



Ending Statelessness Within 10 Years

Good
Practices
Paper

Action 9

Acceding to the UN Statelessness Conventions

UNHCR is publishing a series of Good Practices Papers to help States, with the support of other stakeholders, achieve the goals of its Campaign to End Statelessness within 10 Years. These goals are to:

Resolve the major
situations of statelessness
that exist today

Prevent the
emergence of new cases
of statelessness

Improve the identification
and protection of
stateless populations

Each Good Practices Paper corresponds to one of the 10 Actions proposed in UNHCR's *Global Action Plan to End Statelessness: 2014 - 2024* and highlights examples of how States, UNHCR and other stakeholders have addressed statelessness in a number of countries. Solutions to the problem of statelessness have to be tailored to suit the particular circumstances prevalent in a country. As such, these examples are not intended to serve as a blueprint for strategies to counter statelessness everywhere. However, governments, NGOs, international organizations and UNHCR staff seeking to implement the *Global Action Plan* will be able to adapt the ideas they find in these pages to their own needs.

Background

Action 9 of the *Global Action Plan* calls on States to accede to the UN Statelessness Conventions. Statelessness remains a significant global issue even though two international treaties exist to prevent and reduce the phenomenon and protect stateless persons. The 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons (1954 Statelessness Convention) sets out the definition of a stateless person and prescribes minimum standards for his or her treatment, while the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness (1961 Statelessness Convention) establishes the rules that States must follow to prevent statelessness at birth and later in life. Increasing the number of States that are party to these Conventions will bolster the effort to end statelessness worldwide.

Too few States are party to the Statelessness Conventions, yet increasing this number will have a direct impact on resolving statelessness. States that accede¹ to the Conventions typically do so while undertaking

¹ This document generally refers to accession as the means by which States agree to become parties to the 1954 and 1961 Statelessness Conventions. Please note that the 1954 and 1961 Conventions closed for signature on 31 December 1955 and 31 May 1962, respectively. As a result, the only States that can ratify the Conventions are those which signed before those dates. All other States must accede in order to become parties.

other initiatives to address statelessness, such as reforming nationality laws, conducting surveys of stateless populations and creating statelessness determination procedures as required by the 1954 Convention. Encouraging a State to accede to the Statelessness Conventions can involve engagement with a wide range of stakeholders at the national level, including politicians, government officials, community organizations and civil-society groups. UNHCR, which received the request to actively promote accessions from the UN General Assembly in 1995, must play a leading role in this effort.²

UNHCR seized upon the unique opportunity provided by the commemoration in 2011 of the 50th anniversary of the 1961 Convention to boost its advocacy for accessions to the Statelessness Conventions. These efforts have resulted in 47 additional States party to the Statelessness Conventions since the start of 2011. At a Ministerial Meeting in December 2011 in Geneva, 32 States pledged to accede to the 1961 Statelessness Convention and 22 to accede to the 1954 Statelessness Convention,³ and 44 States have accepted recommendations to accede in the context of the Universal Periodic Review under the auspices of the UN Human Rights Council.

Where States are interested in working towards accession to the Statelessness Conventions but lack the capacity to initiate the process, UNHCR can help, usually in coordination with national authorities and civil society, and sometimes regional organizations or UN partners. Such assistance could include:

- **Sensitizing a country's political leadership** to the importance of addressing statelessness. This could be done, for instance, by senior managers of UNHCR by way of encouraging accession when visiting countries that are not party to the Conventions or by sending letters to government counterparts
- Studying the **compatibility of** national legislation and jurisprudence with the Statelessness Conventions and related human rights standards and discussing the findings with government and civil-society actors
- Organizing **joint UNHCR and government round-table discussions** at the national and/or regional level(s)
- Translating and launching with national parliaments **UNHCR's brochures on the Statelessness Conventions** and *Nationality and Statelessness: A Handbook for Parliamentarians*, a **joint publication of UNHCR** and the **Inter-Parliamentary Union**
- Engaging with the **government entities responsible for treaty approval** at the national level
- Pursuing **follow-up activities** with States that have acceded to either or both of the Conventions to translate its international treaty obligations into concrete legislation and policies

Below are highlighted some key elements of successful efforts by UNHCR to promote accession to the 1954 and 1961 Statelessness Conventions in the Philippines, Croatia and West Africa. A number of good practices emerge from these case studies and could be replicated in States that have pledged to accede to the Conventions.

