

Regional Strategic Meeting on Statelessness

Abidjan, Ivory Coast, 6-8 May 2019



1. Participation, objectives and outcome

From 6 to 8 May 2019, the UNHCR Regional Representation for West Africa (RRWA) and the Economic Commission of West African States (ECOWAS) jointly organized the **second regional preparatory meeting in the run-up to the High-Level Segment on Statelessness (HLS)**, which will be held in Geneva on 7 October 2019. The HLS provides an important opportunity, both to Member States and the ECOWAS Commission itself, to redouble efforts to end statelessness in the region by 2024, in line with the objectives of the *Abidjan Declaration* and the *Banjul Plan of Action*.

The regional preparatory meeting was followed by a smaller two-day **workshop on the establishment of Statelessness Determination Procedures (SDPs)** for those countries in the region that are most committed to domesticating the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and introducing such procedures. This report focusses on the regional preparatory meeting for the HLS. The second workshop, on SDPs, will be presented in a distinct report.

1.1 Participation

The meeting was opened by the **ECOWAS Representative in Ivory Coast**, Ambassador Babacar Carlos MBAYE, and UNHCR Representative Mohamed TOURE. ECOWAS was represented throughout the meeting by the Head of Division, Social Affairs. UNHCR's Head of Statelessness Section at DIP also attended. The workshop brought together **50 participants from the sub-region and beyond**, including 14 Government Focal Points as well as UNHCR Heads of Offices, Senior Protection Officers and UNHCR Statelessness Focal Points.

In view of the ongoing regionalization process, the statelessness Focal person the Economic and Monetary Community of Central African States (**CEMAC**) attended. The President of CEMAC Commission who happened to be Abidjan for other duties requested to attend in an observatory capacity and was authorized to do so. UNHCR Senior Protection Officers from **Cameroon, Chad and the Central African Republic** joined the annual Statelessness Focal Points meeting in the ECOWAS region, for the first time. CSOs, the World Bank, UNICEF and UNFPA also attended and facilitated specific sessions. (See Annex V for a complete list of participants).

1.2 Objectives

The meeting built on the recommendations that came out from the first West Africa preparatory meeting held in Saly (Senegal) in November 2018, and was designed to take stock and further **pave the way for concrete follow-up actions**, to ensure that the achievements made in the region will be coherently showcased at international level, and that concrete, time-bound pledges that have been identified at the technical level will be presented by Government representatives at the HLS (See concept note, Annex III to this report).

1.3 Outcome

The main outcomes of the meeting are detailed **country-specific roadmaps** re-stating achievements to be showcased as well as proposed pledges, with the concrete follow-up actions required for each country and for the ECOWAS. The country-specific roadmaps emanating from this meeting will serve as basis for further engagement with the relevant governments and with the ECOWAS, throughout the coming months. UNHCR Country Representatives especially can rely on the roadmaps for their advocacy at ministerial or higher level in-country. UNHCR Senior Protection Officers are also expected to use the roadmaps as a reference tool for their engagement with state authorities in their respective countries. Major areas for pledges discussed during the Regional meeting in Abidjan

include accession to the Statelessness Conventions, elimination of gender discrimination in nationality laws, prevention of childhood statelessness and birth registration, establishment of SDPs and better data on statelessness (See Annex I to this document for detailed country-specific roadmaps on achievements and Annex II for detailed country-specific roadmaps on pledges).

1.4 PI coverage and *Banjul Plan of Action* Anniversary

The regional meeting received good PI coverage by both national and international media including printed, radio and television (See press release, Annexe VI to this report). As part of the meeting, UNHCR and the ECOWAS organised a cocktail to stress the engagement of the ECOWAS region to end statelessness on the occasion of the second anniversary of the *Banjul Plan of Action*. A number of Ambassadors, heads of UN Agencies, the World Bank, representatives of CSOs *etc* attended the Anniversary celebration.

2. Recap of key elements discussed

The meeting was organized along the following lines: **1.) Taking stock of achievements; 2.) Securing concrete, realistic, measurable and time-bound pledges from the ECOWAS region; and 3.) Developing country-specific roadmaps on pledges to be presented during the HLS.**

2.1 Organisational matters related to the HLS

To inform the group work sessions and plenary discussions, Melanie Khanna, Senior Legal Coordinator (Statelessness) at Division of International Protection (DIP), UNHCR Headquarters, provided guidance on the organization and envisaged outcomes of the HLS. Participants were informed that **invitations to the HLS will be sent out in July.**

As part of the HLS, the depositary functions of the Statelessness Conventions will be brought from New York to Geneva, giving Cabo Verde, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Ghana and Togo¹ the chance to **deposit their instruments of accession at the HLS.** In addition, all States that have acceded to the Statelessness Conventions since the launch of the #IBelong Campaign in 2014, namely Burkina Faso, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger and Sierra Leone, will be honored at the HLS and are **invited to ensure high-level attendance.**

¹ These are countries from West Africa and Central Africa yet to become Party to the Statelessness Conventions

2.2 Envisaged outcomes of the HLS

Regarding the foreseen outcomes of the HLS, DIP particularly highlighted the importance of taking **concrete steps at country levels** for the HLS to become a success, and to advocate for pledges that **go beyond what ECOWAS Member States have already committed to in the *Banjul Plan of Action***. Among others, fixing gaps when it comes to late birth registration, establishing SDPs and ensuring that foundlings do not find themselves stateless will have a profound impact and change the shape of societies as a whole, in a positive direction.

It was also noted that pledges made at the HLS will automatically be included in the outcome document of the first [Global Refugee Forum to be held in December](#), and will thus allow for **concrete follow-up as set out in the Global Compact on Refugees**.

2.3 Importance of partnerships

To highlight the importance of partnerships in line with the [UN Secretary-General's Guidance Note on statelessness](#), representatives of the World Bank, UNICEF and UNFPA as well as local NGOs presented their statelessness-related work in Ivory Coast. Partners' presentations stimulated an exchange on experiences of collaboration across the region and the **linkages between statelessness and the Sustainable Development Agenda (*Leave No One Behind*)**, in particular across *SDG 16.9*, which reads: "By 2030, provide legal identity for all, including birth registration".

3. Follow-up over the coming months

With the **support of their Senior Management**, UNHCR colleagues at country level and at the *Liaison Unit with ECOWAS* are encouraged to continue engaging their respective Government counterparts, to ensure that achievements and pledges discussed and agreed upon at the technical level in Abidjan will be actually adopted by their respective line Ministers, and presented at the HLS. From the Abidjan meeting onwards, UNHCR engagement with Governments and regional entities on the HLS will be based on the roadmaps developed during this meeting. The Statelessness Unit at UNHCR Dakar **stands ready to provide technical assistance** throughout the coming months, including to fine-tune the wording of pledges, as required.

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