



GALCON 2026

The Stateless Generation: Individuals with no Country, No Nationality and No rights



**UNHCR Committee
Research Report**

Definitions

Stateless Person: A person who is not considered a national by any state under the operation of its law.¹

Birth Certificate: the certificate that is filed with the right authorities when a child is born, that records the date and place of birth and the parents' names.²

Legal Identity: Legal identity is the official recognition of a person through details like their name, sex, and date and place of birth, usually recorded at birth and proven by a birth certificate issued by an authorized authority.³

Statelessness: The condition in which an individual is not recognized as a national by any state under the operation of its law, resulting in the absence of rights and protections associated with nationality, including access to education, health care, travel documents, and legal protection.⁴

Intergenerational Statelessness: When statelessness is passed from parents to children, often due to discriminatory or restrictive nationality laws.⁵

Refugee: someone who has been forced to flee out of their country due to danger or persecution.⁶

State Succession: State succession is the legal process in which one state replaces another in responsibility for a territory's international relations, usually following changes such as independence, dissolution, or unification.⁷

Discrimination in Nationality Laws: Discrimination in nationality laws refers to legal rules or practices that unfairly deny or restrict citizenship based on characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, religion, race, or descent, often leading to statelessness or unequal rights.⁸

¹ <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-protect/stateless-people>

² <https://thelawdictionary.org/birth-certificate/>

³ [Legal identity and why it matters | Biometric Update](#)

⁴ <https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/protect-human-rights/ending-https://thelawdictionary.org/birth-certificate/statelessness/about-statelessness>

⁵ <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-protect/stateless-people>

⁶ [What is a Refugee? Definition and Meaning | USA for UNHCR](#)

⁷ [Vienna Convention on Succession of States in respect of Treaties, 1978](#)

⁸ <https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/protect-human-rights/ending-statelessness/about-statelessness>

Legal Invisibility: Legal invisibility refers to the situation where a person is not officially recognized by the state, often due to lack of legal identity documents, leaving them excluded from legal protection, rights, and access to services.⁹

Lyuli: A marginalized minority group in Central Asia with a history of discrimination and lack of documentation, making them vulnerable to statelessness.¹⁰

Host Country/ Host State: A country that receives refugees or stateless people and provides temporary or long-term protection.¹¹

Immigration: Immigration is the process by which people enter and settle in a country other than their country of origin, which may lead to permanent residency or citizenship. However, sometimes, during this process, some individuals may become or remain stateless due to lack of legal status or documentation.¹²

State Repression: When a government uses force, intimidation, or laws to control or punish groups, including removing documents or nationality.¹³

Constitutional Amendment: A formal change made to a country's constitution, often affecting citizenship rules and nationality rights.¹⁴

Rohingya: A Muslim minority group from Myanmar who have been denied citizenship and severely persecuted, making them one of the largest stateless populations.¹⁵

⁹ <https://unstats.un.org/legal-identity-agenda/>

¹⁰ <https://medium.com/adinkra/life-on-the-margins-the-lyuli-people-of-uzbekistan-469687718d2c>

¹¹ <https://www.boundless.com/immigration-resources/host-country-definition>

¹² <https://www.britannica.com/topic/immigration>

¹³ <https://sk.sagepub.com/ency/edvol/the-encyclopedia-of-political-science/chpt/state-repression#>

¹⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/constitution-politics-and-law/Constitutional-change>

¹⁵ <https://amnesty.org.nz/who-are-rohingya-and-why-are-they-fleeing-myanmar/>

Background

Statelessness is a legal term in which the person is not recognized as a national by any state under the operation of its own law.¹⁶ This is more than “not having a passport or ID;” when no state legally acknowledges someone as a citizen, that person may not be able to secure basic identity documents and can be excluded from the systems that provide rights, services and protections. Statelessness became a major international concern in the 20th and the 21st century as wars, new borders, and state formation left some groups outside newly designed citizenship frameworks.