² UN General Assembly Resolution A/Res/50/152 of 21 December 1995.

³ For a full list of States which made pledges, as well as an update of implementation, please see UNHCR, *Draft Overview of Pledges [Extracts Relating to Statelessness]*, 1 August 2013, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/52428fa04.html>

The Philippines

HIGHLIGHTS OF PROMOTION EFFORTS

- **Statelessness issues were incorporated into a Comprehensive Needs Assessment and Framework for Cooperation** of the Philippines' Department of Justice Refugee Processing Unit.
- The Government of the Philippines and UNHCR convened a series of **inter-agency round-table discussions on statelessness** during which the compatibility of the 1954 and 1961 Statelessness Conventions with Philippine law and jurisprudence was analyzed.
- Legal representatives from the Philippine Government were included in two **UNHCR expert meetings on doctrinal issues** arising from the Statelessness Conventions.
- UNHCR promoted the inclusion of statelessness issues in the remit of the **ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR)**.
- The Philippines deposited its **instrument of ratification of the 1954 Statelessness Convention on 22 September 2011** (It signed the Convention in 1955).
- UNHCR continues to collaborate with the Philippine Government **to implement the 1954 Convention** through the adoption of a statelessness determination procedure, the issuance of a Procedural Standards Manual as well as through conducting surveys to identify stateless populations in the Philippines.
- The Philippines submitted a **pledge** at the December 2011 Ministerial Meeting to work towards **accession to the 1961 Statelessness Convention**.

The Philippines' ratifies the 1954 Statelessness Convention

Though the Philippines was one of the States that signed the 1954 Statelessness Convention shortly after it was adopted, it still had not ratified the Convention after more than five decades. 2011 marked the 30th anniversary of the Philippines' historic accession to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. In the context of its ongoing collaboration with the Philippines government, UNHCR's national office in Manila redoubled its efforts to raise awareness of statelessness in the lead-up to the 2011 commemorations of both the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1961 Statelessness Convention, underscoring the fact that the Philippines had already signed the 1954 Statelessness Convention. Moreover, UNHCR and the Philippines' Ministry of Justice provided an example of a creative campaign to promote accessions to the Statelessness Conventions through its "adopt my sister" campaign which highlighted the parallel protection needs of stateless people and refugees.

In 2010, UNHCR and the Department of Justice Refugee Processing Unit (RPU) engaged in a Global Needs Assessment (GNA) to identify solutions to gaps in the Philippines' protection policy and legal framework as well as capacity-building priorities of the government for 2010-2011. Through this process, addressing statelessness in the Philippines was identified and selected as an integral theme of the plans. Ratification of the 1954 Statelessness Convention was the first concrete outcome of the strategic policy framework developed through the GNA and the direct result of collaboration between the Philippine Government and UNHCR.

At the national level, UNHCR and the Department of Justice convened an inter-agency working group that brought together legal experts from both bodies, including the latter's Refugee Processing Unit. The working group also included high level representatives of the Office of the Solicitor General, Bureau of Immigration, the Commission on Human Rights, the Office of the President and the departments of Foreign Affairs, Labour and Social Welfare and Development. UNHCR and the Department of Justice also co-organized two inter-agency round-table discussions on statelessness in October 2010 and May 2011, respectively. Analyses of the compatibility of Philippine law and jurisprudence with the 1954 and 1961 Conventions provided a basis for discussion.



Switzerland, 7 December 2011 / UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres congratulating the representative from the Philippines on the country's ratification of the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons (which took place on 22 September 2011) at UNHCR's ministerial conference on the world's forcibly displaced and stateless, at the Palais des Nations, Geneva. © UNHCR / Jean-Marc Ferré

Parallel to these efforts at the national level, UNHCR included Philippine representatives in a number of events to raise awareness of statelessness at the regional and international levels. For instance, Philippine government representatives participated in two expert meetings examining doctrinal issues arising under the 1954 and 1961 Conventions organized by UNHCR in 2010 and 2011. At the regional level, UNHCR invited four participants from the Government and civil society to an October 2010 regional expert meeting on Good Practices for the Identification, Prevention and Reduction of Statelessness and the Protection of Stateless Persons in South-East Asia. Following this event, UNHCR collaborated with the AICHR, and especially the Philippines' representative to this regional human rights body, to increase awareness of the need to resolve statelessness in South-East Asia.

