



MY MOTHER, MY NATIONALITY

A Report on Granting Bahraini Mothers
the Right to Transmit Their Nationality
to Their Children



December 2024

About us

Founded in 2012, Salam for Democracy and Human Rights (SALAM DHR) is an independent, non-governmental organization that promotes and protects adherence to international human rights standards, particularly in Bahrain and the wider-Gulf region, including through research and dissemination of findings; advocacy and grassroots activism.

Active in human rights coalitions and a member of alliances, including in relation to statelessness, SALAM DHR engages with partners as part of a global movement to uphold human dignity and advance the cause of human rights and the participation of all individuals in public affairs. Internationally recognized bodies and agencies, along with grassroots activists fund the work of SALAM DHR.

SALAM DHR is an international organization with a presence in Bahrain, Lebanon, France, and the United Kingdom (UK). It is registered in France, the United Kingdom and Switzerland.

For more information, please visit our website: <https://salam-dhr.org/>

Table of contents

Executive Summary	1
Report Vision	1
Definition of terms	2
I. Introduction	2
II. The My Mother, My Nationality project	4
1. Project Objective	4
2. Project Activities	4
III. The Legal Framework for the Right to Nationality in both International and Bahraini Law	5
1. The Legal Framework for the Right to Nationality in International Law	5
2. The Legal Framework for the Right to Nationality in Bahraini Law	6
Conclusion	17
1. Recommendations from the international community and various United Nations committees to the Kingdom of Bahrain	17
2. SALAM-DHR's Recommendations:	21
List of References	22

Executive Summary

Gender-based discrimination in nationality laws is a root cause of statelessness, which is the focus of the *My Mother, My Nationality* project. This issue particularly affects children born to Bahraini women who are unable to confer their nationality to their children. Despite Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which affirms every individual's right to a nationality, as well as provisions under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), this practice persists, leading to violations of fundamental rights, including civil, political, and economic rights. Furthermore, the Bahraini Constitution guarantees equal rights for all citizens.

The *My Mother, My Nationality* report addresses the impact gender-based discrimination has on Bahraini women and their children. Women are denied the right to grant nationality to their offspring, resulting in statelessness of children when the father is foreign or stateless.

The report also reviews the legal framework safeguarding the right to nationality in Bahrain. Despite the Bahraini Constitution and the National Action Charter, both of which affirm gender equality, the Bahraini nationality law continues to enshrine this form of discrimination. The report highlights the challenges this law poses to children including the deprivation of basic rights such as education, healthcare, and employment.

Additionally, the report includes testimonies from individuals directly affected by Bahrain's discriminatory nationality law, who continue to experience social and economic marginalization.

Finally, the report presents several recommendations aimed at reforming the existing legislation to promote the rights of Bahraini women and their children, ensuring everyone's right to nationality is granted fairly and equitably to all.

Report Vision

The issue of Bahraini mothers being denied the right to pass their nationality on to their children has impacted a wide variety of individuals and communities. This report seeks to amplify their voices and share the struggles of those impacted by statelessness. It aims to bring awareness to this critical issue and advocate for legal and policy changes to promote justice and equality. The ultimate goal is to end this form of discrimination that threatens the rights of children and mothers in Bahrain.

Definition of terms

Stateless Person: According to the legal definition in the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, a stateless person is someone who is "not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law". This simply means that stateless people are not recognized as citizens by any country.¹ While the official Arabic term for a stateless person is ‘adeem al-jansiya (literally ‘lacking nationality’), in everyday speech, stateless people across the region use various terms to refer to themselves.² One common term is “*bidoon*”. The term *bidoon* means “without nationality” and is often used to refer to individuals who do not hold any specific nationality in certain countries, especially in the Gulf region. These individuals are generally recognized as lacking official documents to prove their affiliation with a particular country.

¹ UNHCR - The UN Refugee Agency. (n.d.). *UN Conventions on Statelessness | UNHCR*. UNHCR. <https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/protect-human-rights/ending-statelessness/un-conventions-statelessness>

²Introducing “Hawiati”: A network for stateless solidarity in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) | European Network on Statelessness. (2021, January 21). European Network on Statelessness. <https://www.statelessness.eu/updates/blog/introducing-hawiati-network-stateless-solidarity-middle-east-and-north-africa-mena>

I. Introduction

The causes of statelessness are varied, ranging from gaps in nationality laws governing nationality acquisition or deprivation, which differ between countries, to the loss or deprivation of nationality by the state itself, both judicially and administratively. Other contributing factors include discriminatory laws and policies based on race, ethnicity, religion or language, as well as causes related to the emergence of new countries or changes in borders, and the lack of birth registration. Gender-based discrimination, which is the primary subject of the *My Mother, My Nationality* project, significantly exacerbates the problem of statelessness and its repercussions on children.³

Some countries maintain policies which continue to deny individuals and members of particular groups their full nationality rights, despite Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirming that “everyone has the right to a nationality.” Statelessness is not only a violation of the right to nationality: it extends far beyond, causing violations of basic political, civil, social, and economic rights. The right to nationality is defined as the legal relationship between an individual and a state and is often a legal or practical prerequisite for exercising basic rights, particularly political and civil rights.⁴ It is a fundamental human right, described as “the right to have rights”⁵, that is integral to human dignity and the full enjoyment of other rights, including civil and political rights, access to public services, the right to identity, health, medical care, education, and work. Deprivation of this right leads to a stripping of many, if not all, basic rights and legal identity, placing individuals in a state of exclusion and isolation in society.

³ UNHCR - The UN Refugee Agency. (n.d.-a). Stateless people | UNHCR. UNHCR. <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-protect/stateless-people>

⁴ [A legal research and study on nationality in private international law - Free Legal Consultations.] [بحث قانوني و دراسة حول](#) الجنسية في القانون الدولي الخاص - استشارات قانونية مجانية (October 2, 2016). أمل المرشدي.

