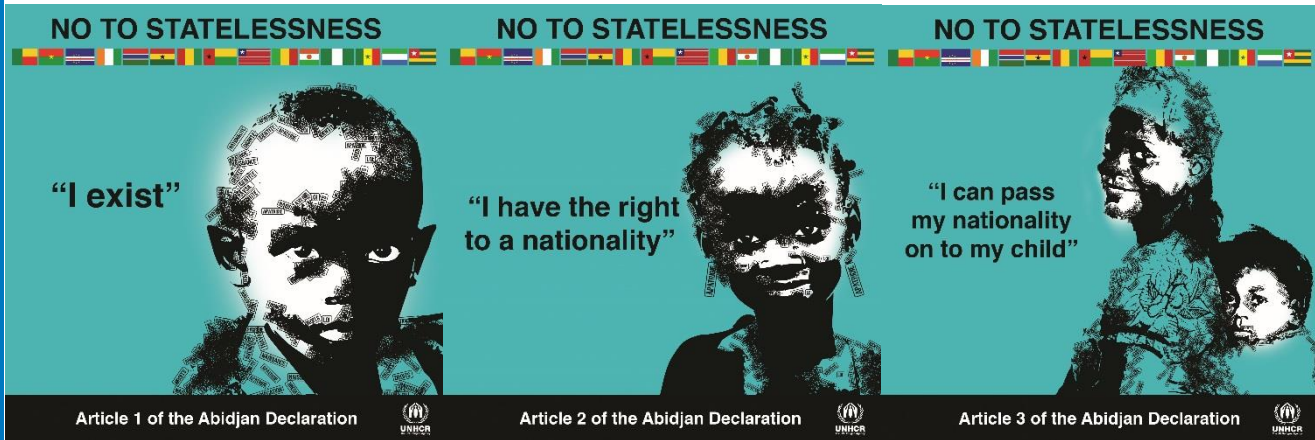


STATELESSNESS IN WEST AFRICA

NEWSLETTER #12

January – March 2017



STATELESSNESS UPDATE

ABIDJAN DECLARATION: TWO YEARS DOWN THE LINE

West Africa celebrates the 2nd anniversary of the Abidjan Declaration on the eradication of statelessness. Over the last two years, the region achieved significant progress as illustrated below:

12 States have acceded to the 1954 **CONVENTION**



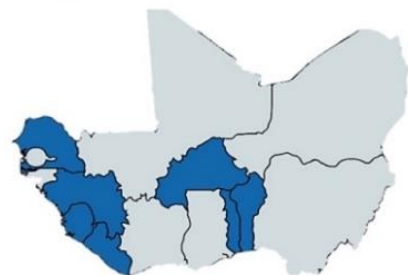
11 States have acceded to the 1961 **CONVENTION**



12 States have developed **PLANS OF ACTION** to end statelessness



7 States have begun a process to revise their **NATIONALITY LEGISLATION**



CELEBRATING THE 2ND ANNIVERSARY OF THE DECLARATION

In February, **West Africa** celebrated the **2nd Anniversary of the Abidjan Declaration**, a regional commitment in support of the global campaign to end statelessness. Activities took place across the region, ranging from TV shows, University debates, press releases and visual campaigns. The region once again showed its support and enthusiasm towards the Declaration.

Regional Celebration of the Abidjan Declaration



UNHCR and ECOWAS commemorating the 2nd anniversary of Abidjan Declaration in Abuja ©UNHCR Nigeria

ECOWAS and UNHCR organised a high level panel in Abuja to celebrate the 2nd anniversary of the Abidjan Declaration. The 15 Ambassadors of the ECOWAS member states and international agencies attended the event. High Level ECOWAS officials underscored the importance of the Abidjan Declaration, and called upon States to make a step forward towards the eradication of statelessness by adopting a legally binding instrument. Great emphasis was also placed the necessity of regional cooperation, the most effective way to put an end to the scourge of statelessness in West Africa.

