

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website. Please note that some RIRs have attachments which are not electronically accessible. To obtain a PDF copy of an RIR attachment, please email the [Knowledge and Information Management Unit](#).

30 October 2017

IRQ106009.E

Iraq: The Foreigner's Residence Card issued in the Kurdistan region, including purpose and validity; status afforded by the card, including access to employment and services and the ability to return and reside in Iraq; requirements and procedures for the issuance and renewal of cards; information included on the card (2015-October 2017)

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1. Residency Cards

According to an undated article published on the website of the Migration Policy Centre (MPC), which "conducts advanced policy-oriented research on global migration, asylum and mobility ... [and] serves governance needs at European and global levels" (MPC n.d.a), "[n]on-residents of the Ira[q]i Kurdistan Region are required to obtain permits that authoriz[e] limited stays in the area. These permits are generally renewable" (MPC n.d.b). In its 2016 *World Report*, Human Rights Watch states that "[i]n late 2014, [Kurdistan Regional Government] authorities required Arab Iraqis to obtain renewable residency permits and issued temporary permits to travel between Kurdistan's provinces" (Human Rights Watch 27 Jan. 2016).

According to the website of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), a "[s]hort[-]term residency card is available to foreigners who wish to stay in Kurdistan for longer than the 15 days granted on entry and for up to 3 months," and a "[l]ong[-]term residency card is available to foreigners who wish to stay in Kurdistan for between 6 and 12 months" (KRG n.d.). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a former director of international relations at the Department of Foreign Relations of the KRG, who occupied this position from 2008 to August 2017, provided the following:

The residency card is issued by the KRG Ministry of Interior for all those who intend to stay in the Kurdistan Region for more than 30 days. ...

The entry permit to stay in Kurdistan is 30 days and if you want to stay longer you have to apply for residency. The residency is usually either three months, or six months or one year.

We don't have residency longer than one year; you can stay more than one year but you have to renew your residency card every year. (Former Director 12 Oct. 2017)

The former director indicated, based on information from a senior officer at the Immigration and Residency in Erbil, that "there is no more temporary residency card" which "was issued in the past for three months", that residency cards are now only available for a duration of six months or one year, and that the card is still "the same" (Former Director 13 Oct. 2017). The same source stated that he believes that the change was made in 2017 and that "the information on the KRG website has not been updated" (Former Director 13 Oct. 2017).

2. Information Included on the Card

The information in the following paragraph was provided by the former director:

Short-term and long-term residency cards look the same. The name, nationality, duration of the stay, and passport number are included on the card. "In Iraq, you can easily get forged documents with the same design and information. We usually advise to check the authenticity of the document." To make sure that a document is "a genuine card and has not been forged," one needs to "ask the KRG Ministry of Interior and in order to do that they need all the information on the card" (Former Director 12 Oct. 2017).

A sample of a residency card, including the issuance and expiration date, as well as the date and place of birth of the card's holder, and an ID number, provided to the Research Directorate by the former director, is attached to this Response.

3. Requirements and Procedures for Issuance and Renewal of Cards

The KRG website indicates the following requirements to obtain a short-term residency card:

- A support letter [from] the applicant's employer and the company registration document in Kurdistan.
- A written personal guarantee from a person of Iraqi nationality who is a resident of the Erbil Governorate.
- Evidence that the applicant has undertaken a blood test according to the procedures of the residence office. A form to obtain a blood test appointment can be collected from the residence office as part of the application process. The blood test result can usually be obtained within 2-3 days. (KRG n.d.)

According to the same source, for the long-term residency card, the above requirements apply, as well as the following:

- Applicants who are citizens of some countries must also obtain approval from the KRG Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. Applicants from these countries need approval from KRG security establishments. The Residency office can inform you which nationalities need such approval. (KRG n.d.)

A 2015 post by the KRG Directorate of Residency in Erbil, on the Erbil Business Directory website, indicates the following "Residency Fees": 3.250 Iraqi Dinars [C\$3] for a long-term residency and 2.250 Iraqi Dinars [C\$2] for a short-term residency (Erbil Business Directory 8 Dec. 2015). The same source indicates that "[f]ines for out of date residence permit" range from 100.000 [C\$107], for the "1st week" to 500.000 Iraqi Dinars, for the "9th week" (Erbil Business Directory 8 Dec. 2015). In contrast, a 2017 article by Rudaw, a Kurdish "media network" with platforms such as a digital portal, a radio and TV news channel and a newspaper (Rudaw n.d.), states that "[t]he fee for a residency permit is 1.2 million Iraqi [D]inars (about \$1,000)" (Rudaw 12 Jan. 2017).