⁵ الحق في الحصول على الحقوق: جدال حول الجنسية في كولومبيا. / المفكرة. (December 16, 2020). لوسيا راميريز بوليفار وسيلفيا رويز مانسيررا. [الحق في الحصول على الحقوق: جدال حول الجنسية في](#) [The Right to Have Rights: A Debate on Nationality in Colombia] [كولومبيا | Legal Agenda](#)

The Kingdom of Bahrain is one of the countries where violations of the right to nationality are widespread. Bahraini women face significant inequality in nationality laws, as they are not allowed to transmit their nationality to their children or foreign spouses on an equal footing with Bahraini men. This legal disparity creates significant challenges for families, particularly for those who fall under one of the following four categories:

1. The mother is Bahraini, and the father is foreign.
2. The mother is Bahraini, and the father has had his nationality revoked.
3. The mother is Bahraini, and the father is stateless and residing in the Kingdom of Bahrain.
4. The mother is Bahraini, and the father is stateless and residing outside the Kingdom of Bahrain.

In all aforementioned cases, Bahraini mothers are the common factor in the instances of statelessness among their children. Thus, they are the demographic upon which the two central arguments of this project are based: the first argument emphasizes the importance and urgency of granting Bahraini mothers the right to pass on their nationality to their children. The second highlights how this denial constitutes a dual violation: in addition to being a violation of the rights of women in Bahrain, which inevitably leads to others violations by depriving their children of nationality, it also constitutes a compounded violation of international laws, legislation, domestic norms, and constitutional principles.

The absence of equality in nationality rights results in systemic inequities for women, children, family unity, and society as a whole, contributing to issues such as statelessness, discrimination, and limited access to essential services and a broad spectrum of fundamental rights. Although children of a Bahraini mother can access medical care in Bahrain, there are other negative repercussions related to legal and social insecurity. For example, children born to Bahraini mothers and non-Bahraini fathers may face legal ambiguity about their status, in addition to social stigma and marginalization that could affect their social integration and mental health. Furthermore, the inability to confer nationality may constitute a violation of the child's rights to nationality and legal identity, affecting their ability to participate fully in society. If this problem is not resolved, it could perpetuate a cycle of marginalization and statelessness across generations, leading to continued, intergenerational.

II. The *My Mother, My Nationality* project

1. Project Objective

The *My Mother, My Nationality* project aims to shed light on the denial of the Bahraini mother's right to grant citizenship to her children. This is achieved by sharing the stories of individuals affected by the gender-based discrimination in Bahrain's nationality laws, in order to advocate for the ending of such systemic discrimination. SALAM DHR also seeks to urge the Bahraini authorities to adopt policies that address this issue: primarily, granting Bahraini mothers the right to pass on their citizenship to their children equally with Bahraini fathers, and protecting stateless children.

2. Project Activities

As part of the *My Mother, My Nationality* campaign, SALAM DHR engaged with affected individuals in order to advocate for ending gender-based discrimination in Bahrain's nationality laws by sharing their stories. Key collaborations with organizations such as the Bahrain Human Rights Society and the Bahraini Women's Union were instrumental in facilitating campaign activities, including collecting testimonies from affected families and ensuring logistical support for dialogue sessions and discussions.

On July 25, 2024, SALAM DHR hosted a closed online dialogue session that brought together activists, representatives of civil society organizations, as well as families and individuals affected by this discrimination. The session highlighted personal testimonies from families impacted by Bahrain's nationality laws and provided key recommendations for legislative reforms. Representatives from the Women's Union enriched the discussions by sharing insights derived from their research, data, field experience and advocacy efforts for women. The session also marked the official launch of the #MyMother_MyNationality campaign.

Additionally, the project team traveled to Geneva in October 2024 during the 57th session of the Human Rights Council. The team met with the Secretariat of the Working Group on Discrimination Against Women and Girls to amplify the voices of individuals affected by systemic gender-based discrimination in Bahrain's nationality laws. During the meeting, they discussed specific cases of Bahraini mothers being denied the right to confer their nationality to their children.

An article entitled, "*Has the Time Come to Grant Citizenship to the Children of Bahraini Women?*"⁶ was published in the online newspaper, the Delmon Post. The article highlighted how many children of Bahraini mothers with non-Bahraini fathers were forced to leave Bahrain and separate from their mothers, while those who remained faced deprivation of their civil and political rights. It called on the state to grant citizenship to these children, emphasizing that all citizens should enjoy equal rights without discrimination. The article stressed the need to amend Bahrain's nationality law to ensure equality between men and women in granting citizenship.

To further support the project's goals, SALAM-DHR aims to organize an in-person dialogue session in Bahrain with the participation of affected families, ensuring their privacy and safety. The session aims to gather additional impactful testimonies that directly contribute to advancing the campaign's objectives. Moreover, as part of the project plan, a short film will be produced to reflect the essence of the campaign, showcasing its key messages, family stories, and primary objectives.

III. The Legal Framework for the Right to Nationality in both International and Bahraini Law

1. The Legal Framework for the Right to Nationality in International Law

Given the importance of the right to nationality, it has been enshrined in numerous international treaties. Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that, "Everyone has the right to a nationality. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of their nationality or the right to change his nationality." Article 24 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights underscores the necessity of registering every child at birth and granting them a name, affirming their right to acquire nationality. Furthermore, Article 7, subparagraph 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates that every child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right to a name and nationality at birth and, as far as possible, the right to know

⁶ Salam Media. (2024, September 13). *Has the Time Come to Grant Citizenship to the Children of Bahraini Women?* SALAM DHR. <https://salam-dhr.org/has-the-time-come-to-grant-citizenship-to-the-children-of-bahraini-women/> For the Arabic version visit Delmon Post website on: [هل حان الأوان لمنح الجنسية لابناء المرأة البحرينية؟](#)

and be cared for by his or her parents. Additionally, Article 9, subparagraph 2 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women stipulates that “States Parties shall grant women equal rights with men with respect to the nationality of their children.”

