



How do children become stateless? (And how can we stop it?)

1. No child chooses to be stateless



Each state (country) sets its own rules for how somebody can acquire or lose nationality. This means that the way these laws operate will decide whether a child gets nationality of a country when they are born. No child decides not to belong.

2. Every child has a connection to one or more countries

Children have connections to the country where they were born and grew up, and to the one that their parents and the rest of their family comes from. So there is no child who doesn't have a connection that should let them have a nationality.



3. Falling through the cracks

Different countries recognise different kinds of connection as a reason to grant nationality. The two most common ways are through being born and living in a country (*the law of soil*) or through descent, which means that if a child's parents or family have nationality, it can be passed on to the child (*the law of blood*). These two kinds of law can be in conflict.

Sometimes a child has connections to more than one country, but if they are unlucky, they could be born in a country which grants nationality by descent, to parents with nationality of a country that only allows nationality by being born or living there. So the child won't be entitled to nationality from either country.



4. Nationality is like membership of a club



Nationality is like a kind of membership. Like joining a club, you have to meet the conditions to be admitted, which are set by the country, before you can enjoy the benefits and obligations (rights and duties) that come from being a member.

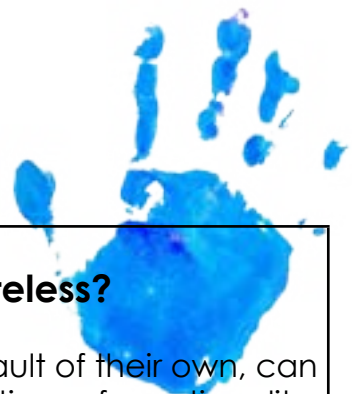
A passport is like a membership card.

5. No child has to be stateless - We can stop it!

We can end childhood statelessness in Europe!

Countries can include simple safeguards in their nationality laws to make sure that children born there are protected from becoming stateless.





6. What are the risk factors for a child to become stateless?

There are a number of ways in which a child, through no fault of their own, can become stateless leaving them without the rights and protections of a nationality.



If there is a conflict in nationality laws of the countries the child has connections to;



If the nationality of the child's parents is not known because the baby was abandoned;



If the child has been involved in international adoption or surrogacy arrangements;



If the child's parents lose or are deprived of their own nationality;



If the child is born to parents who are stateless;



If the child cannot access birth registration or otherwise demonstrate their connection.

7. Ensuring children's right to a nationality

Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, all European countries have an obligation to protect children's right to acquire a nationality.

This can easily be achieved and there are no costs involved, it is simply a question of turning the existing connections a child has to a country into membership.

By putting a safeguard in nationality laws to the effect that any child born on the territory of a country will be entitled to nationality if they would otherwise be left stateless, we could end childhood statelessness within a generation!

If statelessness is not remedied early on, it can have a serious impact on children's lives, and can be difficult to resolve when the stateless child grows into a stateless adult.



This factsheet was prepared as part of the European Network on Statelessness's campaign, **'None of Europe's Children Should be Stateless'**



To learn more visit: www.statelessness.eu
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