After World War II, nationality was increasingly treated as a Human Rights issue; the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states that “everyone has the right to a nationality” and must not be arbitrarily deprived of it.¹⁷ The international legal framework that followed includes the 1954 Statelessness Convention (defining statelessness and setting standards of treatment)¹⁸, and the 1961 Convention on the reduction of statelessness, which emphasizes prevention, most notably by requiring states to grant nationality to children born on their territory who would otherwise be stateless¹⁹. In recent years, UNHCR placed renewed global attention on the topic through its #IBelong campaign (2014-2024)²⁰.

Statelessness usually develops over time through a mix of law, discrimination, and bureaucracy, rather than one single event. UNHCR highlights recurring drivers such as discrimination in nationality laws or in how laws are applied (often affecting minorities), gender discrimination (in 24 countries, women still cannot pass nationality to their children on equal terms with men)²¹, state succession and territorial changes that create legal “gaps,” and documentation barriers (especially missing birth registration and civil records)²². These drivers produce two common pathways: some people are born stateless when they acquire

¹⁶ [UN Conventions on Statelessness | UNHCR](#)

¹⁷ [The 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons](#)

¹⁸ [The 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons](#)

¹⁹ [Universal Declaration of Human Rights | United Nations](#)

²⁰ [Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, 1961](#)

²¹ [Birth registration | UNICEF](#)

²² [Birth registration steadily increases worldwide, but 150 million children still ‘invisible’ - UNICEF](#)

no nationality at birth because their parents are stateless; because safeguards are missing or not implemented; because mothers cannot confer nationality equally; or because the child's birth cannot be registered and proof of eligibility cannot be produced.²³ Others become stateless later when nationality is withdrawn, denied, or becomes impossible to confirm after legal/ political changes or discriminatory administrations²⁴. The consequences are concrete and often lifelong; stateless people may be denied legal identity and face serious barriers to education, healthcare, lawful employment, property, and banking, marriage, and birth registration, travel documents, and effective access to justice, turning basic rights into inaccessible privileges²⁵.

It should be noted that a stateless person is defined by a lack of nationality, while a refugee is defined by being outside their country (or, if stateless, outside their former habitual residence) and unable or unwilling to return due to a well-founded fear of persecution.²⁶ A person can be both stateless and a refugee, facing the combined hardship of displacement and the absence of citizenship anywhere, often complicating documentation and durable solutions.²⁷ Those most affected include children (especially where birth registration is weak), women and their children under unequal nationality laws, marginalized minorities, and conflict-affected or displaced families whose documents and access to civil registries are disrupted.²⁸

²³ [Convention relating to the Status of Refugees | OHCHR](#)

²⁴ [#IBelong Campaign to end statelessness | UNHCR](#)

²⁵ [UNHCR: New Global Alliance launched to consign statelessness to history](#)

²⁶ <https://statelessnessalliance.org/>

²⁷ [Convention relating to the Status of Refugees | OHCHR](#)

²⁸ [Press release: Geneva summit garners action to tackle gender discriminatory nationality laws | UN Women – Headquarters](#)

Organizations and Treaties

Organizations

UNICEF - United Nations Children's Fund:

UNICEF's work links to statelessness because children without nationality often face the sharpest denial of rights, and barriers like missing birth registration. Additionally, weak legal identity systems can lock children out of services long before nationality is even formally determined.^{29 30}

OHCHR - United Nations human rights office of the high commissioner:

OHCHR's statelessness-relevant role is strongly tied to human rights standard-setting and accountability: pushing states to treat nationality as a rights issue, especially where discrimination or arbitrary decisions create statelessness^{31 32}

ENS - European Network on statelessness:

ENS is a pan-European civil society network dedicated to improving protection and solutions for stateless people across Europe through supporting policy development, raising public awareness, and producing comparative research.^{33 34}

GCENR - Global Campaign for Equal Nationality Rights:

GCENR focuses on one of the most preventable drivers of child statelessness: gender discrimination in nationality laws. The campaign mobilizes international action to reform laws in countries where mothers cannot confer nationality to children on equal terms with fathers.^{35 36}

ID4D - Identification for Development Initiative (World Bank Group)

ID4D addresses the "identity gap" by supporting countries to build inclusive, trusted legal identity systems, including civil registration systems, which helps stateless people to enable access to services and provide pathways to documentation that supports nationality confirmation.³⁷