On the other hand, due to the absence of clear legal rules that precisely address cases of statelessness, states recognized the need for further international cooperation to prevent and reduce statelessness. This recognition led to the adoption of a convention, the core purpose of which is the reduction of statelessness, complementing international human rights treaties and provisions related to the right to nationality. For example, while the Universal Declaration of Human Rights confirms that everyone has the right to a nationality (Article 15), it does not specify the particular nationality to which an individual is entitled. This lack of clear rules can result in statelessness. Consequently, states developed additional standards, which were adopted in 1961 as the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness (“1961 Convention”). The influence of the 1961 Convention has extended widely, as it has had a significant impact, with many states incorporating elements of the Convention into their national nationality legislation.⁷

2. The Legal Framework for the Right to Nationality in Bahraini Law

The Bahraini Constitution addresses the right to nationality in Chapter Three: Public Rights and Duties, specifically in Article 17 (a), which states that “Citizenship shall be defined by the law, and no person enjoying citizenship by origin may be deprived of it except in cases of high treason and dual nationality and in accordance with the conditions specified by the law.” In subparagraph (b), it states that “Citizenship may not be withdrawn from a naturalized citizen except within the limits of the law.” Furthermore, article 18 and article 4 of Chapter Two article that the "Basic Constituents of Society" of the Bahraini Constitution is of great importance; The Constitution emphasizes the importance of equality among all citizens before the law in their rights and public duties, prohibiting discrimination based on gender, although it overlooks a crucial aspect of equality in the law, rather than merely before it.

⁷ UNHCR. (September, 2010). Preventing and Reducing Statelessness The 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. | UNHCR. [Preventing and reducing statelessness](#)

Article 4 states, "Justice is the basis of government. Cooperation and mutual respect provide a firm bond between citizens. Freedom, equality, security, trust, knowledge, social solidarity and equality of opportunity for citizens are pillars of society guaranteed by the State."

Article 18 states, "People are equal in human dignity, and citizens are equal before the law in public rights and duties. There shall be no discrimination among them on the basis of sex, origin, language, religion or creed."

Additionally, Article 5 highlights the importance of the family and equality between men and women, providing protection for motherhood and childhood: "(a) The family is the basis of society, deriving its strength from religion, morality and love of the homeland. The law preserves its lawful entity, strengthens its bonds and values, under its aegis extends protection to mothers and children, tends the young and protects them from exploitation and safeguards them against moral, bodily and spiritual neglect. The State cares in particular for the physical, moral and intellectual development of the young. (b) The State guarantees reconciling the duties of women towards the family with their work in society, and their equality with men in political, social, cultural, and economic spheres without breaching the provisions of Islamic canon law (Shari'a)."

The National Action Charter reaffirms, in its second article "Protection of individual freedoms and equality", the principle of equality before the law, "without distinction of race, origin, language, religion or belief." It also affirms that guaranteeing personal freedoms and equality is a fundamental pillar of society and links this to human dignity. The Charter connects this principle to Islamic values as demonstrated in the following extract: "Individual freedoms, quality, justice and equal opportunity are core principles of the society. The State shoulders the responsibility of ensuring them for all citizens on an equal footing. This is based on a broader principle, namely, that people are equal insofar as human dignity is concerned, a principle that has been consecrated by Islam since fourteen centuries. Addressing believers during his 'Hajjatul Wada'a (the last pilgrimage). Prophet Mohammed laid emphasis on this principle by saying that people are as equal as dents of a comb are, that no Arab claims a preference over an "Ajami" (or a non-Arab) and no white man can claim preference over a black man except on the basis of righteousness and good deeds. A natural flow of this great principle of Islam and indeed humanity is a set of related principles, namely:

- 1) All citizens are equal before the law in terms of rights and duties, without distinction of race, origin, language, religion or belief. This has been reiterated by H.H. the Amir in his first address to the people in the wake of his assumption to power.

Despite the Bahraini Constitution and the National Action Charter emphasizing the importance of equality between men and women in all aspects and prohibiting gender-based discrimination, Bahrain's 1963 Nationality Law has enshrined several discriminatory practices against women.

Article 4 (c) of the Bahraini Citizenship Act of 1963, stipulated that citizenship can be granted to children of Bahraini women only under certain conditions, unlike the automatic entitlement for children of Bahraini men.⁸ This highlights the gender-based discriminatory rules in the Bahraini Nationality Law, which are the root cause of children being exposed to the risk of statelessness: a child can remain deprived of their father's nationality for political reasons and deprived of the mother's nationality for traditional and cultural reasons.

Furthermore, Bahrain's reservation to subparagraph 2 of Article (9) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) — stipulates that its application must not breach the provisions of Islamic Shariah⁹ — underscores the discriminatory nature of the Nationality Law.

Despite acknowledging the issue and signing international treaties that explicitly affirm the right to nationality for both genders and emphasize equality – such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and CEDAW – the Bahraini government has not taken effective measures to implement the necessary legal reforms to address the systemic discrimination in the country's nationality laws.

Many international treaty bodies, such as the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and the Universal Periodic Review, have repeatedly urged Bahrain to amend its nationality laws to eliminate gender-based discrimination and prevent childhood statelessness. However, the Bahraini government has failed to address this issue. Moreover, the absence of comprehensive data on stateless children and effective legal safeguards exacerbates the problem.

