



**Regional Strategic Meeting on Statelessness:
West Africa on the journey towards the High-Level Segment to be held on 07
October in Geneva**

Abidjan, 6 - 10 May 2019

Concept Note

1 – Background information

Ever since the launch of UNHCR's #IBelong Campaign in November 2014, States in West Africa have shown strong leadership and made significant progress, both in terms of political commitments and concrete actions to address statelessness throughout the ECOWAS region. Following the adoption of the Abidjan Declaration and the Banjul Plan of Action on Eradication of Statelessness in the ECOWAS region, in 2015 and 2017 respectively, great strides have been made to end statelessness in West Africa: Benin, Burkina Faso, the Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali and Togo formally adopted National Action Plans to eradicate statelessness. In August 2017, Burkina Faso acceded to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, bringing the total number of States in the region that are party to the 1954 and the 1961 Statelessness Conventions to twelve.

Despite political commitments to protect the rights of stateless persons, no State in the ECOWAS region has established a Statelessness Determination Procedure (SDP) to date. However, in accordance with Objective 3.1 of the Banjul Plan of Action, namely "Determine / Recognize / Grant status to stateless persons", establishing SDPs is one of the actions proposed in a number of National Action Plans, which were adopted or are in the adoption process by ECOWAS Member States. Such procedures would ensure that stateless persons systematically secure access to the rights to which they are entitled, in particular under the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, as a step toward a permanent solution and until their situation is resolved.

In the same vein, the High-Level Segment, which will be held in Geneva in October, during the annual session of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (ExCom), provides an important opportunity, both to take stock of the achievements made by West African States to date, and to redouble efforts to end statelessness in the region. The High-Level Segment will mark the mid-way point of the #IBelong Campaign and will especially allow States and the

ECOWAS Commission to make concrete and time-bound pledges to eradicate statelessness by the end of the Campaign in 2024, in line with the objectives of the Abidjan Declaration and the Banjul Plan of Action.

Against this background, UNHCR and ECOWAS are proposing a regional strategic meeting on statelessness, with the following two components:

- 1.) a working session of three days which will represent the annual Statelessness Focal Points meeting in the ECOWAS region. During this session, country-specific review and assessment will be carried out, to measure implementation of the recommendations from the last regional meeting held in Saly (Senegal) in November 2018. More generally, the first three days of the regional strategic meeting will focus on preparations for the Geneva High-Level Segment, including regional coordination on the same.
- 2.) a two-day workshop on Statelessness Determination Procedures (SDPs) for those countries in the region that have already committed or that wish to take the High-Level Segment as an opportunity to commit to domesticating the 1954 Convention, and to establish SDPs in order to grant protection status to stateless persons. Practitioners from outside Africa will be invited to attend this component of the meeting and share their experience.

Both components of the regional strategic meeting on statelessness are designed to pave the way for concrete follow-up action to ensure that the achievements made in the region are coherently showcased at the international level, and to finalise and register pledges, including those relating to the establishment of SDPs, prior to the High-Level Segment in Geneva, in a coherent and coordinated manner.

2 – Objectives

As set out above, the regional strategic meeting on statelessness forms part of UNHCR's worldwide efforts to end statelessness by 2024. The meeting also provides an opportunity for both Governments, UNHCR Focal Points on statelessness and the ECOWAS Commission to share best practices on policies, administrative procedures and legal frameworks, to showcase achievements, and to finalise pledges, including those concerning the establishment of SDPs, for each State as well as for the ECOWAS Commission, the relevant regional organisation.

The working session of the Statelessness Focal Points aims at:

- Showcasing, assessing and discussing achievements, challenges and advocacy opportunities for each of the 15 ECOWAS Member States and for the ECOWAS Commission itself, in accordance with the Banjul Plan of Action and the respective National Action Plans;
- Finalise achievements and concrete, time-bound pledges to be presented by Member States and ECOWAS during the High-Level Segment in Geneva in October;
- Develop an advocacy strategy with clear and country-specific actions for each Member State and the ECOWAS Commission, which engages the relevant government authorities and the permanent missions in Geneva, in order to encourage Member States and ECOWAS to register and present pledges during the High-Level Segment;
- Propose follow-up mechanisms/actions to ensure that pledges are actually implemented in the aftermath of the High-Level Segment, including through linkages with the follow-up and review

processes set out in the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM), as relevant.

