

Key figures

- 15,000 Syrian newborns registered with UNHCR (March 2011-December 2013)
- 25% Newborns with registered birth certificates*
- 38% Newborns unable to obtain registered birth certificates as parents lack required civil registration documentation *

*Based upon a survey of 1,882 newborns registered with UNHCR in August and September 2013.

Excerpt from information leaflet on birth registration for children



December Developments

- Refugee parents of 700 newborns received individual counselling on birth registration.
- Photography classes for 12 stateless children continued in December. They are preparing photo stories for publication and an exhibition to further raise awareness on the importance of access to nationality.
- 12 test cases on marriage registration were finalised this month. The results are being published in a manual providing information on the steps that should be followed to ensure proper registration in the civil registry and with the Ministry of Interior. Marriage registration of parents is necessary for registering the birth of a child.

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 have limited access to healthcare, education and social services, as well as to the labour market. They are unable to move freely and face risks of detention and arrest. In addition, unregistered persons have no civil status records with the authorities and are unable to register births and marriages.

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. Some refugees arrive in Lebanon with unconfirmed nationality, or without documents proving their nationality. This includes Syrian Kurds who were denaturalized in Syria in 1962. Non-Kurdish stateless from Syria may lack nationality due to gaps in Syria's national legislation or lack of access to civil registration procedures. In

addition, despite the fact that 16,000 Syrian refugees have been born in Lebanon, indications are that birth registration levels are extremely low. According to an initial survey conducted earlier this year, 75% of 1,882 refugee newborns do not possess an official birth certificate.

Gaps in Legislative and Administrative Framework:

Gaps in the legislative and administrative framework in Lebanon create new cases of statelessness and prevent historic cases from being resolved. The highly politicized nature of nationality issues in Lebanon presents a barrier to reform.

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 on her children in exceptional circumstances, meaning that children whose fathers are unknown or have unclear nationality can become stateless. Provisions allowing for naturalization are generally not applied to stateless persons and neither are safeguards against statelessness at birth.

Not all children are registered at birth in Lebanon. This is despite the fact that Lebanon is a signatory to the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which require the registration of the birth of every child and reaffirm a child's right to a nationality. Barriers to birth registration include a relatively 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, which are focused broadly

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 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 situation for stateless persons. The Lebanese Ministries of Interior, Justice, Health, Education and Social Affairs have appointed statelessness focal points. These representatives are engaged with UNHCR bilaterally and are also participating in working groups on statelessness.

Direct Assistance: UNHCR is assisting Syrian refugees (and refugees of other nationalities) to access birth registration procedures in Lebanon. UNHCR engages in advocacy and awareness raising activities to promote birth registration among Syrian refugees. Together with UNICEF, UNHCR developed an animated film on birth registration to be shown at registration sites and community centres (available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39ape83HiZE&feature=youtu.be>). UNHCR also works on individual cases with persons at risk of statelessness to assist in confirming their nationality status. UNHCR has started work on developing a legal aid network on statelessness. In 2013, as a pilot project, twelve marriage registration test cases were assisted. The longer-term project will support strategic litigation and information counseling to assist with prevention and reduction of statelessness.

UNHCR implementing partners

Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).