Statelessness - UN Volunteers with UNHCR identify thousands of unregistered people in Côte d'Ivoire

Janvier Okpo is a national UN Volunteer Protection Officer with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), deployed since June 2018 in Tanda, a small town located at 350km east of the Ivorian capital (Abidjan). In his daily work he meets with community members, local authorities, state agents and institutions established in the area to discuss and raise awareness about statelessness, an issue that affects many people.
Janvier goes from door to door to visit families on a regular basis, and during discussions he identifies some family members whose births have not been registered. He takes this as an opportunity to sensitize all the dwellers on the notion of nationality, the importance and cost of establishing different civil status documents and all the required administrative procedures with a view to the restoration of their rights.

There are many cases in the region where several civil registration centers are too distant from populations, who are not able to obtain birth or identity documents and thus deprived of access to several social services such as education.

A stateless person is without nationality. He does not benefit from the legal protection of a State. In accordance with its mandate and the Global Plan of Action for the Eradication of Statelessness by 2024, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Côte d’Ivoire has deployed 29 national United Nations Volunteers, as Field protection assistants in several localities of the country in order to identify and establish a useful mapping of people at risk of statelessness.

Thus, since the beginning of 2019, Janvier Okpo and the 28 other UN Volunteers have been able to identify nearly 1016 people who are stateless or at risk of statelessness, including 13 children. They organize several awareness-raising and capacity-building activities for community and village leaders from 27 remote locations in Côte d'Ivoire, on the importance of birth registration and statelessness.

These national UN Volunteers improve community awareness and education, through individual interviews, awareness sessions and outreach campaigns to local people and authorities or community radios. They play key roles in the current UNHCR outreach plan to reduce statelessness in Côte d'Ivoire.

“Going through all these paths and little villages makes me feel really useful to my country, my fellow citizens as well my brothers living in Côte d'Ivoire. It’s a great satisfaction for me to contribute to RESTORING DIGNITY for people who thought their situation was hopeless, because of lack of identification documents”, Okpo said.

In Côte d'Ivoire, a total of 44 United Nations Volunteers work with UNHCR on a number of themes, including statelessness.

Sub-Saharan Africa

• World Refugee Day • UNHCR • refugees

Sustainable Development Goal: SDG 10: Reduced inequalities, SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities, SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions