



## WEST AFRICA BECOMES THE 1ST REGION IN THE WORLD TO ADOPT A REGIONAL PLAN OF ACTION

### A new milestone in the fight against statelessness

After the three-day regional ministerial level meeting hosted by the Government of the Gambia and jointly organized [by ECOWAS and UNHCR](#), the 15 ECOWAS Member States reviewed and validated a regional plan of action to eradicate statelessness by 2024, now referred to as the “[Banjul Plan of Action](#)”.

During the first two days of the meeting, the 15 Government focal points for statelessness issues, designated under Article 22 of the [Abidjan Declaration](#), reviewed the plan of action, which elaborates concrete measures and specific timeframes that aim at resolving obstacles to the acquisition of nationality in the region.

The Banjul Plan of Action was validated on 9 May 2017 by the 15 ministers responsible for nationality issues. It was then adopted at the ECOWAS Council of Ministers, in Monrovia, Liberia, on 2 June 2017 and thereby became a legally binding document. Through this bold effort, West Africa confirms its worldwide leadership in the fight against statelessness.

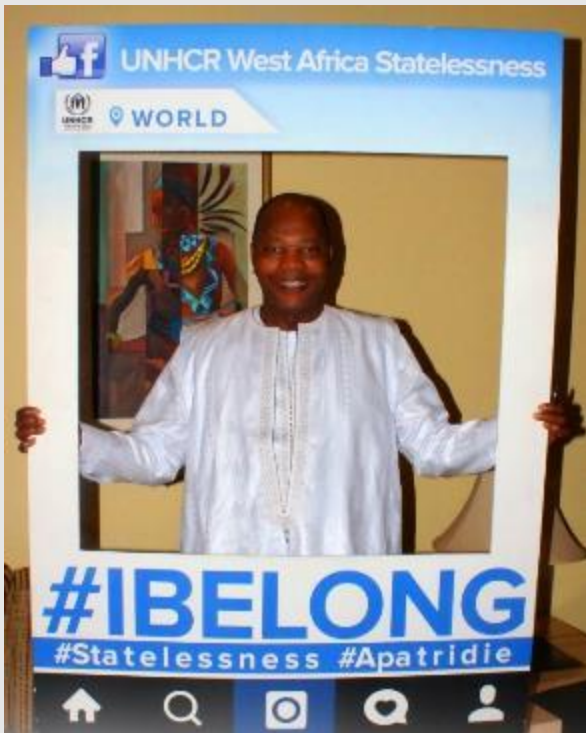


Participants at the ministerial meeting. ©UNHCR/Stéphane Diéné



Graffiti wall painted during the Ministerial Meeting and signed by all participants ©UNHCR/Stéphane Diéné

High-level participants included the Vice-President of the Gambia, Ms. Fatoumata Jallow Tambajang, who commended the region’s determination “to address the root causes of statelessness”; the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for West Africa and the Sahel, Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, who stressed the importance of putting in place a robust regional institutional and legal framework to eradicate statelessness; the Assistant High Commissioner for Refugees (Protection), Mr. Volker Türk, who highlighted the exemplary commitment of the ECOWAS Member States in validating this “unique and inspiring” plan of action .



Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for West Africa and the Sahel, strong supporter of the UNHCR #Ibelong campaign ©UNHCR/Stéphane Diéné



Mr. Volker Türk, Assistant High Commissioner for Refugees (Protection) ©UNHCR/Stéphane Diéné

Representatives of other international organizations, such as UNICEF, UNFPA and the World Bank, were also present and reaffirmed their commitment in the fight against statelessness.

The validation of the Banjul Plan of Action drew the attention of national, African and international medias. Further articles and media resources are available [here](#). Two videos also offer a unique insight into [the expert meeting](#) and [ministerial meeting](#).



On the evening of the third day, celebrating the validation of the Banjul Plan of Action ©UNHCR/Stéphane Diéné



Mr. Mai Ahmad Fatty-, Minister of Interior of the Republic of the Gambia; Ms. Fatimata Dia Sow, ECOWAS Commissioner for Social Affairs and Gender and Ms. Liz Ahua, UNHCR Regional Representative for West Africa welcoming the validation of the Banjul Plan of Action. ©UNHCR/Stephane Diéné

## The Banjul Plan of Action: An important step towards the implementation of the Abidjan Declaration

The Banjul Plan of Action represents a new tool to help eradicate statelessness in the ECOWAS region by 2024. It operationalizes the commitments made in the 2015 Abidjan Declaration and is underpinned by six objectives:



*Legal, policy and institutional frameworks for eradicating statelessness*



*Quantitative and qualitative data on statelessness*



*Free movement of stateless people, integration and protection*



*Advocacy and sensitization*



*Access to proof of nationality*



*Operational monitoring and follow-up mechanisms*



### BANJUL PLAN OF ACTION OF THE ECONOMIC COMMUNITY OF WEST AFRICAN STATES (ECOWAS) ON THE ERADICATION OF STATELESSNESS 2017 – 2024

#### CONTEXT:

Globally, millions of people including hundreds of thousands in West Africa are not considered nationals by any State and are thus stateless, which limits their enjoyment of the full range of human rights. Among the causes of statelessness in West Africa are gaps in nationality laws and policies that leave some people without recognition of the nationality of any State. Even though there is no comprehensive legal framework to address these gaps, significant efforts have been made by ECOWAS Member States to respond to the issue, by amongst others, acceding to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and/or the 1981 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness in the Region.

Likewise, the Authority of Heads of State and Government has adopted Protocols further to the Revised Treaty of ECOWAS which address some dimensions of statelessness including the 1979 Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, the Right of Residence and Establishment and the 1982 Protocol relating to the definition of a Community Citizen.

The Abidjan Declaration is a historical instrument and a milestone in the fight against statelessness in West Africa. The Declaration was adopted during the first Ministerial Conference on Statelessness in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, jointly organized by ECOWAS and UNHCR in February 2015. The Abidjan Declaration recognizes that statelessness is a significant issue in the region and sets out 25 specific measures, primarily addressed to ECOWAS Member States, on how to put an end to statelessness by 2024. The conference also resulted in the adoption of 82 recommendations on how to implement the commitments made. The Abidjan Declaration was endorsed by all Heads of States in May 2015 in Accra, Ghana, during the ECOWAS Summit.

The ECOWAS Plan of Action on Eradication of Statelessness 2017-2024 is based on the commitments and recommendations made in the Abidjan Declaration, the Conclusions and Recommendations and in the Communiqué, and therefore strictly follows the

## KEY ACHIEVEMENTS AND EXCHANGE OF BEST PRACTICES

The Ministers of the 15 ECOWAS Member States responsible for nationality issues took stake of the progress made to date in the fight against statelessness, as reflected in the [joint statement](#). Key developments include the inclusion in the civil registration systems of thousands of people (Senegal, Benin, and Côte d'Ivoire), studies underway to map the nature, form and extent of statelessness (Benin, Gambia, Mali); new accessions to the Statelessness Conventions (Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Burkina Faso); the protection of stateless people (Liberia), etc...

## ABIDJAN COMMITMENTS TRANSLATED INTO ACTION

### Developing national plans of action– art. 24

- In **Guinea**, the National Plan of Action for the eradication of statelessness was officially adopted by presidential decree on 21 April 2017.

**Sierra Leone** developed a National Plan of Action for the eradication of statelessness at a three-day workshop organised by the Ministry of Interior, with the support of UNHCR and the National Commission for Human Rights. The event was attended by the President and representatives of the Parliament, key ministries and civil society. The workshop was opened by the Minister of Interior, who underscored the critical importance of the fight against statelessness.



The Minister of Interior of Sierra Leone surrounded by the participants ©Senthon Kargbo/NaCSA

- In **Burkina Faso**, the National Plan of action is expected to be approved soon by the government. The Plan was validated in May 2017 by the National Commission for Development Planning and submitted to the General Secretariat of the Government for adoption by decree.
- In **Guinea-Bissau**, the Ministry of Justice, with the support of UNHCR, organized a strategic workshop in June 2017 to review the National Plan of Action in light with the Banjul Plan of Action.

### Reducing statelessness - art. 18

- In **Niger**, on 20 April 2017, the Ministry of Interior validated the draft document for the [Administrative and Humanitarian Census Project \(RADH\)](#). This innovative project represents a critical step for the eradication of stateless in the Diffa region, which hosts around 250,000 displaced persons (IDPs and refugees). Approximately 85% of the population lacks documentation proving their identity or nationality. This biometric registration initiative provides a critical foundation for an effective civil registration system.
- In **Burkina Faso**, the risks of statelessness are particularly high in border regions with Mali and Niger. These areas were formerly disputed territories and are today still characterized by important migratory flows. A large part of the population has no nationality or evidence of nationality. UNHCR organized a training for administrative and judicial authorities in the Eastern and Sahel regions, after which the participants committed to advocate against statelessness and in particular to encourage people to make use of mobile courts in order to register and obtain civil documentation.