The SDPs workshop aims at:

- Providing participants with a clear understanding of SDPs and present the substance of UNHCR guidance on establishing and conducting such procedures;
- Facilitate the exchange of experiences in determining statelessness and developing a legal system to protect the rights of stateless persons at the national level, through the contribution of relevant stakeholders from other regions with long-lasting experience on the matter;
- Highlight the linkages between asylum procedures and SDPs;
- Develop a roadmap for the establishment of SDPs in participant States.

A detailed agenda for both components will be shared with participants at least one week prior to the meeting.

3 – Methodology

The regional strategic meeting will comprise a few plenary sessions with presentations by UNHCR and government stakeholders from other regions, with solid experience as regards laws on the status of stateless persons and SDPs, such as the French Office for the Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (*Office Français de Protection des Réfugiés et Apatrides, OFPRA*). A number of sessions, however, will be dedicated to working groups with experts' facilitation. The presentations will allow participants to discuss their respective experience with their counterparts and partners, at the national and regional level. During the working group sessions, participants will have the chance to develop an advocacy strategy for each country in preparation of the High-Level Segment, as well as a roadmap for the establishment of SDPs in the countries that wish to make a pledge to this end. Both components of the regional strategic meeting are designed to be highly interactive and will allow participants to actively engage. Participants will thus be asked to prepare appropriately before the meeting.

Facilitators will alternate from one session to another, and will chair each session, coordinating individual interventions and organising subsequent discussions. Different facilitators will be chosen for each of the sessions, with the aim of engaging participants as much as possible.

4 – Participants

Each ECOWAS Member State will be represented by the designated Government Focal Point on statelessness, the UNHCR Statelessness Focal Point as well as UNHCR Senior Protection Officer covering the country. 59 persons will attend the working session of the Statelessness Focal Points and 37 persons will take part in the SDPs workshop.

First component: Annual working session of Statelessness Focal Points

- 15 Government Focal Points on statelessness;
- 01 ECOWAS Focal Point on statelessness;
- 01 high-ranking ECOWAS official;
- 15 UNHCR Senior Protection Officers/Head of Protection Units (12 Senior Protection Officers/Heads of Protection Unit from the ECOWAS region as well as the Senior Protection Officers from Cameroun, the Central African Republic and Chad);

- 12 UNHCR Statelessness Focal Points;
- 01 member of UNHCR's Senegal Unit;
- 02 members of the UNHCR Liaison Office to ECOWAS;
- 01 representative of CEMAC;
- 04 representatives of UN sister agencies and partner organisations in Abidjan;
- 05 members of the Statelessness Unit, RRWA;
- 02 staff from UNHCR Headquarters (Division of International Protection and Division of Resilience and Solutions/Regional Bureau for Africa).

Second component: SDPs workshop

- 05 high-ranking representatives of government institutions in charge of Refugee Status Determination (Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal);
- 01 high-ranking representative of the Ministry of Justice of Burkina Faso;
- 06 Government Focal Points on statelessness (Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal);
- 06 UNHCR Senior Protection Officers (Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal);
- 05 UNHCR Statelessness Focal Points (Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Niger, Nigeria);
- 01 member of UNHCR's Senegal Unit, Dakar;
- 02 members of the UNHCR Liaison Office to ECOWAS;
- 01 representative of the Ministry of Justice of Nigeria;
- 02 ECOWAS representatives;
- 01 representative of the Inter-Parliamentary Union;
- 01 representative of OFPRA;
- 05 members of the Statelessness Unit, RRWA;
- 01 staff from UNHCR Headquarters (Division of International Protection/Regional Bureau for Africa).

Detailed Administrative Instructions will be shared with participants before the meeting. The UNHCR Regional Representation in Dakar will cover the costs related to the participation of non-UNHCR staff as well as participation costs for staff of the UNHCR Statelessness Unit in Dakar. UNHCR Country Offices are expected to cover the participation cost (DSA, travel and terminal expenses) for staff from their respective offices.

5 – Date and place

The regional strategic meeting will be held in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, from 6 to 10 May 2019, with participants to the first component arriving on Sunday, 5 May. The first component of the regional strategic meeting, namely the annual working session of Statelessness Focal Points, will span the first three days (6, 7 & 8 May). Subsequently, the second component of the regional strategic meeting, that is the SDPs workshop, will take place on 9 and 10 May. Therefore, those participants who take part in the first but not in the second component of the regional strategic meeting will be leaving Abidjan in the evening of 8 May; those participating only in the second component are expected to arrive in Abidjan on 8 May and leave Abidjan in the evening of 10 May.

Dakar, 1 May 2019