Based on the conclusions of the inter-agency round-table discussions in 2010 and 2011, all the concerned agencies of the Government issued their Certificates of Concurrence for the ratification of the 1954 Statelessness Convention and the President signed the instrument of ratification on 30 May 2011. The Philippines became party to the Convention on 22 September 2011, when it deposited its instrument of ratification at the United Nations Annual Treaty Event in New York.

Implementing the 1954 Convention and working towards accession to the 1961 Convention

The ratification of the 1954 Convention was but the first step in the Philippine Government's efforts to address statelessness in a comprehensive manner.⁴ In July 2011, UNHCR organized a Refugee Status and Statelessness Determination Workshop to help the Government implement its new obligations under the 1954 Convention. The workshop discussed the establishment of a statelessness determination procedure and involved new members of the Department of Justice Refugee Processing Unit and representatives from policy and operational units of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Bureau of Immigration and the Committee Secretariat of the House of Representatives. In October 2011 UNHCR facilitated an observation mission by a small Philippine delegation to Hungary and Spain to learn from these countries' experiences in implementing the 1954 Convention, including frameworks for statelessness determination.

The Department of Justice then developed a draft circular proposing elements of a statelessness determination procedure and sought UNHCR's technical assistance on the draft to ensure its compliance with the 1954 Convention and related UNHCR guidelines. On 18 October 2012 the Philippines adopted a statelessness determination procedure,⁵ the first of its kind in Asia. The Government plans to draft a Procedural Standards Manual to aid implementation of the new procedure.

In addition to implementing its obligations under the 1954 Convention, the Government has initiated the process of acceding to the 1961 Statelessness Convention. A third inter-agency round table convened by UNHCR and the Government in November 2011 discussed a study that examined the compatibility of the 1961 Statelessness Convention with the Philippines' legal framework. The Government is committed to fulfilling its pledge to accede to the 1961 Convention and will work to harmonize the statelessness-prevention safeguards of the 1961 Convention with the rules on nationality contained in legislation and in the Constitution.

⁴ At the December 2011 Ministerial Meeting, the Philippines submitted pledges to develop the policy and operational framework to address statelessness to meet its obligations under the 1954 Convention, initiate the process of accession to the 1961 Statelessness Convention, and continue a study of statelessness in the Philippines, among other protection-related pledges. The full text of the Philippines' pledge is included in UNHCR, *Pledges 2011: Ministerial Intergovernmental Event on Refugees and Stateless Persons (Geneva, Palais des Nations, 7-8 December 2011)*, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/4ff55a319.html>

⁵ Please see Department Circular No. 058 - Establishing the Refugees and Stateless Status Determination Procedure [Philippines], 18 October 2012, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/5086932e.html>

Croatia

HIGHLIGHTS OF PROMOTION EFFORTS

- In 2008 UNHCR developed a **dual-track strategy**, campaigning for Croatia's **accession to the 1961 Statelessness Convention** while simultaneously continuing to implement its **operational programming** to prevent and reduce statelessness, particularly among the Roma.
- The Croatian version of the **UNHCR / Inter-Parliamentary Union publication, *Nationality and Statelessness: A Handbook for Parliamentarians* was launched in Parliament** in December 2009. In 2011, UNHCR advocated on statelessness issues with the **Croatian Government using Croatian-language versions of the two UNHCR Brochures on the Statelessness Conventions**.
- A European Commission-funded **social inclusion project** supported a strategic partnership between UNHCR and the Croatian Ombudsman's Office to dispatch **mobile legal clinics to Roma communities**. The clinics helped individuals to obtain the documentation necessary to acquire nationality.
- Croatia deposited its instrument of **accession to the 1961 Convention** at a treaty event at UN Headquarters in New York **on 22 September 2011**.
- Following its accession to the Convention, Croatia hosted a **regional conference on Provision of Civil Documentation and Registration in South-Eastern Europe**. The **Zagreb Declaration** adopted at the conference underscored the commitment of all governments in the region to improve civil registration to prevent statelessness among the Roma. Croatia pledged at the 2011 Ministerial Meeting to undertake concrete measures to this end.

Behind-the-scene efforts to realize Croatia's accession to the 1961 Statelessness Convention

When Croatia emerged from the former Yugoslavia as an independent State, it became party to the 1954 Statelessness Convention by succession. Its accession to the 1961 Statelessness Convention in 2011 marked the culmination of a multi-year, dual-track strategy on the part of UNHCR that combined a campaign to promote accession to the Convention alongside the provision of technical support and assistance to prevent and reduce statelessness in Croatia, particularly among the Roma.