²⁹ [Birth Registration for Every Child by 2030: Are we on track? | UNICEF](#)

³⁰ [Birth registration - UNICEF DATA](#)

³¹ [Statelessness at the UN: Reaffirming the Right to Nationality - Open Society Justice Initiative](#)

³² [UN Calls for Action Against Statelessness Affecting Children - Open Society Justice Initiative](#)

³³ [About us | European Network on Statelessness](#)

³⁴ [Who produces the Index](#)

³⁵ <https://www.equalnationalityrights.org/the-campaign>

³⁶ [UN Calls for Action Against Statelessness Affecting Children - Open Society Justice Initiative](#)

³⁷ [Why ID matters for development](#)

REFUGEE INTERNATIONAL

Refugees International is an independent organisation that researches displacement and pushes for policy solutions and accountability. This intersects with statelessness because some of the world's largest displaced populations include stateless groups.³⁸

ISI - INSTITUTE ON STATELESSNESS AND INCLUSION

ISI is a global human-rights NGO dedicated specifically to promoting the right to a nationality and protecting the rights of stateless people. Its mission and vision are framed around equality and advancing inclusive societies by protecting everyone's right to nationality.³⁹

Global Alliance to End Statelessness

The Global Alliance is a multi-stakeholder platform designed to accelerate coordinated action to end statelessness by connecting states, civil society, stateless-led groups, and other partners.^{40 41 42}

Open Society Justice Initiative

OSJI is a legal organisation that uses strategic litigation and legal advocacy to strengthen rights protections.^{43 44} They believe that the work that combines litigation, advocacy, research, and partnerships helps to combat child statelessness and strengthen the human right to nationality, so its contribution includes them.^{45 46 47 48}

Treaties

The 1951 Refugee Convention

Also called “The 1951 Refugee Convention to address the protection needs of people who have no nationality,” was the first ever treaty hosted by the UNHCR. It provides the first

³⁸ [About Us - Refugees International](#)

³⁹ https://files.institutesi.org/year_report_2024.pdf

⁴⁰ [Global Alliance to End Statelessness](#)

⁴¹ [Join the Alliance](#)

⁴² [Global Alliance Hosts Second Townhall](#)

⁴³ [Who We Are - Open Society Justice Initiative](#)

⁴⁴ [Open Society Justice Initiative](#)

⁴⁵ [Fact Sheet: Children's Right to a Nationality - Open Society Justice Initiative](#)

⁴⁶ [UN Calls for Action Against Statelessness Affecting Children - Open Society Justice Initiative](#)

⁴⁷ [Litigating the Right to Nationality: A Guide for Practitioners - Open Society Justice Initiative](#)

⁴⁸ [Fact Sheet: Children's Right to a Nationality - Open Society Justice Initiative](#)

globally recognized definition of a refugee. It also lists and emphasizes their human rights, their right to legal protection and the assistance a refugee is entitled to receive.⁴⁹

In this convention, statelessness wasn't yet defined or tackled. However, it was indirectly mentioned. Stateless people were only mentioned if they were classified as refugees based on the definition and were addressed as "a person who has no nationality," instead of "stateless," being stateless alone wasn't enough to grant the rights listed in this convention.

The 1967 protocol to the 1951 convention

This is a protocol which removed the geographic and temporal limits of the 1951 Convention. It expanded the scope of who falls into the refugee category and was created in order to make the convention more universally covering.⁵⁰

In the 1951 convention; only people displaced in events before January 1st 1951 counted as refugees, but after the protocol, that was no longer the case. This is only an example of what this protocol has achieved. The 1967 protocol had indirectly helped stateless individuals who fit the refugee definition. However, it did not address them or their rights directly.

The 1954 Convention

Officially called "the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons" is the main treaty that UNHCR's decisions are based upon. It covers the people that were not covered in the 1951 refugee convention and the 1967 protocol. It includes the first ever definition of a "stateless person."⁵¹ This convention guarantees Stateless individuals their basic human rights such as their right to education and employment, legal identity, legal documentation, and so much more.

