

Key figures

- 24,197 Syrian newborns registered – (March 2011- April 2014)
- 72% Syrian newborns without official birth certificates*
- 42% Newborns unable to obtain official birth certificates as parents lack documentation required by civil registries*

* 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



April developments

- The statelessness unit provided individual counselling on birth registration to refugee parents of 450 Syrian newborns.
- The statelessness unit facilitated eight training sessions on birth registration throughout Lebanon. These sessions built the capacity of 191 staff of NGOs, primary healthcare centres and hospitals to provide counselling on birth registration to refugees.

Achievements: January - April

| Activity | Reached January-April | 2014 Target |
|--|-----------------------|-------------|
| Individuals receiving information on birth registration | 9,306 | 22,000 |
| Families of newborns provided with individual counselling on birth registration | 3,738 | 9,000 |
| Capacity building on birth registration with officials and frontliners | 269 | 600 |
| Individuals provided with legal representation for civil registration/ nationality cases | 18 | 100 |

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. 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 24,000 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 engages in advocacy and awareness raising activities to promote birth registration among Syrian refugees. 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

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