

Let's find out about Stateless People!



What Is "Stateless"?

Stateless People = People without a Nationality Those Who Are Not Considered Nationals by Any State

Stateless people -as the word itself already suggests- are people not recognized to be nationals of any state.

According to the UNHCR ([UNHCR, "Mid-Year Trends 2022"](#)), as of 2020 there were 4.3 million people in the world reported as stateless.

However, the actual number is estimated to be over 15 million. ([ISI, "Statelessness in numbers: 2020"](#))

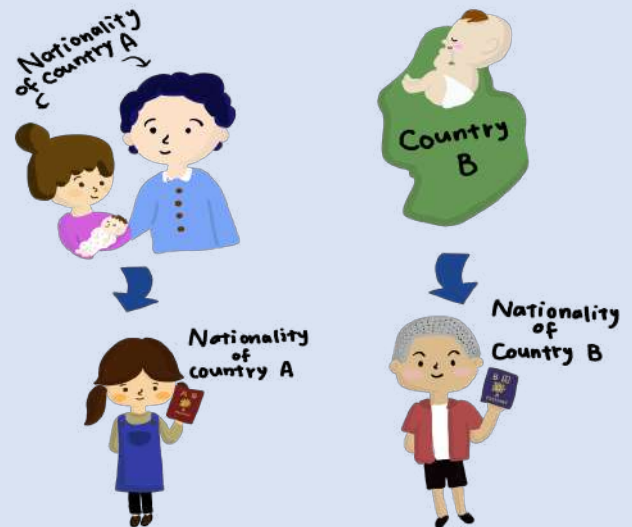
✂ For identification and data collection purposes, the UNHCR also includes "people with undetermined nationality" as "stateless" in their statistics. There are countries which issue identification cards whereby the nationality is listed as undetermined.

According to the 1954 convention (see p. 3), "the term 'stateless people' means a person who is not considered as national by any State under the operation of its law".

What is Nationality?

- a legal bond between a person and a state
- usually acquired at the time of birth, by either being born in that country or inheriting the nationality of their parents

Whether a nationality is granted based on the place of birth or the nationality of a parent depends on each country. There are also countries considering both. One can also become a national of a country through naturalization.



Why Do People Become Stateless?

There are various reasons why people become stateless.

Among those reasons are ...

- contradictions and flaws in the nationality laws and determination procedures, making them ineligible for acquiring nationality in any country
- the disintegration of a state, or a change in the ruling regime of the country
- discrimination against specific groups, based on ethnicity, gender, religion, etc.



Issues Regarding Stateless People in Japan

1. The Lack of Understanding About Stateless People

There are also stateless people living in Japan. They face various forms of prejudice and discrimination as their existence is not widely known.

According to official statistics, there are 487 people classified as stateless living in Japan ([Immigration Services Agency of Japan, Statistics for Resident Foreigners as of June, 2022](#)).

However, the true number is estimated to be much higher.



2. Japan Has Not Ratified International Conventions Relating to Stateless People

The United Nations has adopted the following two conventions relating to stateless people:

1. [The Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons \(1954\)](#)
2. [The Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness \(1961\)](#)

However, **Japan has not ratified either of these conventions.**

3. The Lack of a Statelessness Determination Procedure and a System to Protect Them

While more and more countries have instituted statelessness determination procedures, Japan has neither a procedure for the determination of statelessness nor a law to protect stateless people.

This has led to a situation where a significant number of people are misidentified as having a nationality even though they do not have one.



Why Do People Become Stateless?

Case 1

The Baby Left Behind in a Hospital

A woman, likely a foreigner, gave birth to a baby at a hospital. Unfortunately, the mother disappeared after giving birth.

The identity of the father was unknown.

As no one registered the baby's birth, the baby did not receive documentation proving its identity.

On top of that, the baby was born in a country where a person's nationality is determined by the nationality of a parent (p.1). As a result, the baby became stateless.

✧ There are many countries that specially grant citizenship to such babies. But without such knowledge of the caretakers and help, the children remain stateless.



Case 2

Problems During the Process of Naturalization

Ali, from country A, has been living in country B for a long time. One day, he decided to apply for naturalization in country B, which does not allow dual citizenship.

As he expected to acquire the citizenship of country B soon, he underwent the procedure of dropping his citizenship of country A and became stateless.

But, while Ali was waiting for his new citizenship, he caused a traffic accident and was denied citizenship based on this record.

✧ In this case, Ali can still try to get his former citizenship back, but the success of it cannot be promised.

Applying for
nationality of country B



Case 3

Losing One's Nationality Due to the Collapse of a State

Mr. Ho belongs to a minority ethnic group within country C. After the war ended, country C collapsed, and a new country was established in its place.