- In **Senegal**, the government and UNHCR issued a [joint press release](#) in which Senegal reinforced its commitment to end statelessness. On the date of the anniversary, one of the most popular TV channels in the country broadcasted a [special show on statelessness](#) presented by [High Profile Supporter Aby Ndour](#). The program featured a discussion with UNHCR, parliament representatives, and artists such as [Bideew Bou Bess](#) and [Cheikh Lo](#), on the causes of and solutions to statelessness.
- In **Burkina Faso**, messages on statelessness were sent to the general public via SMS in an effort to mass sensitize the population on the issue. In addition, UNHCR provided registration materials to the civil registry center in the Sahel region, where a large number of undocumented Malian refugees reside. The objective was to strengthen the capacity of the registration center while sensitizing both the authorities and the population on the risks of statelessness.
- In **Ghana**, UNHCR organized a series of awareness-raising activities targeting the media and the general public. A media forum on ‘Addressing Statelessness in the Ghanaian Context’ was attended by the BBC and other major media outlets. In the days leading up to the Anniversary, the issue of statelessness in Ghana was covered via radio, TV and print media. A debate organized by ‘Friends of UNHCR’ – a volunteer-based initiative aimed at engaging university students – took place among journalists and the general public on the issue of *proof of nationality*.
- In **Côte d’Ivoire**, UNHCR was engaged in a media campaign to sensitize the public about statelessness. UNHCR published a press release and launched a video on the national channel, RTI, which included appearances by various well-known Ivorian personalities.
- In **Guinea-Bissau**, the popular singer, Binham, helped to spread the message about statelessness during his 4 concerts in the towns of Bissau, Gabú and Bafatá. The singer, who has been increasingly supportive of UNHCR’s efforts, used his concerts advocate for eradicating statelessness and to distribute informational materials. His charisma and energetic performances were invaluable in assisting UNHCR to spread the message across Guinea-Bissau.

- In **Guinea**, the Committee to End Statelessness and UNHCR organized a visual campaign, by placing banners and posters in strategic points throughout Conakry and Nzérékoré, including at the airport, town halls, ministries, and at civil society organizations.
- In Ekpoma town, in southern **Nigeria**, the Faculty of Law at Ambrose Alli University celebrated the anniversary by presenting a seminar paper titled “The Eradication of Statelessness in West Africa: The Role of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees.” After the seminar, participants continued to sensitize students on statelessness.
- On 10 March 2017, **Togo** UNHCR held a [meeting](#) with government and civil society representatives to assess the current level of implementation of the Abidjan Declaration in Togo. The government adopted a roadmap, and prioritised two actions: the accession to both Conventions, and adoption, by decree, of the National Action Plan.



Singer Binham, supporter of UNHCR's fight against statelessness ©Binham



Awareness raising activities in Ghana ©UNHCR/ Nii Ako Sowa



Aby Ndour and her guests when recording the Aby Show dedicated to statelessness ©UNHCR/ Simplice Kpandji



UNHCR staff on the BBC Focus on Africa Radio ©UNHCR/ Nii Ako Sowa

ABIDJAN COMMITMENTS TRANSLATED INTO ACTION

Developing national action plans – art. 24

- In **Mali**, the National Action Plan is getting closer to formal government approval. In March, The Statelessness Inter-ministerial Committee approved the plan drafted in 2014, which will now be submitted for Ministerial approval.
- In **Guinea**, progress is being made towards the approval of the national action plan, titled "Program to Combat Statelessness in Guinea". The Minister of Justice and Minister of State have passed on the National action plan to the General Secretariat of the Government for the President's signature.

Reducing statelessness – art. 18

In **Mali**, UNHCR, in partnership with a civil society partner assisted 600 stateless refugees originating from Mauritania to apply for Malian nationality through the process of naturalization. In addition, UNHCR organized a two-day workshop with the local authorities in the region of Timbuktu, north of Mali, on the nexus between preventing statelessness and strengthening civil registration. As a result of the discussions, participants developed a detailed plan of action on civil registration that will be incorporated in the national plan of action to end statelessness in Mali.



Participants during the workshop in Timbuktu, Mali ©UNHCR

- In **Liberia**, the Government confirmed the nationality of 709 former Liberian refugees who still reside in their countries of asylum. After the cessation of their refugee status, they were vetted as non-Liberian by the authorities of their country, and were liable to becoming stateless. In 2016-2017, UNHCR supported a 3-member team from the Liberian government to undertake missions to 6 West African countries to review their cases. These 709 Liberians have been officially confirmed as nationals of their country.
- In **Niger**, the Diffa region is home to a large population of refugees and displaced persons. Up to 80 per cent of the population does not have any documentation establishing their identity and nationality. Similarly, a large percent of the host population has never had access to civil registration. In response to this dramatic deficit of documentation, UNHCR and the Government developed a joint project to administer a survey (*'Recensement Administratif de Développement à Vocation Humanitaire'*) aimed at collecting individual data that will assist in the identification and documentation of people at risk of statelessness. Following a validation workshop with local authorities and humanitarian actors in February, the census and biometric registration activities are scheduled to take place in June 2017.
- In **Côte d'Ivoire**, in application of the special law on acquisition of nationality through declaration, the Ministry of Justice delivered nearly 1,000 nationality certificates between January and March 2017.
- In **Senegal**, authorities have issued over 300,000 late birth certificates since the Abidjan Declaration. A birth certificate is often sufficient in Senegal to obtain an ID and passport.

