



**REGIONAL MINISTERIAL LEVEL MEETING FOR THE
VALIDATION AND ADOPTION OF THE REGIONAL PLAN OF
ACTION TO ERADICATE STATELESSNESS IN WEST AFRICA**

CONCEPT NOTE

1. Introduction

ECOWAS will host a regional, Ministerial-level Meeting for the review and adoption of the Regional Plan of Action to Eradicate Statelessness in West Africa. The event will bring together government officials from the fifteen ECOWAS Member States, representatives of ECOWAS, UNHCR and international technical experts, as well as other international organizations. The adoption of the Regional Plan of Action will represent a critical step toward the implementation of the *Abidjan Declaration of Ministers of ECOWAS Member States on Eradication of Statelessness* (“Abidjan Declaration”) of February 2015.

2. Background

Statelessness refers to the condition of an individual who is not considered a national by any State under the operation of its law. While human rights are in principle universal and inherent, in practice, a large range of fundamental human rights are denied to stateless people. They are often unable to obtain identity documents; they may be detained for reasons linked to their statelessness and often times they are denied access to education and health services or blocked from obtaining employment.

Today, at least 10 million people around the world are denied a nationality. An estimated 1 million stateless persons live in West Africa, which is also home to a large population of persons at risk of statelessness. Its main causes are gaps in nationality laws, arbitrary deprivation of nationality, processes relating to state succession and restrictive administrative practices, for example in the issuance of documents that prove nationality.

Statelessness has a devastating impact on the lives of individuals as possession of nationality is essential for full participation in society and a prerequisite for the full enjoyment of fundamental human rights. Furthermore, statelessness may contribute to insecurity within the state. Populations who are denied the protection of a nationality often lead highly marginalized lives, which renders them vulnerable to exploitation by criminal groups, increases the risk of human trafficking and political radicalization and threatens the stability of the state.

The right to nationality is a fundamental human right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in other international and regional human rights instruments to which ECOWAS Member States are party, including the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

3. Context

In February 2015, the 15 ECOWAS Member States met in Abidjan, Cote d’Ivoire, and adopted the landmark Abidjan Declaration, recognizing that statelessness is a scourge in West Africa and committing to a set of measures to end this phenomenon by 2024. Important progress has been made toward its implementation, reflecting the strong commitment and engagement of the Member States.

In order to operationalize the measures set out in the Abidjan Declaration, ECOWAS has developed a draft 8-year Plan of Action, which sets forth a common policy framework and elaborates concrete actions and timeframes to end statelessness in the ECOWAS region. The document was drafted in consultation with UNHCR, as the agency mandated by the UN General Assembly to assist States in the prevention and reduction of statelessness. The Plan of Action will be a critical step to translate the commitments of the Abidjan Declaration into action.

In accordance with ECOWAS procedures and practice, the draft must be reviewed and approved at technical level by experts, and then by the sectoral minister responsible for nationality issues, prior to being submitted for approval by the ECOWAS Council of Ministers and the Summit of Heads of State and Government.

4. Objectives and expected outcomes of the Meeting

- Share best practices and take stock of developments related to the eradication of statelessness;
- Enable experts from ECOWAS Member States to review and validate the draft Plan of Action;
- Present and submit the draft Plan of Action to sectoral ministers for adoption;
- Provide a common policy framework to end statelessness in the ECOWAS region.

5. Organizational arrangements and participation

The Meeting will take place from 7-9 May 2017 (TBC) in Banjul, The Gambia

The working languages of the Meeting will be English, French and Portuguese, for which interpretation will be provided.

Participation will comprise: Government focal points on statelessness, as nominated in application of Article 21 of the Abidjan Declaration; ECOWAS Ministers of sectoral ministries responsible for nationality issues; Relevant directorates of the ECOWAS Commission; UNHCR and international technical experts; Representatives of the African Union, the African commission for People's and Human Rights, UN agencies and other international organizations.

6. Proposed agenda

On 7 and 8 May 2017, experts will take part in a technical meeting to review the draft Plan of Action, and come up with a final and concrete set of measures to end statelessness in the ECOWAS region by 2024. It will be followed on 9 May 2017 by a Ministerial-level Meeting,

during which ECOWAS Member States will take stock of the developments related to statelessness since the Abidjan Declaration and the Plan of Action will be put forward for adoption.

Technical meeting of experts (7-8 May)

Review and inputs to the draft Plan of Action

Ministerial meeting (9 May)

- Statements by Ministers and representatives of regional and international organizations
- Adoption of the Plan of action