to practical, rights-based solutions.

PRIORITISING MENTAL HEALTH

Meaningful and collaborative advocacy on statelessness requires institutions and allies to support, resource, and prioritise mental health.

Stateless people can experience daily, accumulated stresses brought on by uncertainty, insecurity of legal status, and bureaucracy, which can build over time and impact people's mind and body. Those working on advocacy with stateless advocates should take care to avoid recreating or exacerbating these issues.

Simple measures, like a buddy system where advocates are paired with someone within an ally organisation who checks in regularly and shares the load, can make a real difference, build trust, and support more impactful outcomes. Buddies should have adequate training, resourcing, and access to support and supervision themselves.

Allies and institutions need to be intentional about resourcing and prioritising mental health. Some ways to do this include:

- **Embedding wellbeing** in the design of events by, for example, having independent, professional support teams on hand, facilitating structured sessions on mental health, taking breaks from heavy topics, building in space for art and music, and offering quiet spaces for down time

- **Providing clear signposting** information and referral pathways for people to access counselling or psychosocial support.
- **Holding structured debrief sessions**, particularly after challenging engagements.
- **Providing training** on facilitating difficult discussions, including how to deal with challenging dynamics and emotional distress.
- **Developing and sharing feedback mechanisms** that are safe, trusted, and accessible.

EXAMPLE: EMBEDDING WELLBEING IN EVENT DESIGN

In November 2025, Statefree and the European Network on Statelessness held a joint conference in Berlin, bringing together over 100 diverse participants with lived and learned expertise for three days of knowledge exchange and strategic thinking on ending statelessness in Europe. It was not always easy for everyone in the room to navigate the different perspectives and emotions brought up during the conference. To mitigate this, we held structured debrief sessions at the end of each day and after the conference had finished, provided a quiet room for anyone who needed it, and had an independent support team on hand during the conference. Arts, poetry, music and dancing were also used powerfully to bring people together, to release stress, and provide breaks from heavier discussions. Whilst these are no substitute for mental health support and counselling, arts and cultural activities can create powerful shared memories and cultivate collective strength and resilience.

By applying the practical steps and strategies outlined in this section, coupled with the key principles in Section 1, allies and institutions can work collaboratively with stateless advocates to achieve meaningful change. Every step of the advocacy journey is an opportunity to amplify the voices of stateless advocates, ensuring their expertise directly shapes effective solutions and lead to lasting impact.

SECTION IV – MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING

Meaningful and collaborative advocacy is strongest when it includes time and space to reflect on what is changing, what is not, and what needs to be done differently.

Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) is how you do that. Stateless advocates should play a key role in defining what “success” looks like, deciding what to track, and making sense of the results. This keeps advocacy accountable to stateless communities, helps prevent tokenism, and ensures learning is shared and not extracted.

MEL should capture both visible outcomes (e.g., a policy commitment, improved guidance, stronger safeguards) and less visible but equally important change (e.g., increased confidence, stronger relationships with decision-makers, safer participation, and sustainable ways of working).

Allies and institutions can support stateless advocates to monitor their own work by agreeing clear goals together at the start, using simple tools to document activities and outcomes, and creating regular moments of reflection. Feedback should be gathered throughout, not just at the end, and always shared back with decisions and next steps explained.

Participatory MEL at a glance

For stateless advocates, use MEL as a shared learning process between you and your partners.

For allies and institutions, use the opportunity of a participatory approach to MEL to create a shared learning process between you and stateless advocates, focused on accountability, reflection, and improving advocacy, not just reporting impact.

✓ Agree goals together

- Define what success looks like together
- Be clear about the purpose of MEL (learning, accountability, strengthening leadership)

✓ Track change

- Record key activities (meetings, submissions, campaigns, commitments)
- Capture both visible outcomes (policy/practice change) and less visible change (relationships, access, confidence, shifts in discourse)
- Value lived expertise as evidence

✓ Make participation safe and ethical

- Agree consent, confidentiality, and boundaries
- Avoid pressure to share personal stories
- Ensure participation is accessible, resourced, and sustainable

✓ Reflect regularly

- Create routine moments to discuss what worked, what didn't, and why
- Pay attention to power, inclusion, workload, and well-being

✓ Learn, adapt, and close the loop

- Use learning to adjust strategy and ways of working
- Share outcomes and lessons back transparently
- Celebrate progress and recognise all contributions

LOOKING AHEAD: OUR ONGOING COMMITMENT TO IMPACT

The development of this Guide is part of a broader, long-term commitment to support stateless people and communities to claim power and lead change. ENS, Statefree and Apatride Network are dedicated to sharing this Guide widely, building capacity, developing trainings and resources and fostering sustainable change. Whether you are an individual advocate, a grassroots community organisation, or an institutional actor seeking to strengthen your advocacy or engagement practices, we encourage you to reach out to us for a chat about how we could collaborate.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS



[European Network on Statelessness](#) is a civil society alliance dedicated to ending statelessness and securing the rights of stateless people in Europe through legal and policy advocacy, research, campaigning, and community engagement.

[Statefree](#) is a stateless-led non-profit organisation which aims to create visibility and community, and drive change on statelessness.

[Apatride Network](#) is run by stateless people for stateless people, raising awareness of statelessness through guest lectures, publications, advocacy, legal assistance and training, and other projects.

We are additionally grateful to [Family Frontiers](#), who we partnered with to co-deliver a workshop to help develop the Guide, and who particularly influenced the sections on mental health and support.

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A NOTE ON REGIONAL LIMITATIONS

It is important to note that while this Guide offers guidance that can be applied globally, the examples we share, and our collective expertise, are grounded in our experience working to address statelessness in Europe.

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ANNEX: RESOURCES TO SUPPORT STRATEGIC ADVOCACY

ENS resources

[Statelessness Index](#)

[Statelessness Case Law Database](#)

[Statelessness Identification toolkits](#)

[Blogs, publications and resources](#)

[Storytelling Guidelines](#)

[Community Speaker Policy](#)

[Litigation Toolkit](#)

Statefree resources

[Statefree website](#)

[Statefree Case Assistant](#)

Apatride Network resources

[Apatride Network website](#)

Resources from our members and partners

[Global Alliance to End Statelessness](#)

[Legal Atlas on Gender Discrimination in Nationality Laws](#)

[Statelessness Encyclopaedia Asia Pacific \(SEAP\)](#)

[Stateless Hub](#)

[Refworld](#)