According to a 2014 post by the KRG Directorate of Residency in Erbil, on the Erbil Business Directory website, this directorate has three residency offices, in Erbil (Hawler), Duhok and Sulaymaniah; these "residency offices give residency permission according to regulations issued by the KRG's [M]inistry of [I]nterior" (Erbil Business Directory 25 Nov. 2014).

The KRG website states that "[i]f an Iraqi citizen living outside of Kurdistan wishes to apply for a residency card in the Kurdistan Region, he or she must visit the residency office of the governorate to which they will apply in person" (KRG n.d.). The same source states the following: "If a Kurdish individual was born in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq or was born abroad but his/her family is from the Region, he or she does not need a residency card" (KRG n.d.). The MPC explains that "Iraqi citizens who are not from the region, but who seek to obtain residency permits for areas controlled by the [KRG] required sponsorship from a resident in the region" (MPC n.d.b). The former director provided the following:

The requirements to get residency card is to have a sponsor, whether it is a company, a university, a school or any offices of government.

[Having a] sponsor means that you are working for somebody or [an] organization.

You cannot renew your residency card online or from abroad; you have to be personally present at the Immigration Office for the renewal. ((Former Director 12 Oct. 2017)

The same source further indicated that the process is usually completed "through an official agent," and that "in most cases the process is done by a lawyer," noting that "[e]ven if the applicant initiates the process of

applying for residency or to renew the card, the Immigration Office needs information about the sponsor and may ask [for the sponsor] to be present" (Former Director 12 Oct. 2017).

A 2016 report on a joint fact finding mission to Erbil and Beirut in September and October 2016, conducted by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) [1], cites the Head of the General Security Directorate as stating that "the sponsorship was abolished in 2012" (Denmark and DRC Apr. 2016, 14). The report explains that according to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a lawyer working for an international NGO, a journalist, Human Rights Watch and an independent researcher, "sponsorship, in practice, is still being enforced" (Denmark and DRC Apr. 2016, 14). The same source cites a western diplomat, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), PAO/KHRW [2] and an international NGO as stating that "it is possible to enter KRI [Kurdistan Region of Iraq] without a sponsorship, however, in order to work or to settle in KRI, a sponsorship is required in practice" (Denmark and DRC Apr. 2016, 14). Regarding the renewal of "residence permits," the report indicates the following:

IOM stated that, with regard to processing of applications for residence permits and the duration of renewed residence permits, the procedure is arbitrarily implemented. According to IOM, sometimes, the temporary residence permit is extended for one week or a month or two months or sometimes even three months during the approval process for a permanent residence. To the knowledge of IOM, the decision may depend on the applicant's background and place of origin. (Denmark and DRC Apr. 2016, 17)

4. Status Afforded by the Foreigner's Residence Card

According to the former director, individuals with a residency card "can apply to bring their family members to Kurdistan. They can send their children to public school and they have access to public hospitals" (12 Oct. 2017). The same source also indicated that residency card holders can apply for jobs, but when there is a change in their job, they have to go to the Residency Office to update their "profile," in accordance with their new job and sponsor (Former Director 12 Oct. 2017).

MPC provides the following:

[t]he KRG has granted residency permits to Syrian refugees that entail freedom of movement within the three Kurdish provinces, right to education free of charge in public schools on par with Iraqi nationals, as well as right to work. Refugees holding a residency permit are also granted free access to health services in the Kurdish region. (MPC n.d.b)

Similarly, a 2015 joint agency briefing paper on Syrian refugees, published by Oxfam (UK) for other humanitarian organisations [3], states that the KRG "issues residency permits to registered refugees that allow them to rent houses, obtain work permits and access healthcare, education and other services" (Oxfam (UK) et al. 9 Nov. 2015, 5).

