

ABIDJAN DECLARATION ON THE ERADICATION OF STATELESSNESS

Adopted on February 2015 by the Member States of ECOWAS, the Declaration supports UNHCR's global campaign to end statelessness by 2024

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE ABIDJAN DECLARATION 2 YEARS AFTER

ACCESSION TO THE STATELESSNESS CONVENTIONS (ART. 4, 14)

Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone and Mali acceded to both Conventions after the Abidjan Declaration. Twelve out of fifteen West Africa countries have now acceded to the 1954 Convention while eleven have become party to the 1961 Convention. In addition, following a vote by its parliament, Burkina Faso will soon become the 12th State to accede to the 1961 Convention.

DEVELOPING NATIONAL ACTION PLANS TO END STATELESSNESS (ART. 24)

With the exception of Cape Vert, Niger and Sierra Leone all countries in the region have developed plans of action to end statelessness. The Gambia and Benin have formally approved their plans at Ministerial level while Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea have taken steps to complete the same process.

REVISING NATIONALITY LAWS (ART. 2, 3)

States have committed to reform constitutional, legislative and institutional regimes related to nationality in order to include appropriate safeguards against statelessness. The following seven countries are in the process of revising their nationality legislation: Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Liberia, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

IMPROVE INFORMATION AND DATA COLLECTION (ART. 1, 15)

States recognized the urgency to obtain information on the causes of statelessness and affected population. Studies have been completed in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire and are ongoing in Benin, Gambia, Ghana, Mali and Nigeria.

REDUCING STATELESSNESS (ART. 18)

So far, 45,000 persons who are stateless or at risk of statelessness have received identity documents in West Africa since the Abidjan Declaration, including 34,000 birth certificates issued mainly in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire and Mali, and 10,550 nationality certificates issued in Côte d'Ivoire.

FOCAL POINT ON STATELESSNESS (ART.22)

All States have fulfilled their commitment to designate a focal point on statelessness.

PROTOCOL ON THE RIGHT TO A NATIONALITY (ART.5)

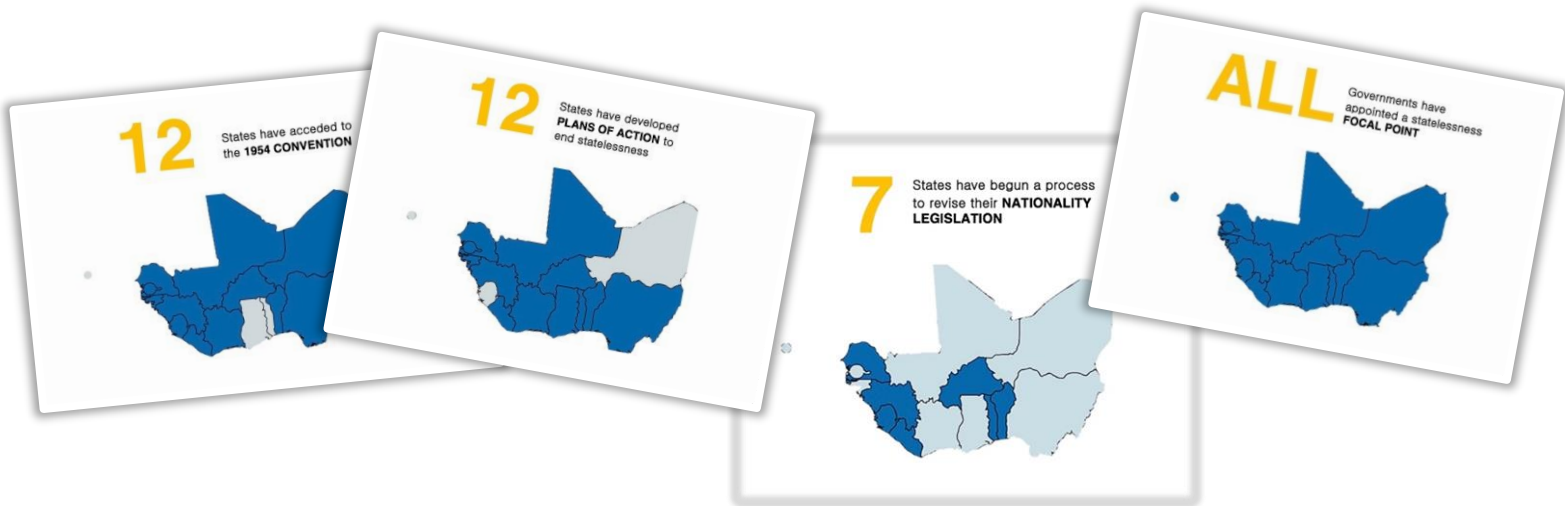
Following a request by ECOWAS States, AU Heads of States and Government approved the examination of a draft protocol on the eradication of statelessness by the African Union.



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NEXT STEPS

BINDING REGIONAL PLAN OF ACTION

ECOWAS has developed a regional plan of action to end statelessness which is expected to be submitted to member States in the upcoming months. If approved, the regional plan will be a major step forward as West Africa will have a legally binding instrument on the eradication of statelessness.

REGULAR EXCHANGE WITH GOVERNMENT

All 15 States in West Africa have appointed a statelessness focal point. UNHCR has organized a regional workshop to strengthen their expertise and to better define their roles. It is vital that country offices constantly engage with focal points to implement and follow-up on activities.

ADOPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL ACTION PLANS

The Abidjan Declaration and the global campaign to end statelessness provide for the development of national action plans. Even though most countries in the region have developed their strategies, more needs to be done in order to officially adopt and implement them. Each country has its own internal process of adoption i.e. Guinea intends to adopt it at Presidency level.

CONTINUOUS SENSITIZATION EFFORTS

Efforts to capture public attention need to be continuous. At least twice a year - on the occasions of the #IBELONG global campaign on 4 November and the Abidjan Declaration on 25 February - awareness raising activities should take place. Some good practices are: engaging with artists, broadcasting messages on TV and radio, open air sensitization activities and press conferences.

PARTNERSHIPS

Building partnerships with civil society and education institutions is key. Civil society organizations can provide guidance and legal assistance to persons of concern. Universities and researchers can provide government authorities with tools and expertise to implement obligations.

COLLECT DATA ON BIRTH REGISTRATION

The lack of birth registration is not the same as statelessness, yet it heightens the risk of leaving someone without a nationality. UNHCR should start to systematically collect information on government efforts and developments regarding birth registration, especially late birth certificates.