



## ICGLR-UNHCR study finds long-term refugees at risk of statelessness in the Great Lakes region

A new [study](#) by the Secretariat of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, highlights risks of statelessness for refugees who have spent more than 20 years outside their country of origin, and especially for their descendants born in exile.

The study, “Refugees from Generation to Generation: Preventing Statelessness by Advancing Durable Solutions in the Great Lakes Region”, focused on Rwandan refugees in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Congolese refugees in Rwanda, and South Sudanese and Congolese refugees in Uganda. It was based on surveys and focus group discussions with refugees, as well as on legal and policy analysis and interviews with government officials where possible.

The study found that most long-term refugees lack any identity document from their country of origin and would face huge challenges in re-establishing nationality if they were ever to return to that country. They identify most closely with the country of asylum, and many – though not all – would like to acquire citizenship there. In practice, however, naturalization is impossible to access, while many refugees struggle even to renew their refugee identity documents. Gaps in nationality laws mean that those born in the country of asylum are at especially high risk of statelessness – above all, if their births were not registered.

According to the study, only eight percent of the adult long-term refugees surveyed had a birth certificate. Although birth registration rates have improved significantly for children of refugees born in asylum countries, most notably in Rwanda, only 28 percent of adult refugees born in Uganda, and six percent of adults born in the DRC held a birth certificate.

The study made recommendations to authorities of all three countries, as well as to the ICGLR and UNHCR, in order to address risk of statelessness in the context of these prolonged refugee situations. The recommendations included both legal reforms and practical initiatives to permit refugees to access legal pathways to citizenship that already exist on paper.

The recommendations also include the need for ICGLR Member States to continue efforts to ensure that all refugees have valid identity documents issued by the country of asylum, and achieve universal birth registration, including late registration of the adult refugee population born in country of asylum.

The study was launched during a regional experts’ conference on eradication of statelessness and access to legal documentation held in Nairobi, Kenya from 25 to 27 July 2023. The conference was organized thanks to the support of the European Union through its Directorate-General for International Partnerships. The three-day regional statelessness conference brought together government statelessness focal points from the 12 ICGLR Member States and other key experts to discuss the implementation of pledges made to eradicate statelessness in the region, and to consider new pledges to be made at the Global Refugee Forum in December 2023. The experts from the 12 ICGLR States adopted an [outcome document](#) with key recommendations to intensify efforts to end statelessness in the Great Lakes region.



“The ICGLR-UNHCR study ‘s findings are crucial to tackle statelessness risks among long-term refugees and their descendants in the region and will guide the development of the ICGLR Strategy for comprehensive durable solutions in the Great Lakes region,” emphasized Amb. Mohammed Yasir, ICGLR Deputy Executive Secretary.

"Preventing and addressing statelessness is critical for refugees who have spent over two decades in exile, as it paves the way for any durable solution. The efforts made at this conference and through the results of this study will assist governments' efforts in addressing statelessness risks arising from prolonged displacement by facilitating refugees' access to civil registry, identity, and nationality documentation which is extremely important." said Kristine Hambrouck, UNHCR's Regional Deputy Director for the East, Horn of Africa, and Great Lakes region.

In November 2014, UNHCR launched its global #IBelong Campaign to end statelessness by 2024. Since then, ICGLR Member States and its Secretariat have shown political will and commitment to address statelessness. However, with only one and a half years left to the end of the campaign, only a small number of pledges and other commitments to address statelessness have been implemented by ICGLR Member States and other pledging entities.

According to UNHCR's 2022 Global Trends report, there are over 103,000 stateless persons residing in Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, and Uganda. However, the actual number is presumed to be considerably higher since the existing statistics on statelessness only account for stateless populations in less than half of the ICGLR countries and do not include those who are in long-term or former refugees and their descendants without a recognized nationality.

Full study available in English and French.

- ICGLR & UNHCR: Refugees from Generation to Generation: Preventing Statelessness by Advancing Durable Solutions in the Great Lakes Region, April 2023, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/64b643374.html>
- CIRGL & HCR : Réfugiés de Génération en Génération : Prévenir l'Apatrie par les Solutions Durables dans la Région des Grands Lacs, avril 2023, disponible sur [opendocpdf.pdf \(refworld.org\)](#)
- Outcome Document of the regional experts' conference on statelessness and legal identity documentation held from 25-27 July 2023 in Nairobi, Kenya with State experts from ICGLR Member States available in three languages: [English](#) - [French](#) - [Portuguese](#)

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