Conducting sensitization campaigns – art. 6



Senegalese participants of the competition trying to convince the audience ©AfDBPi

Regional- Radio France International (RFI) travelled to Abidjan and recorded its famous daily show '[7 Milliard de Voisins](#)' with a larger public essentially composed of university students. RFI invited an Ivorian MP, UNHCR and young people to debate on the issue of "lack of proof of identity and statelessness"



Emmanuelle Bastide and her guests in Abidjan. © RFI/Camille Nérent



Villagers watching videos on statelessness – Thilogne Village, North of Senegal © UNHCR/Fernando Bissacot

Regional – On 03 February in Abidjan, the African Bank for Development (ABD) hosted the final of the regional competition Voice of Youth ("[Voix des Jeunes](#)"). Students from Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal debated on statelessness and proposed innovative solutions on "how to address lack of proof of nationality". Interesting ideas were shared and included promoting female leaders as well as traditional and religious authorities.

Senegal- For three weeks, the Afrikabok roving cinema festival passed through 13 villages in northern **Senegal** (at the border with Mauritania) to entertain and raise awareness of statelessness. In addition to screening videos on the theme, the organization stimulated discussions in local language (Pulaar) and distributed informative comic books. The project targets over 30,000 villagers and local officials. Learn more about Festival Afrikabok [here](#).

Strengthening Regional Commitment



Participants of the workshop in Dakar ©UNHCR/ Salome Moulineuf

Senegal - 46 people from 17 African countries met in Dakar in January for a 5-day training. In addition, 40 participants were able to attend from Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, through videoconference. The 5-day training was organized jointly by UNHCR and the *Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie* (AUF). It brought together practitioners from governments and parliaments, UNHCR and civil society. The training aimed at sharing best practices and providing tools for the prevention and reduction of statelessness. Several participants undertook actions upon return to their countries. In the [Republic of the Congo](#), participants organised a training for State-authorities involved in the issuance of birth certificates. In [Chad](#), participants convened a workshop on Statelessness and Nationality to share the knowledge and skills obtained from the training with key national stakeholders.

Strengthening civil registration – art. 6

- In **Senegal**, a Presidential decree ordered the issuance of late birth certificates to be [free of charge](#) starting from February 2017. Before, the cost of a birth certificate was around CFA 700 in a country where over 20% of individuals, including 30% of children below the age of 5, do not have a birth certificate. A birth certificate is fundamental - although not sufficient in itself – to prove that a person meets the criteria for obtaining the Senegalese nationality.
- In **Burkina Faso**, the government in partnership with the private sector has been testing a new technology to enhance civil registration. The technology consists of a unique plastic chip, which is inserted into the bracelet of each new-born child and linked to a phone application that is used by mid-wives. With their phones, the mid-wives scan the baby's bracelet containing his/her biodata, which is automatically downloaded in all registry centers in the country making it easier for the acquisition of civil documents. The initial testing phase was concluded in January and the government is currently analyzing the possibilities for country-wide use.
- **Côte d'Ivoire** is currently reforming its civil code and developing a National Registration of Physical Persons (NRPP) platform, with the aim of issuing a unique ID number to every national and legal resident. Within this process, the government has undertaken a review of the Ivorian civil registration system. To this end, UNHCR participated in a government-organized workshop which brought together several experts engaged in the field of civil status.

Revising nationality laws – art. 2, 3

- In February, the Council of Ministers of **Benin** approved the draft bill modifying the nationality law. The draft bill has now reached the National Assembly, where it is yet to be adopted. The bill aims, among others, at removing discriminatory elements of the country's nationality law to ensure gender equality. It intends to give men and women the same rights to pass nationality to their children, as well as the same conditions to acquire, change or keep nationality.
- In **Togo**, the Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights organized an advocacy [workshop](#) on the removal of gender discrimination from national legislation on the 7th and 8th February. The workshop brought together government, UNHCR, civil society, and international experts, and was followed by a press conference ([summary video](#) on TV). The Nationality Code of Togo includes several discriminatory provisions that must be reformed to achieve gender equality. Two examples are the provisions that only permits mothers to confer nationality on children in cases where the father

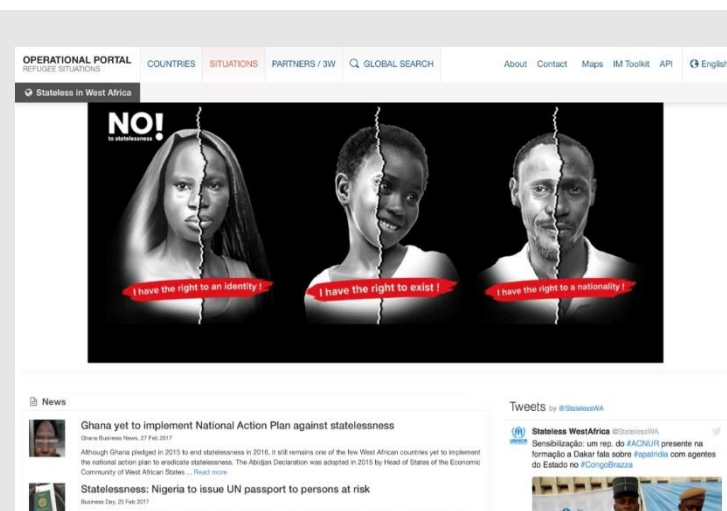
is stateless or his nationality is unknown; and that Togolese men may confer nationality to foreign spouses upon marriage, a right denied to Togolese women.

Improve information and data collection – art. 1, 15

- Studies mapping the landscape of statelessness are still ongoing in Benin, Gambia, Ghana, Mali and Nigeria.

ONLINE PLATFORMS

- Our 6 week-long [Facebook campaign #1minute1million](#) in support of [#IBelong global campaign](#), has just finished. As part of the campaign, nine stateless people from five countries in West Africa shared their stories and reached an audience of more than 30,000 people. Gender discrimination, low rates of birth registration and violence against children were some of the issues that were covered. Take a look at our Facebook page if you haven't seen it yet!



Statelessness issues in West Africa now have a new home:

<http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/statelesswa>

Follow this link to access all the content UNHCR has been producing on statelessness across the region as well as news and multimedia materials on the issue!

We hope you enjoy the new website!

UPCOMING

- 7–9 May – Banjul, **the Gambia: Regional Conference** on the Validation and Adoption of the Regional Plan of Action to Eradicate Statelessness in West Africa, organised by ECOWAS and UNHCR.
- April and May – **Côte d'Ivoire**: a 2 month roving awareness-raising campaign that will take place in the capital, Abidjan and elsewhere in the country. The sensitization activities will take place in San Pedro- Bouake – Bondougou – Korhogo – Odienne.

STATELESSNESS IN THE NEWS

- 17 countries were represented at the workshop on statelessness and nationality in Dakar ([Senegal- French](#))
- The issue of statelessness at the center of an international competition in Abidjan ([Cote d'Ivoire- French](#))
- RFI dedicates its broadcast “7 Milliards de voisins” to statelessness and to the existing solutions ([Regional- French](#))
- Togolese initiative to end gender-based discrimination in nationality law ([Togo- English](#))

- In Senegal, the issuance of civil status certificates at court hearings is now free of charge ([Senegal- French](#))
- Technology at the service of the fight against statelessness in Burkina Faso ([Burkina Faso – French](#))
- Ghana yet to implement National Action Plan on statelessness ([Ghana- English](#))
- The revision process of the ID delivery system has been launched in Liberia ([Liberia- English](#))
- Nigeria about to adopt new measures to eradicate statelessness on a national level ([Nigeria-English](#))
- A Senegalese television program entirely devoted to stateless people on the occasion of the 2nd anniversary of the Abidjan Declaration ([Senegal- French /Wolof](#))
- Joint press release by UNHCR and the Senegalese government on developments related to the eradication of statelessness since the Abidjan Declaration ([Senegal- French](#))
- The Government of Benin considers amending the nationality code ([Benin-French](#))
- The travelling film festival Afrikabok returns for its 2017 edition ([Senegal – French](#))

LOOKING FOR MORE?

If you want more information, check out the following resources:

- UNHCR's Global [website](#) on Statelessness;
- UNHCR's regional [website](#) on Statelessness in West Africa;
- UNHCR's #IBelong Global Campaign to End Statelessness – [Support it here](#);
- Documents from the [Ministerial Conference](#) on Statelessness in the ECOWAS region in 2015;
- [Webpage](#) where we post our Newsletter in 3 different languages;
- [KORA](#) - UNHCR's blog dedicated to Refugees, Internally Displaced Persons, and Stateless people in West and Central Africa;
- Look for us on Social Media, we are on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) (@StatelessWA) and [Youtube](#) ;
- You can also reach us by e-mail at sendawas@unhcr.org.



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