**UNHCR-ECOWAS Parliament Regional Workshop**

**“*Role of the ECOWAS Parliament in Achieving Protection and Durable Solutions to forcibly displaced and stateless persons in the ECOWAS region”***

***Banjul, 22-23 August 2022***

**CONCEPT NOTE**

## Background

The ECOWAS Parliament, as an Assembly of Peoples of the Community, serves as a forum for dialogue, consultation, and consensus for representatives of the peoples of West Africa. UNHCR works to ensure Protection and solutions to those forcibly displaced or and stateless. The partnership between ECOWAS Parliament and UNHCR commenced with a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), signed on 5th October 2016. It provides a framework for joint initiatives towards realizing mutual objectives for the protection of internally displaced persons (IDPs), asylum seekers, refugees, and stateless persons in the sub region. Therefore, UNHCR supports the objectives of the Parliament to contribute to the promotion of peace, security, and stability in the region, promote and defend principles of Human Rights, democracy, the rule of law, transparency, accountability, and good governance; and contribute to the efficient and effective implementation of relevant objectives and policies of the ECOWAS Community[[1]](#footnote-1).

1. **Justification**

West Africa faces some of the world's most complex security and humanitarian challenges. Acute and prolonged crises are deteriorating, and needs are growing. Millions of people are being driven to the edge of survival due to conflict and violence, extreme poverty, weak governance, chronically high food insecurity and malnutrition, as well as the impact of climate change[[2]](#footnote-2). The hardships they endure due to forced displacement, makes them even more vulnerable. They lose assets and livelihoods and are unable to plan their future. Many suffer from trauma, and women and girls are at high risk of gender-based violence. Host communities need support, too. The forcibly displaced often live in poor areas in developing countries that are already struggling to meet their own development goals. Accommodating the sudden arrival of masses of newcomers presents a challenge for host governments, putting further pressure on their ability to provide adequate basic services and infrastructure. The extent to which ongoing sanctions imposed on military regimes in some Member States affect civilian populations and further complicates the situation described above, is yet to be measured and understood. UNHCR is working to promote protection to those forced to flee, as well as durable solutions in the context of increasing humanitarian crises in the sub region, by encouraging refugee-hosting countries to include refugees and other persons of concern in their country’s development plans, such as, health and education systems. These efforts are in line with the Global Compact on Refugees.

One main objective of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) is to ease the pressures on countries hosting refugees and other persons of concern, by strengthening the resilience of refugees and their host communities, particularly through greater cooperation. At the 2019 Global Refugee Forum (GRF) and High-Level Segment on Statelessness (HLS), the international community came together to demonstrate solidarity with the world’s refugees and stateless persons, and the countries and communities that host them, and made commitments towards better protection and long-term solutions. The next global forum in 2023 will seek to examine progress made so far, identify accelerators, and provide opportunities for the next round of pledging[[3]](#footnote-3). Therefore, translating Members States’ commitments into action, is key to effect and ensure sustainable solutions, especially for protracted refugee situations in the sub region. The ECOWAS Parliament is strategically positioned to support advocacy towards the implementation and monitoring of pledges made by Member States, and to advance the 2017 ECOWAS Banjul Plan of Action against statelessness.

Effecting relevant regional legal frameworks and processes to drive solutions, is fundamental to addressing root causes of forced displacement in the sub region. Members States have shown their support to refugee protection by becoming parties to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol (to the exception of one of them) and the 1969 Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa[[4]](#footnote-4), and to the 2019 AU Convention for protection and solutions to Internally Displaced Persons in Africa. 3 out of the 15 Members States have also become Party to the 1954 Convention on the status of stateless persons and the 1961 Convention on the prevention and solutions to statelessness. However, gaps remain to align with international and regional refugee and stateless protection laws and standards. The refugee status entails the legal recognition of refugee protection needs, the legitimacy of the resulting mobility and subsequent search for lasting solutions. Refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless persons and IDPs often experience situations of vulnerability as they are often exposed to heightened risks of harm and require special care, support, and protection. Such vulnerabilities may arise from inefficient administrative processing of asylum claims and claims for stateless status, as such processing can be very lengthy, bureaucratic, opaque, and sometimes simply non-existent, leaving refugees and stateless persons unable to fully enjoy the rights guaranteed to them under international law. By strengthening asylum and statelessness determination procedures in the region, Member States will be able to systematically identify those in need of international protection, apply the non-refoulement principle and offer an alternative to life-threatening onward movements. UNHCR seeks to support ECOWAS Member States in the development and adoption of a Directive on Minimum Standards on Asylum systems in line with international and regional law, and to continue the ongoing work initiated with the ECOWAS Commission, towards a regional model-law for protection and solutions for stateless persons.