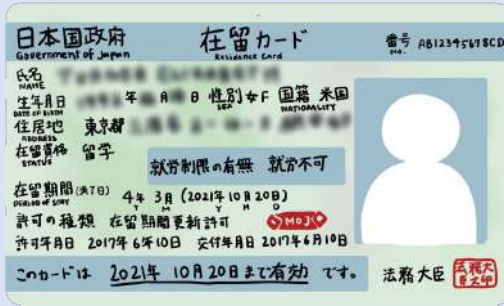
However, under the nationality laws of the new country, members of Mr. Ho's ethnic group were not considered nationals of the country, thus making them stateless.

✧ There are countries that encourage naturalization to people like Mr. Ho, while some do not.



What Kind of Issues Do Stateless People Face?

Many foreigners living in Japan are issued with a residence card.



There are those among the stateless whose nationality displayed on their residence cards does not reflect reality.

In this way, there are various problems caused by the lack of a Statelessness determination procedure.

※ The residence card is a personal document issued by the Ministry of Justice of Japan. It does not necessarily indicate the actual nationality of a person.

Cases from Japan

In Japan, the nationality of a child is determined by the nationality of the parent/s. Thus, government services tend to assume that children possess the same nationality as their parents. However, there are people who cannot acquire the nationality of their parent/s.

【Case 1. A personal document stated my nationality, but the truth was...】

Fei came from country E to Japan when she was four years old. She grew up in Japan and is now 26 years old.



She decided to marry a Japanese man. In order to submit a marriage certificate in Japan, Fei and her fiancé went to the embassy of country E to apply for a single status certificate for Fei.

However, the embassy told them that “your residence card does indeed indicate that you are from country E, but you don’t have any identity documents issued by country E, which means that we cannot issue you with a single status certificate.”

Even though her residence card indicated that she was a national of country E, she had never been! “Then what is my nationality?”, she asks herself. Fei realized that she had been stateless the whole time.

Fei had thought she was a national of country E, but in fact her birth had never been registered in country E.

For those in a similar situation

There are cases where alternative documents are accepted instead of the single certificate. Sometimes, late birth registrations can be turned in as well.

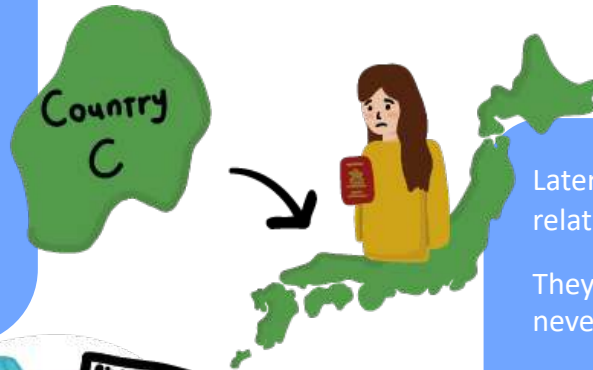
So please do not give up, and ask for expert advice at the public office, embassy, or lawyer!

【Case 2. Ordinary things that are difficult】

Kei's mother comes from country C.

She was brought to Japan by a human trafficking organization on a fake passport.

She was making her living as a dancer.



Later, she gave birth to a child from a relationship with a Japanese man.

They never married and Kei's father never recognized Kei as his own child.

To add on, Kei's mother never registered Kei's birth with country C or in Japan.



15 years later, after obtaining special permission to reside from the Japanese government, Kei enrolled in senior high school.



Kei's high school takes students on school trips to Australia.

But Kei does not have a passport which is needed for overseas travels. Neither did he know about the re-entry permit, and how to obtain it. The re-entry permit could have been used as a substitute for a passport.

But lacking this information, Kei was the only one not joining the trip.

Later, believing that there was no scholarship for stateless people, Kei even gave up going to university..

"I'm stateless. There is no way I can do this." Such thought made Kei suffer.

For those in a similar situation

A minor can acquire a nationality by being recognized by a parent as his/her child at court. Stateless people can go overseas by getting a re-entry permit and there are many scholarships that stateless people can apply to.

Solutions can be found, so please look out for information as early as possible, ask for advice, and do not give up!

The Various Issues That Stateless People Face



The Case of Mr. Li...



When I was stateless, I faced various obstacles in my everyday life. For example, once when I tried to open a bank account, there was a bank that did not allow me to open an account with them because my identity documents indicated I was “Stateless”. I also faced difficulties when traveling overseas as I would have to apply for a visa and for permission to enter each country. This required a lot of documents and often prevented me from traveling abroad. In fact, this issue prevented me from seeing my mother one last time before she died, which broke my heart.

Towards a Solution

Suggestion 1

There is currently no system in Japan for determining if a person is stateless. This leads to cases where the nationality of a person is not correctly listed on identity documents. Solutions to statelessness cannot be worked out without identifying who is stateless.