To achieve the objectives of this project, SALAM DHR directed its efforts toward engaging with affected individuals in order to advocate for ending gender-based discrimination in nationality

⁸ ADHRB STAFF. (2023, June 26). *Dispatch on the Citizenship Law for Women in Bahrain | Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain*. Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain. <https://www.adhrb.org/2023/06/dispatch-on-the-citizenship-law-for-women-in-bahrain>

⁹ *Ibid*

laws and sharing their personal stories and testimonies. These activities form a central part of the project's activities.

This report includes the stories and voices of affected individuals and families impacted by discrimination in Bahrain's nationality laws, based on personal testimonies shared with the SALAM DHR's project team during one of the dialogue sessions on this topic.

Hasan

Hasan, born in Bahrain in 1997, is directly affected by the discriminatory Nationality Law. His mother is Bahraini, while his father is "Bidoon" (stateless), rendering Hasan stateless as he cannot acquire Bahraini nationality through his mother. Hasan and his family face daily hardships due to his lack of nationality, which denies him the most basic rights afforded to Bahraini citizens. Furthermore, his siblings suffer from the same predicament.

"As a Bidoon, there are basic rights I don't have in Bahrain. Simple things like opening a bank account – I can't do it. I don't own anything in my name. I can't register for jobs through the Ministry of Labor because I don't have any identity."

Despite holding a birth certificate, proving he was born in Bahrain, this document has only granted him access to healthcare – the sole right given to children of Bahraini mothers. Hasan graduated from high school in 2015 with distinction but was denied scholarships and university grants because he is not legally Bahraini. Later, he graduated from the University of Bahrain in 2019 with a bachelor's degree in English. Hasan worked as an English teacher for three years in a private school but could not work in any government institution due to his legal status.

"To this day, I'm 26 years old, and I have no aspirations. I can't even think about getting married. At this age, I should be thinking about marriage and starting a family. Realistically, I haven't been able to consider these things because my situation doesn't allow it."

Hasan, stateless individual born to a Bahraini mother and a stateless father, currently residing in Bahrain.

Umm Hadi

Umm Hadi does not hold Bahraini nationality. She is the daughter of a Bahraini mother and a Saudi father. Umm Hadi has two brothers and one sister, all of whom are stateless. The family

does not hold Saudi nationality, as they have no family ties to Saudi Arabia following her parents' divorce and her father's subsequent passing.

Umm Hadi and her family have been living in Bahrain since 2006. She applied for citizenship but despite her application being accepted in 2010, it hasn't been granted yet. Her family relies on social welfare for assistance and faces significant financial difficulties.

Umm Hadi graduated from university in 2016 but has been unable to secure employment via the "Tamkeen" support program, which is exclusively for Bahraini citizens. Additionally, she cannot access government housing as she does not have children with Bahraini nationality.

"We've become stateless: caught between two fires. We have no housing, no job, and no nationality. So, what's the solution?"

In 2018, Umm Hadi married a Bahraini man and applied for citizenship again, but to no avail. Her inability to work continues to prevent her from helping her family, who are struggling financially, especially with a child suffering from a chronic illness.

"Our only hope is to gain nationality so we can live a dignified life on this land we know as home."

Umm Hadi, stateless mother born to a Bahraini mother and a Saudi father, residing in Bahrain.

Ali - Abu Mortada

Ali Abdulimam, a Bahraini activist, had his nationality revoked in 2015. He has two children who were born in the United Kingdom but were denied Bahraini citizenship due to their father's statelessness and their mother's inability to transmit her Bahraini nationality. Ali reflects on how this experience has impacted him and his family.

"The hardest thing was explaining to my infant child that he doesn't have a document to prove his identity or allow him to travel. That was heartbreaking."

Ali also faces the challenge of explaining his situation to his young children, who view him as a hero and a human rights defender:

"Daddy, why was your nationality revoked? Why was your identity taken away? You're someone who should be honored!"

Ali, Bahraini activist, victim of citizenship stripping, father of two children born in the UK to a Bahraini mother.

Jaafar Yahya

Jaafar Yahya, a Bahraini citizen who had his nationality revoked in 2015, shares the struggles he and his family have faced. Jaafar now resides in Germany, where his son Yahya was born and raised. Despite having a Bahraini mother, Yahya cannot obtain Bahraini nationality, nor does he qualify for German nationality. Yahya is currently five years and nine months old, but he remains stateless.

"Yahya still doesn't understand why he can't go to Bahrain. He keeps asking me: Daddy, why can't I go to Bahrain? We had to explain to him that he doesn't have a passport. He constantly asks me: Daddy, why don't I have a passport?"

Jaafar highlights additional challenges related to travel, as he must obtain a temporary passport for his son. However, trips to Gulf countries remain impossible due to non-recognition of this document. He also emphasizes that the suffering extends beyond Yahya to the entire family. For instance, Yahya's elderly grandmother, who is wheelchair-bound, has never met her grandson, depriving Yahya of a deeper connection with his extended family:

"This suffering doesn't just affect the individual who had their nationality revoked. It impacts the whole family – the grandmothers, the aunts. His grandmother, my mother, who is wheelchair-bound, hasn't seen him yet and is heartbroken because she hasn't been able to meet her grandson."

Jaafar, Bahraini activist, victim of citizenship stripping, father of a stateless child born in Germany to a Bahraini mother.

Umm Al-Ahzan

Umm Al-Ahzan, a Bahraini woman married to a Saudi man, who himself has a Bahraini mother and Saudi father, struggles with her children's inability to obtain Bahraini nationality. Her ordeal began in the 1990s when her husband was arrested during political unrest and imprisoned in Bahrain for a year and two months. Upon completing his sentence, he was immediately deported to Saudi Arabia and banned from entering Bahrain for five years, despite being born and raised in Bahrain and his mother being Bahraini.