4.1 Right to Return to the KRI

Without providing further details, the KRG's website states the following regarding short-term residency cards: "If the holder is issued a residence card for this purpose and leaves Kurdistan before it has expired, the card will be retained by immigration staff on departure. A fresh residency application must be made upon returning to Kurdistan" (KRG n.d.). The same source states the following regarding long-term residency cards: "Residence cards may be retained by holders leaving Kurdistan for short periods" (KRG n.d.). The former director indicated that "holders of permanent residency cards can leave and enter Kurdistan without having any problem" and that he believes there will not be "any limitation" in terms of time (12 Oct. 2017). The same source also noted, based on information provided by the senior officer in Erbil, that

the holder of a residency card is free to travel back to their home or outside of Kurdistan Region as long as their card is valid, but if they want to leave Kurdistan permanently they have to give back the residency card to the Residency Office or at the airport. If somebody has a residency card and it expired when they are outside of the Kurdistan Region, they have to apply for a visa to enter Kurdistan again and then apply for residency again. (Former Director 13 Oct. 2017)

4.2 Travel To and Residence in Other Parts of Iraq

Information on the right to travel to and reside in other parts of Iraq with the foreigner's residence card was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The former director indicated that the residency card cannot be used for travel outside of the KRI, noting that "usually, it is not accepted by the authorities from the rest of Iraq [and that] you can use this card to

enter Kurdistan only" (Former Director 12 Oct. 2017). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes

[1] The DRC describes itself as "a humanitarian, non-governmental, non-profit organisation working in more than 30 countries throughout the world" (DRC n.d.).

[2] Public Aid Organization (PAO), based in Erbil, is "an independent non-governmental and non-beneficial organization" that works to improve "life and implement human rights" (PAO n.d.). "The mission of the Kurdish Human Rights Watch, Inc. (KHRW) is to enable [i]nternally [d]isplaced [p]ersons (IDPs), refugee, asyl[um] newcomers and homeless individuals to achieve self-sufficiency and economic independence through direct assistance and capacity-building" (The Kurdish Project n.d.). Its mandate also includes IDPs in the Kurdistan Region (The Kurdish Project n.d.).

[3] The 2015 joint agency briefing paper was published by Oxfam (UK) for the DRC, the Norwegian Refugee Council, Save the Children, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), CARE, World Vision and Oxfam International (Oxfam 9 Nov. 2015, 20).

References

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Danish Refugee Council (DRC). N.d. "[About DRC](#)." [Accessed 25 Oct. 2017]

Erbil Business Directory. 8 December 2015. "[KRG - Directorate of Residency](#)." [Accessed 10 Oct. 2017]

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The Kurdish Project. N.d. "[Kurdish Human Rights Watch \(KHRW\)](#)." [Accessed 23 Oct. 2017]

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Migration Policy Centre (MPC). N.d.b. "[Iraq](#)." [Accessed 10 Oct. 2017]

Oxfam (United Kingdom), Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Norwegian Refugee Council, Save the Children, International Rescue Committee (IRC), CARE, World Vision and Oxfam International. 9 November 2015. *Right to a Future: Empowering Refugees from Syria and Host Governments to Face a Long-Term Crisis*. [Accessed 10 Oct. 2017]

Public Aid Organization (PAO). "[Public Aid Organization](#)." [Accessed 23 Oct. 2017]

Rudaw. 12 January 2017. "[Foreign Workers Flock to Kurdistan Citing Safety](#)." [Accessed 10 Oct. 2017]

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: International Organization for Migration in Iraq; Kurdistan Regional Government – General Directorate of Citizenship of the Ministry of Interior in Erbil, Department of Foreign Relations.

Internet sites, including: Assessment Capacities Project; BasNews; Keesing Reference Systems; Kurdistan Regional Government – Directorate of Residency (Erbil), General Directorate of Citizenship, Ministry of Interior, Representation in the United States; Minority Rights Group International; Newland Chase; Norwegian Country

of Origin Information Centre; Save the Children; The Organization for World Peace; UN – Refworld, UNHCR; United Kingdom – Home Office; US – Department of State.

Attachment

Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). 2014. "Residence Card." Provided by a former director of International Relations, Department of Foreign Relations, Kurdistan Regional Government, 24 October 2017.

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