In 2008, UNHCR and the Council of Europe convened a round table entitled, "Regularization of the legal status of Roma: Progress achieved and remaining problems," which highlighted the persistence and scale of statelessness among Roma communities in Croatia. The meeting helped identify factors contributing to the creation of statelessness among Roma in the Western Balkans, including the legacy of displacement from the former Yugoslav republics, which renders it difficult for members of the community to obtain personal identification documents or otherwise prove important civil registration events related to nationality. The meeting concluded with a call for regional cooperation and flexible evidentiary rules to provide Roma with the civil documentation required to acquire nationality.

Mobilized by greater awareness of the challenges in addressing statelessness in Croatia, UNHCR embarked on its dual-track strategy in 2009. It forged relationships with government counterparts to raise awareness of the persistence of statelessness in Croatia. Focusing on the important role the Croatian Parliament plays in enacting legislation to address statelessness, UNHCR translated its joint publication with the Inter-Parliamentary Union entitled *Nationality and Statelessness: A Handbook for Parliamentarians* into Croatian and launched it in Parliament in December 2009 at an event presided over by the Deputy Speaker and featuring speakers from a range of political parties. Following on from this, UNHCR continued to work with parliamentarians and members of the Croatian Government to promote accession to the 1961 Statelessness Convention.

In 2009, UNHCR began to implement a regional project in the Western Balkans to promote the social inclusion of marginalized communities, particularly Roma. Under the project, which was supported by the European Commission, UNHCR partnered with the Croatian Ombudsman's office to provide free legal services to help Roma individuals surmount the challenges they face when trying to obtain birth certificates or other civil-registration documents necessary to prove nationality, thereby contributing to the prevention and reduction of statelessness in Croatia. UNHCR and the Croatian Ombudsman's office were able to document systemic obstacles in Croatia's legislation and civil-registration system that placed Roma at risk of statelessness. This in turn enabled the Ombudsman's office and UNHCR to advocate for reforms.

UNHCR convened a round table with the Ombudsman's Office and the Croatian Office for Ethnic Minorities in 2010 at which it was highlighted that high administrative fees, a lack of personal identity documents and low rates of birth registration were the leading causes of statelessness among Roma in Croatia. The European Commission's support for this project coincided with the European Union's increasing scrutiny of Croatia's record on social inclusion of Roma, including the prevention and reduction of statelessness in the community, through improved provision of civil registration documents.

That same year, the national office translated into Croatian the UNHCR Brochures, *Protecting the Rights of Stateless Persons: The 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons* and *Preventing and Reducing Statelessness: The 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness*, and used them for advocacy with the Government throughout 2011.

The year 2011 saw UNHCR's work yield positive results on several fronts. The Croatian Parliament adopted a Law on Promulgation of the 1961 Statelessness Convention and, on 22 September 2011, the Croatian President deposited his country's instrument of accession at the United Nations Annual Treaty Event in New York. In the regional context, Croatia's accession to the 1961 Convention was closely followed by that of Serbia, which acceded to the 1961 Convention on 7 December 2011.

Croatia demonstrated its commitment to resolving statelessness not only on its own territory but also in the region by hosting the Conference on Provision of Civil Documentation and Registration in South-Eastern Europe, co-convened in October 2011 by UNHCR, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. The conference resulted in a joint declaration by all participants calling for improvements in the provision of civil documentation to Roma communities through both national and regional collaborative efforts.⁶ Croatia also submitted a pledge at the December 2011 Ministerial Meeting confirming its commitment to further improve its legislative and administrative structures to facilitate the provision of civil documentation to Roma with the view to prevention and reduction of statelessness among these communities.⁷ UNHCR has continued to work with Croatia and other governments in the region in this regard with the ultimate goal of resolving statelessness.