The family lived in Saudi Arabia for 16 years due to Umm Al-Ahzan husband's fear of returning to Bahrain and facing potential re-arrest and torture. However, life abroad proved too challenging, prompting Umm Al-Ahzan to return to her homeland. This decision fractured her family, leaving her living alone in Bahrain while her husband and children remained in Saudi Arabia. Her repeated attempts to secure Bahraini nationality for her children, including applications submitted since 2012, have gone unanswered.

Umm Al-Ahzan faces daily challenges as a mother, such as being unable to provide housing for her children because they lack Bahraini citizenship. The situation worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic when half of her children were with her in Bahrain, while the other half remained in Saudi Arabia. During that pandemic, she was unable to cross the border to check on them. She continues to grapple with the pain of her family being separated, a separation caused by the Bahraini state's denial of citizenship to her children:

"We are socially, psychologically, and emotionally impacted. Our family is being torn apart because I cannot give my children my nationality."

Umm Al-Ahzan, Bahraini woman enduring the fragmentation of her family.

Lia

Lia, a Bahraini mother married to an Italian man, lives in Bahrain. She chose to raise her two children in her homeland, where they lived and studied in Bahrain. Despite this, her children were unable to obtain Bahraini citizenship, a matter Lia tirelessly sought to resolve through every possible avenue.

As a result of being denied Bahraini citizenship, one of her children had to travel to Italy to pursue higher education and secure his rights, relying on his father's Italian nationality. The other child stayed in Bahrain, striving relentlessly to obtain citizenship, which caused the family to split:

"One of my children had to go to Italy because he has his father's nationality, while the other stayed in Bahrain and, after much effort, managed to obtain Bahraini nationality."

Lia finds this disparity baffling, as one child eventually succeeded in obtaining citizenship after a struggle, while the other remains stateless without any clear explanation.

Although her children hold Italian nationality, it does not replace their sense of belonging to the homeland where they grew up.

Lia, Bahraini mother facing family separation due to her children's denial of citizenship.

Sadiqa

Sadiqa is a Bahraini woman married to a “Bidoon” born in Bahrain. Despite her husband’s mother being Bahraini and his grandparents being from Bahrain, neither her husband nor their seven children have been able to obtain Bahraini nationality. Their marriage has lasted for over 24 years, and all their children were born and educated in Bahrain, yet they remain stateless.

Sadiqa submitted an application to the Immigration and Passports Directorate to request Bahraini nationality for her children. Later, when the Bahraini Women’s Council introduced the opportunity for Bahraini women married to stateless men to register and seek support for granting nationality, Sadiqa registered her name and was promised a response. However, despite her ongoing efforts and follow-ups, the responses have been disappointing, and her children still have not been granted citizenship.

Sadiqa recounts her daily struggles due to her children’s statelessness, such as accessing medical care. She often faced challenges renewing her children’s health cards, even though healthcare is the only right granted to children of Bahraini mothers.

"We had to fight to get them treated at hospitals. Some agreed, and others refused to treat them." Sadiqa says.

Her daughter was refused admission to the Polytechnic University after being asked about her nationality. However, Sadiqa managed to enroll her children at the University of Bahrain after filing a complaint.

Sadiqa also describes challenges with social assistance systems. She receives just 15 Bahraini Dinars (approximately £32) every three months as meat subsidies – a right provided to Bahraini citizens. However, her children, being stateless, are not eligible for state assistance. Moreover, even though her children were educated and graduated in Bahrain, they face difficulties finding job opportunities due to their legal status. Her eldest son, who had secured a job near their home, was fired when officials discovered that his ID card listed him as "Iranian," despite never having been to Iran in his life.

Sadiqa is deeply worried about her children’s future, as dealing with government offices and public institutions requires a Bahraini citizen. She often handles all the administrative work on her children’s behalf, but she fears for their fate when she is no longer around to support them.

"I fear the future... I mean, my children and I are lost. I must be present with them at all times."

Sadiqa has officially addressed her plea to the authorities, particularly the Bahraini Women's Council and His Majesty the King:

"As a Bahraini woman, I appeal to the Women's Council to look into my children's cases. My poor son dreams of joining the army. My hope is that His Majesty the King, the Prime Minister, and the Women's Council will issue a decision granting my children nationality."

Her story ends with a painful message, reflecting her feelings of alienation from her homeland. She believes that while others are granted nationality, her children, who rightfully deserve it, are denied that right:

"I see people being granted citizenship, and this burns me inside because my children, who deserve it, don't get it. This is injustice. Bahraini women's children should be the first to be treated fairly."

"I am a stranger in Bahrain. Sadly, a stranger. I live as if I am someone foreign who came here with nothing to call her own."

Sadiqa, Bahraini mother of seven stateless children

Balqis

Balqis endures daily struggles with her children due to the revocation of her husband's nationality for political reasons. After her husband's citizenship was revoked while he was abroad, Balqis was pregnant with their second child. This left her children without Bahraini citizenship. After applying pressure on the relevant authorities for years and fulfilling numerous requirements, her eldest son was eventually granted a temporary passport to visit his father for two weeks. However, the passport was confiscated upon his return to Bahrain. Her second son has never met his father, deepening Balqis' sense of alienation from his family.

Although born and raised in Bahrain, her children face severe challenges due to the state's refusal to recognize their citizenship. Bahraini women are not allowed to pass their nationality to their children. It is a right reserved exclusively for Bahraini men. This policy has marginalized her children, depriving them of basic rights like education, healthcare, and travel.

On May 19, 2022, Balqis tried to enroll her eldest son in school. She recalls:

"More than a month has passed, and the ministry is still reviewing the application. Does it take this long to study a case? Especially since my child is not the first stateless child to enroll in school... Many children have been registered before, which means the ministry is already familiar with such cases. Should I wait until the school year starts while the ministry is still 'studying' the matter?"

