

Salah: A Journey Through Statelessness

Salah is a stateless man, who was born in the Al-Tash refugee camp in Ramadi, Iraq. His family was forced to flee the Khomeini-regime in Iran before his birth. In 2008, the ravaging war in Iraq forced Salah to flee to Europe and seek protection in Norway.

The Norwegian authorities consider that Salah has Iranian citizenship, but Iran determined that Salah is not their citizen. Without proper identification documents from any country, including Iran, Salah has no country to return to and cannot obtain a residence permit in Norway either.

“You have no chance to live as a normal person.”

Salah lives with his partner May-Britt in Norway and they have two young children together. Salah spends most of his time with his children as his daily routine consist of taking them to the kindergarten, participating in parents’ meetings and playing with them. Their bond is very strong. However, this image of a beautiful family gets shattered as Salah cannot get married with May-Britt and may not apply for family reunification with her and the two children since he has no proof of identity nor nationality.

Salah is educated to work as a nurse, but he does not have a right to work without identity documents despite the fact that his profession is in high risk and great demand in Norway.



“I hope that my life is not going to get worse with the authorities telling me that I have to leave my children behind. With every year that passes, it gets harder and I am afraid that the day I fear the most, will come soon.”

“Every day feels like a year to me. I have been waiting for 12 years in Norway without being allowed to do anything. People my age, have a lot to contribute to the society with.”

“Every father wants to make sure that his children have a secure future. One day, I hope to be able to buy birthday presents for my children.”

Without any nationality, stateless persons often do not have the basic rights that citizens enjoy. Statelessness affects socioeconomic rights such as: education, employment, social welfare, housing, healthcare as well as civil and political rights including: freedom of movement, freedom from arbitrary detention and political participation.

Being undocumented is not the same as being stateless. However, lack of birth registration can put people at risk of statelessness as a birth certificate provides proof of where a person was born and parentage – key information is needed to establish a nationality.

The 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons is the cornerstone of the international protection regime for stateless persons. It provides the definition of a stateless person and establishes minimum standards of treatment for stateless people with respect to a number of rights. These include, but are not limited to, the right to education, employment and housing. The 1954 Convention also guarantees stateless people a right to identity, travel documents and administrative assistance.