

## Statelessness Update

## June 2014

### Key figures

- 29,170** Syrian newborns registered – (March 2011- June 2014)
- 72%** Syrian newborns lack official birth certificates\*
- 42%** Syrian newborns lack official birth certificates because their parents lack documentation required by civil registries\*

\* This is based on a survey of 5,779 newborns registered with UNHCR between 1 August 2013 and 31 January 2014.

### Excerpt from information leaflet on birth registration





Animated film on birth registration available at:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=39ape83HiZE&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39ape83HiZE&feature=youtu.be)

### June developments

- The Statelessness Unit counselled 947 individuals on birth registration.
- The Statelessness Unit met with mukhtars and religious authorities to gather information on diverse procedures for concluding and registering marriages. This information will contribute to awareness-raising products on marriage registration.
- The Statelessness Unit finalised a contract for the production of a TV spot and radio spot on birth registration to be launched later this year.

### Achievements: January - June

Activity	 Reached January-June	 2014 Target
Individuals receiving information on birth registration	18,756	22,000
Families of newborns provided with individual counselling on birth registration	5,629	9,000
Training on birth registration with officials and front-liners	299	600
Individuals provided with legal assistance for civil registration/ nationality cases	375	1,000

### 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 and social services, as well as 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. Stateless refugees in Lebanon include Syrian Kurds who were denaturalised 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. A number of groups of individuals may find themselves at risk of statelessness in Lebanon. Over time, migrants and refugees may lose links to their country of nationality. In addition, despite the fact that 29,000 Syrian refugees have been born in Lebanon, indications are that birth registration levels are extremely low. According to a survey of 5,779 Syrian newborns, 72% 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 as well as prevent longstanding cases from being resolved. The highly politicised 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 stateless will inherit this status despite having a Lebanese mother. Provisions allowing for naturalisation 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.

- **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 to access birth registration procedures in Lebanon. UNHCR has started work on developing a legal aid network on statelessness to assist unregistered persons of Lebanese origin to access Lebanese nationality. This work has included documenting test cases on marriage registration to inform strategic litigation and information counselling to assist with prevention and reduction of statelessness.

## UNHCR implementing partners

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