In the spirit of the Global Compact on Refugees, UNHCR strategic goal is the promotion of protection and solution guidelines to ensure refugees adequate access to their rights and the ECOWAS integration agenda and framework of freedom of movement offers a favorable context.

1. **Objectives**

The workshop will strive to achieve the following objectives:

* Sensitize the Parliament Committees on the significance of the GCR, inform on commitments of States during the 2019 GRF, and advocate for the timely and efficient implementation of pledges made by ECOWAS and Member States.
* Inform on and advocate for the effective implementation of pledges made by ECOWAS and Member States, to address statelessness, at the High-Level Segment on Statelessness in 2019, and on the Banjul Plan of Action against statelessness.
* Highlight the gaps in asylum/refugee protection in the region, and the need for an ECOWAS model framework on asylum processes, laying out minimum standards for asylum systems in the region.
* Inform on ongoing efforts to develop a regional model-law for the protection of stateless persons and solutions to their predicament and seek support from the Parliament on its finalisation and implementation.
* Build a common understanding on the impact of sanctions on civilian populations in ECOWAS Member States facing such sanctions and discuss possible mitigation measures.
* Identify and emphasize the role of the ECOWAS Parliament in the realization of UNHCR strategic objectives.
* Identify the role of the Parliament in promoting the effective implementation of relevant regional and sub regional processes.

1. **Methodology**

Discussions will be carried out in plenary and breakout sessions. Presentations will include an Overview of the humanitarian situation in the region and efforts towards solutions, Global Compact on Refugees - the Role of the Parliament in the operationalization of the GCR in the region, Presentation of pledges made by ECOWAS and Member states at the Global Refugee Forum and the High-Level Event on Statelessness; an Informative/advocative Session on Asylum/Refugee protection and the significance of adopting a comprehensive model asylum framework in the region.

1. **Expected outcome**

* Recommendations on concrete support actions of the ECOWAS Parliament towards:
* the operationalization of the GCR in the sub region
* the fulfilment of States’ GRF/HLS pledges, towards the next Global Forum in 2023
* Recommendations on the support and contributions of the PRC to the adoption and most importantly implementation of the ECOWAS model framework on asylum and statelessness processes.
* Recommendations on addressing the impact of sanctions on forcibly displaces populations in affected countries

1. **Participants**

* Honorable Members of the Standing Committees on Political Affairs, Peace, Security and APRM | Legal Affairs and Human Rights | Social Affairs, Gender and Women Empowerment of ECOWAS Parliament
* Staff of ECOWAS Commission
* Staff of ECOWAS Parliament
* UNHCR (Regional Representation for West and Central Africa and HQ).

1. **Venue**:

The retreat will take place both physically and virtually, at the end of the delocalised Meeting of the Standing Committees of ECOWAS Parliament cited above, in Banjul, The Gambia.

## Duration

The 2-day Workshop will take place on 22-23 August 2022

# Abuja, July 2022

1. <https://www.devex.com/organizations/ecowas-parliament-158629> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Forced Displacement Refugees, Internally Displaced and Host Communities <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/forced-displacement#1> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Road to 2023 <https://globalcompactrefugees.org/article/road-2023> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, The Gambia and Togo [↑](#footnote-ref-4)