The 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness

This Treaty compliments the "1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons" and aims to combat the spread of statelessness, by setting out rules towards its prevention. It listed rules such as: the obligation that states must guarantee nationality for any individual born on their land.⁵² Another listed rule was that states must grant a child born abroad their nationality to avoid them becoming stateless, and so many more. Consequently, becoming stateless would become harder and statelessness would be reduced.

⁴⁹ [The 1951 Refugee Convention | UNHCR](#)

⁵⁰ [The 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees | UNHCR](#)

⁵¹ [The 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons | UNHCR](#)

⁵² [The 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness | UNHCR](#)

Current Situation

Discriminatory laws, conflicts and state repression are still affecting and causing statelessness to this day; children born in displacement face difficulties in accessing nationality, while minorities and displaced individuals struggle to live their lives without any form of legal documentation. At the end of June 2025, there were at least 4.4 million stateless people worldwide, many more undocumented. Those same people do not have a legal identity and often are not granted basic human rights; they do not receive complete legal protection, or political rights. They cannot vote, often do not have access to education and medical services, are not able to work legally, nor get married, and are way more at risk for violence, abuse and exploitation.⁵³ Statistics from the last two years have shown that countries like Bangladesh, Côte d'Ivoire, Myanmar, Thailand and many more still have an overwhelming stateless population.⁵⁴

The situation in Bangladesh is one of the worst; in June 2024, the number of stateless cases in Bangladesh had reached an estimate of 1 million individuals. In fact, two in five of all reported stateless people cases are Rohingya who have escaped persecution in Myanmar.⁵⁵ However; during the last year, 47,200 individuals who were formerly stateless or of undetermined nationality were able to acquire or confirm their nationality. By the end of 2024, Turkmenistan became the second country to solve all stateless cases on its soil and has since then implemented various laws to enhance its citizenship rights. Kazakhstan made the statelessness determination process simpler and faster, reducing the application period from 45 to 30 days. In 2024, Malaysia adopted a Constitutional Amendment giving the right to women who give birth abroad to pass on the Malaysian nationality to their children. In 2020, Kenya granted citizenship to a large stateless community by the name of the 'Shona community' improving the lives of many.

Despite these important achievements, progress has been slow and uneven; urgent changes are yet to occur in several countries with large stateless populations. In 24 countries, women still lack the same rights as men to grant their nationality to their children. In addition, recognition of statelessness as a serious problem is still limited. As a result, UNHCR's capacity to provide protection services, including the number of staff dedicated to statelessness, becomes limited, and many cases of statelessness remain undocumented, this means that the real number of displaced individuals is even higher.⁵⁶

Other than those born stateless, a lot of populations are still forced to flee their homes due to conflicts, crises, climate change and persecution, and we see examples of this everyday. Therefore, global cooperation is necessary and very urgent.

⁵³ <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-protect/stateless-people>

⁵⁴ <https://www.unhcr.org/media/global-appeal-2025>

⁵⁵ <https://unrefugees.org.uk/learn-more/news/news/five-key-takeaways-from-unhcrs-2024-mid-year-trends-report/>

⁵⁶ [Global Report 2024 | UNHCR](#)

Critical Events and Timeline

World War I (1914-1918): World War I, the collapse of empires, caused statelessness because imperial citizenship systems disappeared, while newly created states adopted restrictive nationality laws. Many people, especially minorities and displaced populations, were excluded from citizenship and left without any state recognizing them.⁵⁷

The Nansen Passport (1922): The Nansen Passport was the first internationally recognized document that allowed stateless refugees to travel and work legally after World War I, addressing the lack of nationality caused by the collapse of empires.⁵⁸

Nazi era and World War II (1933-1945): Millions became stateless due to denationalization under the Nuremberg Laws, which legally stripped Jews and other targeted groups of German citizenship. These laws redefined citizenship on racial grounds, excluding those classified as “non-Aryan” from the legal community of the state. As a result, affected individuals lost their nationality and the legal protection of the state, leaving many stateless.⁵⁹

Universal declaration of human rights-article 15 (1948):