Despite providing all the required documentation, her son struggled to access his right to education:

"Education in Bahrain is mandatory for everyone, whether Bahraini or non-Bahraini. It's not our fault that our child doesn't have Bahraini nationality... The absence of a passport is a force majeure beyond our control. We need a fundamental solution to the issue of stateless children. Bahrain is a country of law and has ratified numerous treaties that protect children's rights... but where is that reflected in reality?"

Balqis recounts another incident involving her son when she bought him a small chalkboard as a gift. He wrote:

"I've been disadvantaged in my life."

When she asked him why he felt this way, he replied:

"I'm deprived of everything – how can I not be disadvantaged? I have no nationality, no passport. I go to the hospital and face delays before they accept me. I go to school and face delays before they admit me. I can't travel. I saw my dad only once. I can't even cross the bridge [to Saudi Arabia]. My friends travel during vacations, but I can't even see Saudi Arabia or snow like them. People go to matches, and I wish I could, but I can't. Everything depends on having a passport and nationality, and I'm deprived of it all. I feel suffocated, Mom..."

Balqis, Bahraini mother married to a Bahraini man who is a victim of citizenship stripping.

Umm Ahmed

Umm Ahmed is a Bahraini woman married to a Saudi man who passed away before securing passports for their children. She has five children (two daughters and three sons). Following the arrest of two of her sons, Ahmed, one of her sons, was deported to Saudi Arabia and barred from entering Bahrain after serving his sentence. Ahmed is married to a Bahraini woman. They have a daughter, born in Bahrain, but she has not been granted Bahraini citizenship. Umm's other two sons, Hasan and Abbas, remain imprisoned, and the family fears they may face deportation upon

their release. Her two daughters, married to Bahraini men, have not been able to acquire their husbands' citizenship.

Umm Ahmed, Bahraini mother of five stateless children.

Mariam

Mariam is a Bahraini mother of five stateless children, married to an Iraqi man. According to Bahraini law, any Arab who resides in Bahrain for 15 years is eligible to acquire Bahraini citizenship, but her husband has not been granted it, despite having fulfilled the criteria. Additionally, Mariam has not been able to secure Bahraini citizenship for her children, despite them being born and raised in Bahrain.

"I am Bahraini, and my children were born in Bahrain. From the moment they opened their eyes, they have been in Bahrain. They breathe Bahrain, their childhood is Bahrain, their schools are in Bahrain. They were raised here, and this is their homeland. They have loyalty to the country... Their love for Bahrain is just like that of any other citizen."

Due to the difficult living conditions and financial challenges resulting from their statelessness, Mariam's husband once took two of their daughters to Iraq without informing her. After immense pressure from Mariam, he returned to Bahrain after a week and brought the girls back. However, this incident caused the daughters to miss school during that time, and Mariam lived in constant fear and anxiety that such an incident could happen again, leaving her worried she could lose her daughters forever.

"I am a Bahraini mother, and my only dream is to feel safe and secure with my small family here in my homeland, Bahrain, because we have no other country."

The challenging circumstances have only worsened as her children have grown older. Each new phase of life brings greater difficulties. Mariam's 17-year-old daughter will turn 18 in March, at which point her residency will no longer fall under her mother's sponsorship and must be converted to a work visa. Fear grips her daughter as she and her siblings face uncertainty about their future. Mariam shares her daughter's words from a recent conversation:

"Mama, how will I work? Where can I go, Mama?"

Mariam, Bahraini mother of five stateless children.

Umm Ayman

Umm Ayman is a Bahraini woman married to a Saudi man. She lives in constant fear for her son, in addition to suffering from difficult financial circumstances. She is unemployed and depends on assistance from others, along with the Ministry of Social Development, with no one else to support her. Her son, Ayman, is currently in prison in the residency violations department because he does not have Bahraini citizenship.

A few days after Ayman's birth, Umm Ayman returned from Saudi Arabia with only his birth certificate. She stayed in Bahrain after her return. After some time, her husband passed away, severing her connection to Saudi Arabia and her husband's family. She does not know them, nor does she have any information about their whereabouts, and they have never contacted her. Consequently, her son stayed in Bahrain, where he grew up and was educated.

During the mass protests of 2011, Ayman was arrested and sentenced to 10 years in prison. After completing his prison sentence and returning home, he was arrested again several months ago and transferred to the residency violations prison. Ayman was threatened with deportation to Saudi Arabia. However, since he does not have any documents or proof of his Saudi citizenship, Saudi Arabia refused to accept him. He is now at risk of being deported to a third country without any papers or documents.

Umm Ayman, Bahraini mother of a stateless son caught between prison and the threat of deportation

Ma'souma

Ma'souma, also known as Umm Hussein, is a Bahraini woman married to an Iranian man. She is a mother to six children who live in Bahrain, all of whom are stateless. Despite applying for citizenship since 2001, her family still faces rejection, even though her children were born and raised in Bahrain. Although her husband worked for 36 years at the Ministry of Electricity, he retired without rights or citizenship. He passed away in 2012 without receiving his entitlements.

Umm Hussein recounts the struggles her children have faced due to their lack of Bahraini citizenship, particularly in hospitals and daily life. The family suffers from constant relocation and instability, living in rented accommodation, which exacerbates their emotional distress. She adds that her eldest son, who was studying accounting, was unable to complete his education due to his lack of Bahraini citizenship, while her daughter refuses to get married because she has no nationality or passport.

Ma'souma is the only available support for her children. She fears for their future after her death and calls on those in power to grant them citizenship:

"My children have developed a resistance to life but... if I leave them, what will their future be?"

Ma'souma, Bahraini mother of six stateless children

Conclusion

The findings of the *My Mother, My Nationality* project make it clear that systemic gender inequality in Bahrain's nationality legislation remains a fundamental issue. This form of systemic discrimination continues to prevent Bahraini women from conferring their nationality to their children, affecting not only those directly impacted by the law but society as a whole. "To Live without a nationality is to live a life in the shadows"¹⁰, stripped of any identity and legal existence.