## Enable stateless persons to obtain a legal status – art. 16

- In **Liberia**, UNHCR conducted a training for the Liberian Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC), which works with stateless persons, on *statelessness status determination* in order to strengthen protection of stateless persons.

## Ensuring birth registration - art. 6

- In **Côte d'Ivoire**, in April and May 2017, UNHCR organized four training sessions for authorities involved in the birth registration process (registrars, ENA civil servant students) and persons known for their awareness-raising skills (religious and community leaders, teachers, etc.), with a view to helping ensure every child is registered at birth.

## Conducting sensitization campaigns– art. 10

**Côte d'Ivoire** – On 21 April 2017, UNHCR launched a large-scale, roving awareness-raising campaign. The caravan travelled throughout the country and made stops in Abidjan, San Pedro, Bouaké, Bondoukou, Korhogo, and Odienne. In order to raise public interest, UNHCR insisted on interaction and entertainment. Awareness messages on statelessness were delivered through musical, dance and theatrical performances, film projections and Q&A sessions with the public. The activities, which were attended by more than 300 spectators, drew the attention of the [local media](#) and television.



Open-air sensitization activities on statelessness  
©UNHCR/Côte d'Ivoire



Baydi of the famous group Bideew Bou Bess, strong supporter of the UNHCR #Ibelong campaign  
©UNHCR/Salomé Moulineuf

**Sénégal** – [UNHCR high-profile supporter](#), Bideew Bou Bess, placed statelessness at the heart of the celebration he organized on the National Independence Day with the Ministry of Culture. The event centred on the themes of citizenship and social cohesion. Bideew Bou Bess staged a [discussion panel](#) on statelessness, managed an [awareness-raising stand](#) and performed his single [“I Belong”](#) during a concert broadcasted on national television. More than 300 signatures were collected for the #IBELONG campaign. Bideew Bou Bess, a long-standing partner of UNHCR, reaffirmed its support for the fight against statelessness in front of an interested audience and attentive medias.

## Improving access to proof of nationality – art. 7

- In **Mali**, UNHCR continues to implement [its naturalisation project for refugees at risk of statelessness in the Kayes region](#), which aims to simplify administrative procedures. To this end, UNHCR conducted working sessions with local

authorities, including the town council, the tribunal of Kayes and the governorate, and provide refugees with information on administrative procedures.

- In **Benin** UNHCR and ABeGIEF (National Agency for the integration of border areas) supported the reinforcement of birth registration systems in five border zones presenting high risks of statelessness. The activity consisted of providing ten municipalities with IT kits (computers, software for digitizing birth certificates) to regularize the births of some 28,000 people.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

- In **Benin**, the Ministry of Justice and UNHCR plan to gather actors involved in the fight against statelessness to take stock of the implementation of the National Plan of Action and review the document in light of the Banjul Plan of Action.

## ONLINE PLATFORMS



Visit our new website dedicated to the Banjul meeting: [www.unhcr.org/ecowas2017](http://www.unhcr.org/ecowas2017) to access key meeting documents, speeches, the Banjul Plan of Action, media resources, and a selection of photos and videos.

Enjoy!

## STATELESSNESS IN THE NEWS

- West Africa adopts a Plan of Action to end statelessness ([Regional – French](#))
- Over 40 million children unregistered in West Africa ([Regional- English](#))
- The Benefits of Biometrics in Fight against Statelessness ([Regional- English](#))
- A discussion panel on statelessness at a festival on citizenship ([Senegal-French](#))
- Sierra Leone about to adopt a National Plan of Action ([Sierra Leone-English](#))
- Increasing risks of statelessness in Nigeria with the ongoing crisis in the north eastern part of the country ([Nigeria-English](#))
- Appeal to student consciousness on nationality issues ([Côte d’Ivoire-French](#))
- The consequences of statelessness on a daily basis: Interview with a stateless person ([Senegal-French](#))

## LOOKING FOR MORE?

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For further 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;
- Documents from the [Ministerial Meeting](#) on Statelessness in the ECOWAS region in 2017;
- [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](mailto:sendawas@unhcr.org).



[www.unhcr.org/statelessness](http://www.unhcr.org/statelessness)

[unhcr.org/ecowas2015/](http://unhcr.org/ecowas2015/)

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



[kora.unhcr.org](http://kora.unhcr.org)

[www.unhcr.org/ibelong/](http://www.unhcr.org/ibelong/)



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