The first global statement that declares that everyone has the right to a nationality.⁶⁰

Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons (1954):

This treaty officially defined who is stateless and made countries give them basic rights, such as ID papers, access to courts, and protection from discrimination. It was the first global step to ensure stateless people were seen and protected by the law.⁶¹

Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness (1961):

This convention was made to prevent statelessness before it even starts, especially for children. It requires countries to give nationality to children who would otherwise be stateless and stops governments from removing citizenships unfairly.⁶²

Myanmar Citizenship Law- Rohingya Excluded (1982):

Myanmar passed a citizenship law that excluded the Rohingya people from a nationality, making them one of the largest stateless groups in the world. As a result, they were denied basic rights, which contributed to mass displacement and ongoing humanitarian crises.⁶³

⁵⁷<https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/protect-human-rights/ending-statelessness/about-statelessness>

⁵⁸<https://www.unhcr.org/blogs/a-century-of-mobility-a-glimpse-into-the-history-of-refugee-travel-documents/>

⁵⁹<https://www.chaberlin.org/en/blog/statelessness-europes-forgotten-human-rights-issue-2/>

⁶⁰ <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

⁶¹ <https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/protect-human-rights/ending-statelessness/un-conventions-statelessness>

⁶² https://legal.un.org/ilc/texts/instruments/english/conventions/6_1_1961.pdf

⁶³ <https://tdhj.org/blog/post/rohingya-myanmar-lawfare/>

Collapse of the Soviet Union (1991):

When the USSR dissolved, newly independent states adopted new nationality laws that required residence, registration, or ethnic affiliation to qualify for citizenship. Many people, particularly ethnic minorities and migrants, did not meet these legal criteria and were not automatically granted nationality, leaving large numbers stateless or at high risk of statelessness.⁶⁴

UNHCR Launches #IBelong Campaign (2014):

The UN started a global campaign to end statelessness by encouraging countries to change laws, register births, and protect vulnerable groups. It brought worldwide attention to a problem that had been ignored for decades.⁶⁵

Launch of the Global Alliance to End Statelessness (October 2024): In October 2024, UNHCR launched the Global Alliance to End Statelessness, bringing together states, international organizations, and civil society to accelerate efforts to end statelessness. The Alliance focuses on legal reforms, universal birth registration, and protection of stateless populations, marking a renewed global commitment to addressing statelessness ahead of the 2030 deadline.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/event/the-collapse-of-the-Soviet-Union>

⁶⁵ <https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/protect-human-rights/ending-statelessness/ibelong-campaign-end-statelessness>

⁶⁶ <https://statelessnessalliance.org/>

Question to consider

1. What is your country's current legal framework regarding nationality and birth registration, and the prevention of statelessness? (Does your country allow children to inherit nationality easily? Are there gaps in discriminatory laws?)
2. Does your country host a stateless population, refugees at risk of statelessness, or communities facing discrimination that may affect their nationality rights? (Who are they, where are they located, and what challenges do they face?)
3. What policies, practices, or programs has your country adopted to reduce statelessness, support legal identity, or protect those without nationality? (Birth registration system, legal reforms, etc)
4. How does your country cooperate with UNHCR and other International organizations related to nationality, statelessness, and legal identity? (Partnership, data sharing, humanitarian program, etc)
5. What solution or reforms could your country realistically support in this committee to protect stateless individuals and prevent new cases from arising? (Legal reforms, Regional cooperation, Education access, unified registration system, etc)

Relevant Media

[Atlas of Stateless Persons](#)

[Cate Blanchett: What is statelessness? | #iBelong](#)

["Everyone has the right to a nationality!"](#)

[Statelessness Explained](#)

[Living as a Stateless Person](#)

[Reflections from the Statelessness Encyclopedia Asia Pacific \(SEAP\) Project](#)

Helpful Resources:

[Statelessness Around the World | UNHCR UK](#)

[What is Statelessness? Causes, Impact, and Solutions](#)

[Handbook on Protection of Stateless Persons | unhcr](#)

[Figures at a glance | UNHCR](#)

[UN Calls for Action Against Statelessness Affecting Children - Open Society Justice Initiative](#)