The situation of stateless individuals in Bahrain, particularly children, requires genuine efforts and protection. In light of these findings, amending Bahrain's Nationality Law is crucial to promoting gender equality, protecting children's rights, and ensuring the social and economic stability of affected families and Bahraini society.

1. Recommendations from the international community and various United Nations committees to the Kingdom of Bahrain

The international community and various UN committees have provided clear recommendations to Bahrain, which have not yet been implemented, urging the Bahraini authorities to accelerate legislative amendments to the Nationality Law, thereby taking significant steps to ending the practice of discrimination against women and ensuring equal rights for women in transmitting nationality to their children. The recommendations also call for the protection of stateless children's rights, thereby guaranteeing their right to a nationality. Additionally, they urge the Bahraini authorities to request technical assistance in order to effectively implement these changes.

¹⁰ The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees during the "I Belong" campaign.

In the [concluding observations on Bahrain's fourth periodic report](#),¹¹ the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women urged Bahrain to end gender-based discrimination and ensure that Bahraini women have the same right as Bahraini men to transfer their nationality to their children. The following was noted:

12(b) There have been delays in reviewing discriminatory legislation, including the Penal Code and the Nationality Law;

13(b) Give high priority to its law reform process and to modify or repeal, without delay and within a clear time frame, all discriminatory legislation, including discriminatory provisions in the Penal Code, Family Law and Nationality Law, and to sensitize parliamentarians, religious and community leaders, women human rights defenders and the general public on the need for legislative reform;

34. The Committee notes with concern the delay in adopting the 2014 draft amendment to the Nationality Law, pursuant to which Bahraini women would be granted the same rights as Bahraini men to transmit their nationality to their children. It also notes with concern that the draft amendment does not provide for an automatic transfer of nationality to the child when the woman is married to a foreign spouse, unlike when a Bahraini man is married to a foreign spouse, thereby putting the woman's child at risk of being stateless.

35. The Committee recommends that the State party expedite the adoption of the 2014 draft amendment to the Nationality Act and revise it to ensure that Bahraini women have the same right as Bahraini men to transfer their nationality to their children, including when they are married to a foreign spouse. The Committee, in line with its previous recommendation (CEDAW/C/BHR/CO/3, para. 34), recommends that the State party accede to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

Additionally, the Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern in its [concluding observations](#)¹² regarding the measures taken by Bahrain concerning children born to Bahraini mothers, considering them insufficient to guarantee their right to the mother's nationality.

¹¹ **CEDAW/C/BHR/CO/4**: Concluding observations on the fourth Periodic Report of Bahrain /Publication Date: 2 March 2023 /UN Document Symbol: CEDAW/C/BHR/CO/4

¹²**CRC/C/BHR/CO/4-6**: Concluding Observations on the combined fourth to sixth periodic reports of Bahrain /Publication Date: 27 February 2019 /UN Document Symbol: CRC/C/BHR/CO/4-6

21. While noting Act No. 35 of 2009, granting resident permits to children of non Bahraini men, and the 2013 waiver, granting Bahraini nationality to such children, the Committee is concerned that such measures are insufficient in guaranteeing the right of all children born to Bahraini mothers to nationality. It is also concerned about: (a) Slow progress in its national legislation to allow the transfer of citizenship to children of Bahraini mothers and non-Bahraini fathers; (b) The large number of children who are at risk of being stateless, including Baharna, Ajam and Bidoon children, children whose citizenship has been revoked and children born to a parent whose citizenship has changed or has been revoked; (c) Reports of barriers faced by children of mothers in detention in obtaining a birth certificate or national identity card.

The recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child included under the title "The Right to Nationality and Birth Registration" in section (D) of Civil Rights and Freedoms, paragraph 22 the following recommendations:

- (a) Expeditiously amend its Citizenship Act to ensure the right to a nationality for all children of Bahraini women married to non-Bahraini men, to establish safeguards to prevent children from being stateless and to ensure that the citizenship of such children is not revoked;
- (b) Collect data on stateless children, disaggregated by, inter alia, sex, age, national and ethnic origin, and minority or socioeconomic status, and provide information on this issue in its next report;
- (c) Guarantee the right to acquire Bahraini citizenship for all children currently residing in the State party who would otherwise be stateless, regardless of their own, or their parents', legal status;
- (d) Consider ratifying the Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness;
- (e) Seek technical assistance from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), among others, for the implementation of these recommendations.

Furthermore, [the concluding observations made by the working group on the Universal Periodic Review \(UPR\)](#)¹³ regarding the current situation in Bahrain also included several recommendations to address statelessness, particularly among children. Some of these recommendations include calls for granting Bahraini women the right to transmit nationality to their children, amending the Citizenship Law alongside the importance of taking firm steps to prevent discrimination against children suffering from statelessness.

124.233 Take steps to end discrimination against women, including by allowing Bahraini women to transfer their Bahraini citizenship to their children (Norway);

124.234 Amend legislation to allow Bahraini women to pass on their nationality to their children (Cyprus);

124.235 Amend the Citizenship Law prohibiting the passage of citizenship from a woman to her child (Sierra Leone);

124.236 Amend the Citizenship Law, by allowing the passage of citizenship from a woman to her child, while introducing legislation to protect and guarantee the rights of stateless children (Brazil);

124.237 Amend the Citizenship Law to grant citizenship to the children of Bahraini women married to non-Bahraini men (United States of America);

124.238 Amend and harmonize laws and policies to ensure Bahraini women the right to pass citizenship to their children (Slovenia);

124.240 Amend its nationality laws so that Bahraini women married to foreigners can transmit Bahraini citizenship to their children (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland);

124.244 Put in place and strengthen mechanisms combating and preventing discrimination against girls, children with disabilities, children born to foreign or stateless fathers and all the vulnerable children from minority groups to avoid marginalization (Gambia)

124.232 Enable women to transfer nationality to their children without restriction and on equal basis with men (Lithuania);

¹³A/HRC/52/4: Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review/ Publication date: 11 January 2023 /UN Document Symbol: A/HRC/52/4

124.239 Amend the Citizenship Law and other relevant legislation to allow women to transfer Bahraini nationality to their children without restriction and on an equal basis with men (Canada);

124.241 Implement all necessary legislative and administrative measures to allow Bahraini women married to foreigners to transfer their nationality to their children without restriction (Uruguay);

124.242 Provide legal guarantees to stateless persons to obtain Bahraini nationality, including through the adoption of laws that allow women to transmit nationality to their children (Costa Rica).