⁶ UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Zagreb Declaration, 27 October 2011, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4fa2193e2.html>

⁷ The full text of Croatia's pledge is included in UNHCR, *Pledges 2011: Ministerial Intergovernmental Event on Refugees and Stateless Persons* (Geneva, Palais des Nations, 7-8 December 2011), available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/4ff55a319.html>

West Africa

HIGHLIGHTS OF PROMOTION EFFORTS

- Coordinated and sustained activities to promote accession to the Statelessness Conventions throughout the 2011 commemorations year included **high-level letters sent by the Assistant High Commissioner-Protection** that were **followed up by UNHCR's Regional Representation for West Africa (RRWA) in Dakar** at the national levels.
- UNHCR's Regional Representative sent *notes verbales* to all governments in the region in May 2011. **A training session on statelessness** was included for the first time in the **annual summer course on human rights and refugee law held in Cotonou, Benin** in July 2011. **A three-day awareness-raising seminar** on statelessness for government, civil-society and UNHCR representatives from nine Francophone West African countries was held in Dakar, Senegal, in November 2011.
- These efforts resulted in **the highest number of pledges related to statelessness of all UNHCR regional representations** at the 2011 Ministerial Meeting, including seven States that pledged to accede to one or both of the Statelessness Conventions, five States pledging reform of nationality laws to prevent statelessness, one State that pledged to improve the provision of civil registration to prevent statelessness and one pledged to undertake a study on statelessness.
- **Nigeria and Benin acceded to both Statelessness Conventions in 2011** and **Burkina Faso acceded to the 1954 Statelessness Convention in 2012**. **In 2013, Côte d'Ivoire acceded to both Statelessness Conventions**, while **Gambia deposited its instruments of accession to both Conventions in 2014**. **The same year, Guinea acceded to the 1961 Convention** and **Niger to the 1954 Convention**. Further progress in fulfilling additional pledges on accession is ongoing.
- A series of **UNHCR-convened regional meetings and seminars** since 2012 have led to strong resolutions and appeals to address statelessness.

Building momentum through UNHCR's Regional Representation for West Africa in Dakar

The 2011 commemorations efforts saw UNHCR's RRWA achieve considerable success in promoting accession to the Statelessness Conventions. The West Africa sub-region also counted the highest number of States making statelessness related pledges at the December 2011 Ministerial Meeting. Of the 15 countries covered by the RRWA, six (Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone and Togo) pledged to accede to both the 1954 and 1961 Statelessness Conventions. Guinea, which was already a State party to the 1954 Convention, submitted a pledge to accede to the 1961 Statelessness Convention.

The first State to accede to the Statelessness Conventions in the region was Nigeria, whose President personally deposited his country's instruments of accession to both Conventions at the United Nations Annual Treaty Event in New York in September 2011. Nigeria's lead in this regard may have encouraged other ECOWAS States to follow suit.

This success in promoting State commitment to address statelessness by acceding to the two Statelessness Conventions and an additional array of measures was the direct result of sustained advocacy in 2011 by the RRWA, combined with follow-up activities at the national level. In March 2011, UNHCR's Assistant High Commissioner-Protection (AHC-P) sent letters to all governments in the region encouraging them to mark the 50th anniversary of the 1961 Statelessness Convention by acceding to one or both of the Statelessness Conventions. The Regional Representative at RRWA followed up with *notes verbales* to government counterparts in the region on the importance of acceding to the Conventions. This combined outreach was successful in raising awareness of statelessness at the appropriate political levels in the governments in the region.

The RRWA then provided its government counterparts in the region with technical advice and training on how to tackle statelessness. The first opportunity to do so arose in July 2011 during the annual summer course on human rights and refugee law held in Cotonou, Benin, which targets Francophone States in West and Central Africa. The course, co-organized by UNHCR and the UNESCO Chair for Human Rights in Benin, brings together NGO and governmental partners and places particular emphasis on the participation of national human rights institutions. In 2011, UNHCR began incorporating a training module on statelessness into the curriculum.

Following the Regional Representative's *notes verbales* and the Cotonou summer course, the RRWA encouraged UNHCR country offices in the region to promote national follow-up, particularly highlighting the December 2011 Ministerial Meeting in Geneva as an opportunity to accede to the Statelessness Conventions or pledge to do so alongside other actions to resolve statelessness in this context. An important element of this outreach was the dissemination of the internal UNHCR analysis of each country's nationality laws in terms of compatibility with key provisions of the 1961 Statelessness Convention.