[UNHCR Global Report in 2024](#)

[The Americas Network on Nationality and Statelessness](#)

[Canadian Centre on Statelessness](#)

[Citizenship Rights in Africa Initiative](#)

[Hawiati - MENA Statelessness Network](#)

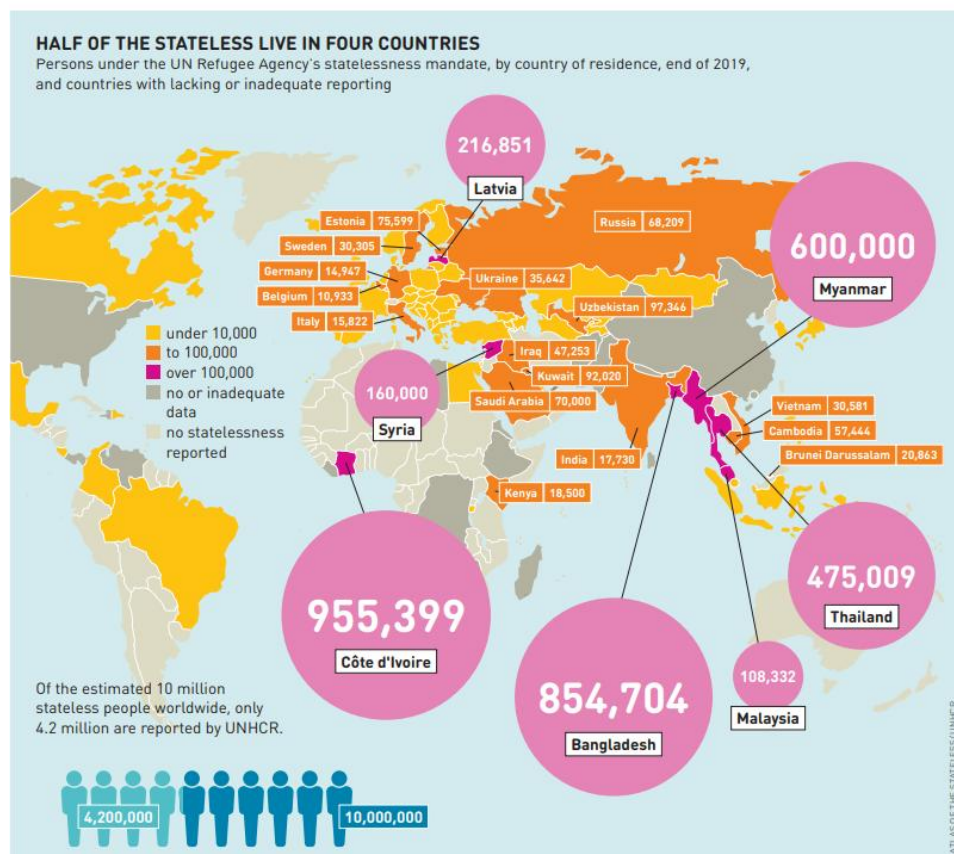
<https://statelessnessalliance.org/>

https://www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls_uploads/pdfs/sonst_publicationen/atlasofthestatless2020_web_201029.pdf

Short videos:

<https://youtu.be/NJVU-fjPrzY>

<https://youtu.be/IqAqcIqmSKU>



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[Citizenship brings hope to stateless minorities](#)

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https://www.equalrightstrust.org/ertdocumentbank/Flyer%20on%20ending%20gender%20discriminatory%20nationality%20laws_0.pdf

<https://www.humanium.org/en/stateless-invisible/>

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<https://theconversation.com/the-nansen-passport-the-innovative-resp>

<https://encyclopedia.usmmm.org/content/en/article/the-nuremberg-race-laws>

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<https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/great-war-and-the-origins-of-humanitarianism-19181924/tragedy-of-being-stateless-fridtjof-nansen-and-the-rights-of-refugees/0117BF7EDAE249802B54974D1C5C02C2>

<https://theconversation.com/the-nansen-passport-the-innovative-response-to-the-refugee-crisis-that-followed-the-russian-revolution-85487>

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