

# The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

## Positions for the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees – Executive Committee

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### I. Addressing the Impact of Statelessness on Children

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK) recognizes the severe difficulties faced by children around the world without state identification or nationality. The UK remains committed to prioritizing the most vulnerable individuals applying for asylum, refugee status, and residency within our borders. As Rob Oxley, Prime Minister Boris Johnson’s press secretary stated, “Protecting vulnerable children will remain our priority after Brexit.” Although the world has witnessed a growing refugee humanitarian crisis since 2015, the global community is failing to appropriately respond. The UK is proud to remain devoted in lowering the number of stateless children internationally by accepting a record 20,000 refugees by the end of this year and by offering British citizenship to stateless children born within our borders. Additionally, the recently passed Dubs Amendment renews our ability to coordinate with the European Union regarding unaccompanied refugee minors and allows the most vulnerable to continue seeking refuge in our nation regardless of other events. However, considering the continued international prevalence of statelessness, we believe the global community must respond in larger measures.

Although substantive implementation methods must continue to fully end the crisis of child statelessness, we must note the progress made by the United Nations and the global community in which the UK remains a leading figure. The UK was a signatory of the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, which affirms the right of all individuals to a nationality. The UK additionally extended this ratification to then-British controlled Hong Kong. In 1961, the UN ratified the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness (CRS), encouraging signatories to allow stateless persons born in their territory to become citizens, which the UK continues to adopt. However, only 75 UN Member States have ratified the 1961 CRS, and even fewer have adopted the proposals into law. Many stateless children feel silenced or even invisible by their lack of a nationality. A 2015 UNHCR report aimed to address that feeling of invisibility by consulting with stateless children and their families in seven different countries. The report recognized the preventability of child statelessness, and that the right of every child to a nationality is guaranteed under the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. The UK is a ratified member of the 1989 Convention and submits an annual report on child rights to the Committee on the Rights of the Child. At home, the UK continues to welcome stateless children and other easily exploited people. The UK amended its National Immigration Rules in April 2013, allowing people to be granted residency within the UK based solely on their stateless status. Previously, only those who qualified as refugees or asylum seekers could receive the same guarantee. The UK additionally offers British citizenship to any stateless child born outside of UK territories if either of their parents are citizens or residents. The UK takes significant steps to prevent child statelessness both nationally and on the global stage, and is prepared to continue working toward the goal of ending child statelessness.

The UK encourages UN Member States to adopt measures that will limit child statelessness and tackle many of its causes. The R.I.S.E. Initiative is a potential framework for introducing these measures: **R**ecognizing citizenship within borders at birth, **I**ncreasing global research for stateless individuals, **S**treamlining the nationality and residency processes, and **E**nacting legal equality for stateless individuals regardless of age, gender, or sexual orientation. In proposing this initiative, the UK demonstrates its commitment to state sovereignty for all nations and directly addresses core problems that continue to sustain child statelessness around the world. This Initiative additionally works toward several of the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, as it would reduce poverty and inequality and increase economic growth and general well-being. The UK first recommends that UN Member States enact legislation to offer birthright citizenship to all individuals born within their borders. The 1961 CRS advocated for this position, yet as of 2019 only 62 nations around the world offer some form of birthright citizenship. Second, The UK calls for an increase on research regarding statelessness, which would allow this committee to more effectively allocate funds and resources, as well as raise further awareness of this pressing issue. In 2019, the UNCHR allocated \$926 million to refugees, internally displaced, and stateless people. A five percent increase for additional research could provide more accurate results to better tackle this concern. Third, The UK believes a streamlining of the nationality process would further serve to reduce the stateless population. A 2013 Côte d’Ivoire law allowing stateless individuals to apply for residency or citizenship effectively reduced their stateless population by nearly 10 percent within only six months. Finally, The UK recommends UN Member States enact legal protections and equality for stateless individuals. This would serve to significantly decrease the high levels of sexual and gender-based violence aimed at the most vulnerable. The UK believes all children deserve a chance at a bright

future, and the Initiative proposed will provide the opportunity for millions of stateless children around the world to achieve that goal.

