

UNHCR Lebanon

Statelessness Update

December 2014

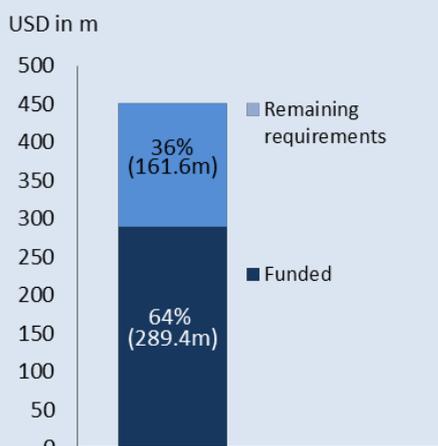
Key Figures

44,927	Syrian newborns registered with UNHCR (March 2011-December 2014)
69%	Syrian newborns lack official birth certificates*
39%	Syrian newborns lack official birth certificates because their parents lack documentation required by civil registries*

* This is based on a survey of 8,673 newborns registered with UNHCR between 1 August 2013 and 30 April 2014.

Funding

UNHCR total requirements: USD 451 m



December developments

- UNHCR's implementing partner Frontiers Ruwad Association, facilitated two full-day outreach awareness sessions in Akkar reaching 37 stateless persons. Participants were sensitized about legal solutions to statelessness, the importance of obtaining and keeping records of identity documentation, as well as rights when engaging legal representation for nationality lawsuits.
- As part of its legal aid programme on statelessness, UNHCR through Frontiers Ruwad Association and eight Lebanese lawyers, initiated proceedings to assist over 90 individuals of Lebanese origin with confirmation of nationality through courts. While court proceedings in Lebanon are lengthy, it is expected that some decisions will be issued in 2015. In addition, around 20 individuals continued to be supported with confirmation of Lebanese nationality via the judicial late registration of births and marriages.
- Throughout the year, UNHCR Lebanon worked to raise public awareness about statelessness. UNHCR produced a storytelling video on civil registration and statelessness for persons of Lebanese origins, which can be seen at <http://youtu.be/XG0BRvulTAo>.

In addition, a regional TV spot on statelessness with the slogan 'if they don't belong, they don't exist' was produced and will be disseminated in the Middle East and North Africa region in 2015. The TV spot highlights the issue of access to rights for stateless persons.



- In 2014, extensive work was done by UNHCR Lebanon and its partners to raise the awareness of Syrian refugees on the importance of birth registration. Over 45,000 individuals received information, counselling and legal assistance and over 500 humanitarian workers were trained. A mid-year Government decision allowing all Syrian refugees without legal stay to regularize their residency without paying the usual fines and fees until 31 December 2014 also improved access to birth registration for those parents without legal stay, as legal status is required to register births. UNHCR's birth registration survey indicates that there has been an increase in monthly birth registration rates from 23 to 40 per cent in 2014.

'When grew up, when I turned 12 years old I learned what it meant not to have ID documents,' Leal tells her story on <http://youtu.be/XG0BRvulTAo>

Achievements: January – December

Activity	Reached Jan-Dec	2014 Target
Individuals receiving information on birth registration through awareness sessions	38,929	22,000
Families of newborns provided with individual counselling on birth registration	9,694	9,000
Training on birth registration with officials & front-liners	575	600

Needs

There are estimated to be tens of thousands of stateless persons in Lebanon. The exact number is difficult to ascertain. Two significant reasons for this are that there has not been an official census since 1932 and many stateless persons do not have civil registration records. There are a number of different profiles of stateless persons in Lebanon, as well as individuals who are at risk of statelessness. Stateless persons in Lebanon face obstacles in accessing healthcare, education, social services, as well as the labour market. They are unable to move freely and face risks of detention and arrest.

Challenges

Influx of Syrians: With the continued arrival of refugees from Syria, the number of stateless persons and persons at risk of statelessness has risen. Stateless refugees in Lebanon include Syrian Kurds who were denaturalized in Syria in 1962. Since March 2011, 44,927 Syrian refugees have been born in Lebanon and, according to a UNHCR survey of 7,731 Syrian newborns, 70% do not possess an official birth certificate.

Gaps in legislative framework: Lebanon is not a signatory to either the 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons or the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. The Lebanese nationality law contains gender-discriminatory provisions, which only allow a Lebanese woman to confer her nationality to her children in exceptional circumstances. Provisions for naturalization are highly politicized and at the discretion of the Lebanese State. Safeguards against statelessness at birth are interpreted very narrowly by the courts.

Gaps in administrative framework: Not all children are registered at birth in Lebanon. This is despite the fact that Lebanon is a State Party to the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child which requires the registration of the birth of every child and reaffirms a child's right to a nationality. Barriers to birth registration include a complex procedure with onerous requirements for documentation.

Strategy

UNHCR has a global mandate to work on the identification, prevention and reduction of statelessness, and the protection of stateless persons. In Lebanon, UNHCR is working to respond to statelessness through three strategic actions:

- **Identification of the population:** The advancement of rights and protection for stateless persons in Lebanon is constrained by the lack of data on persons concerned. UNHCR is supporting a survey on statelessness in Lebanon being undertaken by a local NGO called Frontiers Ruwad Association. UNHCR is also undertaking qualitative research on statelessness through individual casework and participatory assessment. This information is contributing to the strategy for the prevention and reduction of statelessness as well as the protection of stateless persons.
- **Advocacy for legislative changes:** UNHCR works with the Lebanese government for improvements to the Lebanese nationality law, access to civil registration, as well as the protection of stateless persons. The Lebanese Ministries of Interior, Justice, Health, Education and Social Affairs have appointed statelessness focal points who are engaged with UNHCR bilaterally and are also participating in working groups on statelessness and civil registration.
- **Direct assistance:** UNHCR is assisting Syrian refugees to access civil registration procedures in Lebanon. UNHCR has implemented a legal aid project on statelessness which focuses on assisting unregistered persons of Lebanese origin to access Lebanese nationality. UNHCR has initiated a national campaign on birth registration in partnership with Frontiers Ruwad Association and with the support of the Ministries of Interior, Social Affairs, Public Health, Education and Justice.

Excerpt from information leaflet on birth registration



Animated film on birth registration available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=AX0j243WnTk

UNHCR implementing partners

Caritas, International Relief and Development (IRD), Frontiers Ruwad Association, and Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).