In light of the positive feedback received from its government counterparts, the RRWA organized the first ever regional awareness-raising seminar on statelessness. Held in November 2011 and targeting Francophone States in the region, the seminar brought together representatives of governments, national civil society and UNHCR country offices. The workshop not only introduced and explained fundamental concepts and practice related to statelessness, but also incorporated time for important break-out sessions that allowed the representatives from each country to concretely discuss the statelessness situation in their unique national contexts and propose recommendations for action plans to resolve statelessness at the national level. The general consensus upon the seminar's conclusion was that there was a need to improve legislative frameworks governing nationality in order to prevent statelessness throughout the region. Accepting the regional dimension of statelessness encouraged relevant actors to begin taking measures at the national level.

Successful accessions campaign in Benin

Benin was the first country to fulfill its pledge made at the December 2011 Ministerial Meeting to accede to both the 1954 and 1961 Statelessness Conventions. UNHCR's Benin country office followed the accession process closely from initial discussions in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and debate within the National Assembly to approval by the President and deposit of the instruments of accession, setting an example for other country offices to follow.

Upon receipt of the AHC-P's letter in March 2011 by Benin's Minister of Foreign Affairs, a legal affairs director of this Ministry wrote to the Commission on Foreign Relations, Development Cooperation, Defense and Security of the Beninese Parliament (National Assembly) recommending that it examine the compatibility of the two Statelessness Conventions, as well as the Kampala Convention on internally displaced persons, with Beninese law. In July 2011, the Commission recommended that the Beninese Parliament approve accession to the two Statelessness Conventions.

UNHCR's country office maintained contact with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Assembly to follow up on further progress regarding the Statelessness Conventions. As presidential and legislative elections were held in early 2011, UNHCR's Country Representative waited until after the new Cabinet and National Assembly took office to meet personally with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the newly elected President of the National Assembly.

In November 2011 the National Assembly adopted a law authorizing Benin's accession to the two Statelessness Conventions which was signed by the President. In parallel, Benin pledged to accede to the two Conventions in the lead-up to the 2011 Ministerial Meeting and deposited its instruments of accession on 8 December 2011. This coincided with the second and final day of the Ministerial Meeting, sending a clear statement to all participating States of the importance of fulfilling the pledges made in this forum.



Côte d'Ivoire, February 2015 / Signature of the Abidjan Declaration of Ministers of ECOWAS Member States on Eradication of Statelessness by Mr. Coulibaly G. Mamadou, Minister of Justice and Human Rights of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, in the presence of Mr. António Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and Dr. Fatimata Dia Sow, ECOWAS Commissioner in charge of Social Affairs. © UNHCR / Hien Macline

Maintaining momentum on further State action on statelessness in West Africa

With the high number of statelessness-related pledges taken in West Africa, there is much follow-up work to be done to ensure that States fulfill their commitments. This can come in the form of ongoing advocacy at the political level as well as by providing technical assistance on the modalities of acceding to the Statelessness Conventions. It could also include efforts to promote nationality law reform, improve civil-registration procedures and undertake studies on statelessness. As for further progress in West Africa since 2011, Burkina Faso and Niger deposited their instruments of accession to the 1954 Statelessness Convention while Guinea did so for the 1961 Convention. Côte d'Ivoire and Gambia acceded to both the 1954 and 1961 Statelessness Conventions.

Since 2012 UNHCR has convened a series of regional meetings and seminars in the region to sustain the momentum created by the accelerated rate of accessions. The African Union, which had pledged at UNHCR's 2011 Ministerial Meeting to raise awareness of statelessness, followed up on a 2012 symposium with the theme, "Preventing Statelessness, Preventing Conflicts", by working with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to raise the profile of the issue. The Commission subsequently adopted a resolution on the right to a nationality and has recently initiated a process to draft a protocol on the right to a nationality in Africa.

UNHCR also took steps to increase awareness of statelessness among key stakeholders in West Africa through a round table organized with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union in December 2013. The round table resulted in a declaration, the Banjul Appeal, which calls upon States, NGOs and regional and international organizations to take specific measures to prevent and reduce statelessness and improve the protection of stateless people. On 19 December 2014, UNHCR's RRWA held a one-week training session on statelessness in Dakar, Senegal, for more than 30 journalists from across the West African region. A wide range of issues was covered, including the rights of stateless people and the duties of States vis-à-vis stateless children, women and men. Most recently, in February 2015, 15 ECOWAS Member States adopted a Declaration to end statelessness in West Africa and pledged to undertake law reforms to prevent statelessness (Benin, Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone), naturalise stateless refugees born in the country (Mali) and accede to the statelessness conventions (Ghana, Mali and Togo).