## II. Empowering and Integrating Gender Equity Movements for Refugees

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland stands with the United Nations in continuing to promote gender equity movements for refugees around the world. As a founding Member State of the UN, the UK adheres to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which states, “Everyone has the right to seek and enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.” The UK firmly believes in the state’s responsibility to realize gender equity and to crack down on instances of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). As Foreign Secretary, now-Prime Minister Boris Johnson began the #LeaveNoGirlBehind campaign to advocate for international educational gender equality, and called raising the standards of gender equality in education “the key to unlocking so many other problems.” Since the 2015 refugee crisis, the UK has created refugee resettlement programs that intentionally aim to relocate the most vulnerable from places of conflict, particularly women, children, and young people. In recent years, the UK voluntarily introduced a nationwide, multi-year survey of refugees and their integration into British society to better understand core areas of discrimination and disadvantage. As one of the world’s strongest democracies with institutions and ideas replicated around the world, the UK is fully dedicated to the concept of gender equity and the prevention of SGBV for refugees around the world.

The UK continues to promote gender equity and equality for refugees. Since 2003, approximately one third of all refugee applicants to the UK have been women, and government publications recognize the higher instances of poverty, abuse, and trauma they likely carry. Under the 2010 Equality Act, refugees and migrants are protected from all forms of discrimination relating to gender, race, ethnicity, or national origin. The UK has consistently supported gender equity measures for refugees on a global stage, as well. A signatory of the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the UK believes in non-discrimination and economic, social, political, and educational equality for all women. In addition, the UK supports the 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, which states that “some groups of women, such as women belonging to minority groups, indigenous women, refugee women... are especially vulnerable to violence.” In 2011, this committee released a strategy against sexual and gender-based violence that sought to improve data collection, raise awareness within the Commission regarding gender inequality and SGBV, and increase cooperation with other UN actors and outside aid organizations. That same year, the UK pledged to continue supporting the work of this committee at the Ministerial Intergovernmental Event on Refugees and Stateless Persons. The UK recognizes the pressing need of gender equity for refugees, has taken action in the past, and stands ready to continue leading on the world stage toward comprehensive equity for all.

The UK offers several proposals to this committee and encourages implementation from all UN Member States. The R.A.R.E Program is an effective framework for the introduction and execution of these proposals: **R**esearch increases regarding SGBV, **A**dvancing leadership gender equality within refugee communities, **R**educing cultural stigmas surrounding women and children, and **E**ducational development and equality. Within this proposal, the UK maintains its commitment to ending gender inequality among refugees and aligns closely with the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals of reducing inequality, promoting gender equality, and providing quality education to all. The UK first recommends that this committee increase funding to further research the effects of SGBV on women and minority refugees. A small funding increase would allow this committee to increase the scope of its annual SGBV reports and further extend the UN Safe From the Start Initiative. Second, The UK believes UN Member States should actively promote gender equality among refugee leadership positions. Although women represent half of the worldwide refugee population, the vast majority of leaders within UN and state-run refugee camps are male. More female leaders would serve to further the cause of gender equity among refugees. Third, The UK advocates for stigma reduction education concerning women and children within refugee communities. The Economic and Social Council reported in 2014 that 60 percent of all preventable maternal deaths take place in a humanitarian or refugee setting, often accompanied by stigma surrounding childbirth and pregnancy. Increased education within refugee camps regarding pregnancy and reproductive health would reduce these fatalities. Finally, The UK proposes increased funding for this committee’s educational development to further educational equality among refugees. A recent report by this committee found that 3.7 million refugee children, over half of the global refugee population, do not receive a formal education. As this committee’s 2018 education report makes clear, refugee girls who attend school are far less likely to be forced into marriage or become pregnant, and have a higher chance to achieve career goals in the future. Comprehensive education reform can be undertaken by this committee and would serve to further the goal of gender equity within refugee communities. The UK is united with this committee in the promotion of gender equity for all refugees, and anticipates further engagement to meet this goal.