Create a procedure to determine statelessness!

Suggestion 2

According to the Japanese nationality law, article 2, paragraph 3, children born in Japan whose parents are either unknown or stateless are given Japanese nationality. While such a law designed to prevent statelessness exists, it is only rarely applied as it is not widely known.



Give me the nationality that is rightfully mine!

Suggestion 3

Ignorance and poor understanding about stateless people leads to various types of discrimination. Regardless of whether a person is in possession of a nationality of any country, in this society, everyone should be respected as a person and have their right to life protected.



Find out about stateless people and protect their rights!

Towards a World Beyond Nationality

Up to this point, we have introduced the various issues that stateless people face. But does being “stateless” really lead to “unhappiness”? Moreover, do people really have to have a “nationality” at all?

On this page, we are going to introduce some people who have chosen to live as “stateless people”.

【The late Eugene Aksenoff】

The late Eugene Aksenoff, who had been the director of the International Clinic (Tokyo), became stateless when the State of Manchuria collapsed. In fact, he could have acquired a nationality but chose not to.

He once said:

“I don’t want a nationality at all. The reason is this way I can be free. What I desire right now is to be healthy and to contribute to society as a doctor as long as possible, and I hope that one day the world stops fighting and comes together as one.”

He didn’t charge a fee for foreign patients struggling with money who came to his clinic. As he defines being stateless as being free from states. Perhaps he came to think this way after losing his “homeland” to war.

【Zhong Zhang】

Mr. Zhong Zhang is a stateless poet, whose ethnicity can be defined as Zainichi Korean (Resident Korean living in Japan). On the document that he possesses, his nationality is listed as “*Chosen* (Korea)”, but this neither stands for “South Korea” or “North Korea”. It stands for the country that existed before the country was split between North and South.

Currently, there is no country with the name “*Chosen* (Korea)”. Therefore, Mr. Zhong Zhang also falls under the category of Stateless people. But after all these years in Japan, why has he never applied for Japanese nationality?

His response to this question is as follows:

“Becoming a national of a country is a huge life decision. I wanted to become a national of a state that makes people happy. But when I looked around the world, there was no such state. That being the case, I faced the question of what I should do as a stateless person, and I thought I should put my efforts into the realization of a state that makes me want to become a national of that country.”

Perhaps Mr. Zhong Zhang’s decision to live as one human being, in pursuit of a world where everyone is happy, may be a sign to us all that **there is something more important than nationalities.**

Towards a World Beyond Nationality

【Final Thoughts】

Although being stateless, both Mr. Aksenoff and Mr. Zhong Zhang have legal immigration status, and have their own careers. Of course, as Stateless people they have faced inconveniences such as not having a passport, meaning that special documents such as a re-entry permit (to Japan) had to be obtained when traveling abroad. In addition, as not many people in Japan are aware of the existence of stateless people, they have faced prejudice in society.

But what if there were a more appropriate system in place for stateless people? What if more people knew about stateless people? Perhaps, it would eliminate the perception that **Statelessness is an “issue that should be eradicated” or “not exist”**. It might allow a person the choice of living as a stateless person according to their preference as a “natural person”. The words of Mr. Aksenoff and Mr. Zhong Zhang present such a possibility.

The Stateless Network is working towards creating a society where people live in comfort, regardless of **whether they have a nationality or not**.



What you can do to help

■ What you can do to help

1. Become a member of “Stateless Network”

- Regular Member:10,000yen/5,000yen (per year)
- Supporting Member:2,000yen (per year)

2. Participate as a volunteer

- Help as a translator, plan events, raise funds, be part of the team managing the organization, etc

3. Donate

- We will use all donations for supporting stateless people

Account

Mitsui Sumitomo Bank, Totsuka branch (store number 791)

Account number 7279958, non-profit organization Stateless Network

About us: the “Stateless Network”

The “Stateless Network” is an organization that supports stateless people.

It was founded in January 2009 to join with stateless people, taking seriously the troubles they face, and to work towards creating a society where people would not face discrimination for not possessing a nationality.



■ Main Activities

1. Consultation Portal

We offer consultation for people who face problems relating to being stateless via E-mail and through individual meetings. Regarding legal matters we connect those requiring legal assistance with lawyers and administrative scriveners who work in cooperation with the Stateless Network.

Email: SOUDAN@stateless-network.com

Procedures related to nationality can take months, and even years.
There is also a risk of being denied a nationality once one turns an adult.
So, **please ask for help** at the public office, embassy,
or an expert lawyer in this field **as soon as possible**.

2. Sharing information

We are advocating for a greater understanding regarding issues relating to statelessness in Japan and abroad by working together with other civil society organizations.



Interacting with stateless children from the Sulu Passage region, providing material and educational support



Children book readings to build understanding among the younger generations



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