There is an urgent need for swift action to align Bahrain's nationality laws with international standards and to ensure their serious implementation to guarantee that all children and families in Bahrain enjoy equal rights and protections. However, all of this remains dependent on the prevailing political will, both in Bahrain and amongst the international community. If there is no clear, conscious political will to address the issue of equality in nationality, it signals a serious trend toward an increase in the number of stateless individuals, extending to future generations in Bahrain.

2. SALAM-DHR's Recommendations:

In light of the findings of this report, SALAM DHR presents the following recommendations to the Kingdom of Bahrain to address the gender-based discrimination in nationality laws and its serious consequences for children:

At the international level

- Bahrain should fully implement international conventions it has ratified that address equality in nationality rights for women, including their right to pass nationality to their children and spouses on an equal basis with men, and address statelessness, and integrate these conventions into national legislation.
- Bahrain should remove reservation to subparagraph 2 of Article 9 of the CEDAW, which calls for granting women equal rights with men regarding their children's nationality, as well as reservations on related issues in other treaties promoting women rights (for instance, the reservation to Article 3 of the ICCPR).

At the national level

- Review Bahrain's constitutional texts that guarantee equality before the law and place more emphasis on the importance of equality in the law.
- Prioritize the review and amendment of the discriminatory nationality law, granting Bahraini women the same rights as Bahraini men in transmitting nationality to their children.
- Facilitate and speed up procedures for applying for nationality.
- Empower Bahraini mothers to register their children at birth so that newborns receive an identity regardless of the father's status.
- Work to introduce legislation and decrees to ensure comprehensive legal protection to advance the rights of stateless children, including access to education, healthcare, and other rights. Ensure that all children residing in Bahrain, who would otherwise be stateless, can acquire Bahraini nationality, regardless of their or their parents' legal status.
- Establish a committee to collect data on stateless children in Bahrain, create a database, and work towards identifying cases of statelessness with the aim of eliminating it.

List of References

English References

- UNHCR - The UN Refugee Agency. (n.d.). *UN Conventions on Statelessness* | UNHCR. UNHCR. <https://www.unhcr.org/what-we-do/protect-human-rights/ending-statelessness/un-conventions-statelessness>
- Introducing “Hawiati”: A network for stateless solidarity in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) | European Network on Statelessness. (2021, January 21). European Network on Statelessness. <https://www.statelessness.eu/updates/blog/introducing-hawiati-network-stateless-solidarity-middle-east-and-north-africa-mena>
- UNHCR - The UN Refugee Agency. (n.d.-a). Stateless people | UNHCR. UNHCR. <https://www.unhcr.org/about-unhcr/who-we-protect/stateless-people>
- Salam Media. (2024, September 13). *Has the Time Come to Grant Citizenship to the Children of Bahraini Women?* SALAM DHR. <https://salam-dhr.org/has-the-time-come-to-grant-citizenship-to-the-children-of-bahraini-women/>- For the Arabic version visit Delmon Post website on: [هل حان الأوان لمنح الجنسية لابناء المرأة البحرينية؟](#)
- UNHCR. (September, 2010). Preventing and Reducing Statelessness The 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. | UNHCR. [Preventing and reducing statelessness](#)
- ADHRB STAFF. (2023, June 26). *Dispatch on the Citizenship Law for Women in Bahrain* | *Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain*. Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain. <https://www.adhrb.org/2023/06/dispatch-on-the-citizenship-law-for-women-in-bahrain>
- CEDAW/C/BHR/CO/4: Concluding observations on the fourth Periodic Report of Bahrain /Publication Date: 2 March 2023 /UN Document Symbol: CEDAW/C/BHR/CO/4 <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4007518?ln=fr&v=pdf>
- CRC/C/BHR/CO/4-6: Concluding Observations on the combined fourth to sixth periodic reports of Bahrain /Publication Date: 27 February 2019 /UN Document Symbol: CRC/C/BHR/CO/4-6 <https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=CRC%2FC%2FBHR%2FCO%2F4-6&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False>

- **A/HRC/52/4:** Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review/
Publication date: 11 January 2023 /UN Document Symbol: A/HRC/52/4
<https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g22/611/04/pdf/g2261104.pdf?OpenElement>

Arabic References

- بحث قانوني و دراسة حول الجنسية في القانون الدولي الخاص - استشارات. (2 October, أمل المرشدي. 2016) قانونية مجانية [A legal research and study on nationality in private international law - Free Legal Consultations.] بحث قانوني و دراسة حول الجنسية في القانون الدولي الخاص - استشارات قانونية مجانية
- الحق في الحصول على الحقوق: جدال. (16 December, لوسيا راميريز بوليفار وسيلفيا رويز مانسيرا. 2020) Legal Agenda | الحق في الحصول على الحقوق: جدال حول الجنسية في كولومبيا [The Right to Have Rights: A Debate on Nationality in Colombia] المفكرة القانونية



**My Mother, My Nationality .. A Report on Granting Bahraini Mothers the Right to
Transmit Their Nationality to Their Children.**

copyright©