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2021 marked the 60th anniversary of the 1961 UN Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, an international treaty which aims to prevent new cases of statelessness.1029 A fact sheet published by UNHCR for the occasion confirmed that progress has been made over the last decade with more and more countries signing the treaty. However, it warned that new cases of statelessness persist.1030

In January 2021, Iceland acceded to the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.1031 Following accession, a Standard Operation Procedure was adopted by the Directorate of Immigration, which was developed in cooperation with UNHCR. It outlines the policies and procedures to be followed when considering asylum applications from stateless persons.1032 To ensure that practices align with the convention, UNHCR organised an open seminar and technical workshop for legal practitioners on “Operationalising the Statelessness Determination Procedure”.

In Bulgaria, in February 2021, a new legislative act amending and supplementing the Law on Foreigners in the Republic of Bulgaria was adopted by the National Assembly, introducing new grounds for refusing to grant stateless.1033

In October 2021, Finland opened consultations on proposed amendments to the Citizenship Act (359/2003) and the Government Decree on Citizenship (293/2013).1034, 1035 The UNHCR Representation for Nordic and Baltic Countries provided feedback to align the definition of stateless person to the 1954 Convention, to include a statelessness determination procedure to the current citizenship status procedure and to introduce more favourable requirements for the naturalisation of stateless persons.1036 The government’s proposal is expected to be submitted to the parliament in the spring session in 2022.

In the Netherlands, a proposal for a Statelessness Determination Procedure Act was submitted in December 20201037 The bill was discussed by parliament in May 2021 and January 2022 to clarify pending questions, including the duration of the process and the extent of stateless cases in the country.1038 The coalition agreement of 15 December 2021 included reference to this bill, stating that the process will continue in 2022.1039

Following amendments to the Swedish Aliens Act which introduced a shift from permanent to temporary residence permits, the Act on Swedish Citizenship was amended to grant a stateless

person holding a temporary residence permit the right to obtain Swedish citizenship, which before was only possible with a permanent residence permit.1040 The person must have been born in Sweden, be stateless since birth and resided in Sweden for the past 5 years or resided in Sweden for a total of 10 years and not yet turned 21 years of age. The change was necessary to avoid divergence with the 1961 UN Convention on the reduction of statelessness. For stateless persons holding a permanent residence permit, the residence requirements remained unchanged: 4 years of lawful and habitual residence for naturalisation of adults, 2 years of lawful and habitual residence for children born abroad, and legal and habitual residence (no specific length) for children born in Sweden. However, the ENS reported that these amendments in the legislation resulted in a longer and more difficult process for stateless persons to acquire Swedish citizenship.1041

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