

# Responses to Information Requests - Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Saudi Arabia: Residency permits through sponsorship, including the foreigner's family members eligible to be sponsored; the process for a sponsor to revoke their sponsorship and whether the foreigner receives documentation that the sponsorship has been revoked (2010-January 2019)

## 1. Residence Permit

Sources explain that, in order to be employed in Saudi Arabia, a foreign worker must obtain a residence permit (*iqama*) through a local sponsor who is usually their employer (UK 6 June 2018; ExpatWoman.com 7 Aug. 2018). Sources indicate that the *iqama* functions as an identification document for foreign workers in Saudi Arabia (ExpatWoman.com 7 Aug. 2018; Wolters Kluwer n.d.). According to the Saudi Ministry of Interior, the *iqama* allows foreign workers to "move freely in the city where they work" (Saudi Arabia n.d.a).

According to sources, the sponsor's consent is necessary when the sponsored person wants to transfer their sponsorship to work for a new employer (UK 6 June 2018; Sweden May 2018, 6). For further information on sponsorship and residency permits in Saudi Arabia, see Response to Information Request ZZZ106013 of November 2017.

### 1.1 Family Members Eligible for Residence Permit

Proven SA, a consulting firm offering support and services to the corporate sector in Saudi Arabia (Proven SA n.d.), states on their website that only foreign workers in "white-collar" professions can sponsor their family (Proven SA 27 Sept. 2016). On its website, PricewaterhouseCoopers International Limited (PwC), an international association of accounting and consultancy firms (Bloomberg n.d.), indicates that "only certain categories of employee[s] can sponsor dependants," and adds that "[g]enerally, unskilled workers are unable to sponsor family members," and that "[e]mployees without university qualifications" may also have difficulties sponsoring family members (PwC [2016]).

According to the website of Helen Ziegler and Associates, Inc. (HZA), a recruitment firm providing staffing services to hospitals in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Qatar (HZA n.d.a), women who are sponsored for "staff-level" positions, such as nurses, are offered a "single-status contract" and are not able to sponsor their spouse or "dependents" (HZA n.d.b). According to the same source, men in "mid-level clinical management, such as [n]urse [m]anagers, [l]aboratory [s]upervisors, etc.," are offered "married status contracts (which pay for airfare, housing, healthcare, and children's education for the spouse and two children)," while women employed at the same level are offered single-status contracts (HZA n.d.b). The same source adds that female physicians and female senior

administrators are "usually" offered a married-status contract (HZA n.d.b). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the Saudi Ministry of Interior's website, a "[h]ouseholder's residence permit" includes residence permits for the holder's wife and minor children (Saudi Arabia n.d.a). Another page of the same website notes that once the child of a "resident alien" is 18 years of age or older, they must obtain a "separate residence permit" (Saudi Arabia n.d.b).

According to a document available on the website of the King Fahd University of Petroleum & Minerals (KFUPM), an "adult son" may "renew his [r]esident permit (Iqama) with his parents" if he is a student and under 25 years of age (KFUPM n.d.). Once he is 25 years old, he must either leave the country with a final exit visa or "find a new sponsor and have his sponsorship transferred" (KFUPM n.d.). The source adds that daughters can continue to reside with their parents, regardless of their age, as long as they remain unmarried (KFUPM n.d.). Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

On their website, PwC indicates that if a resident permit holder has "elderly or infirm parents," the holder can request to sponsor them (PwC n.d.). The same source explains that sponsorship of parents is granted as an "exception" and that the applicant must "prove [that] his or her parents need care" (PwC n.d.). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative of HZA indicated that some workers [employed in hospitals] have asked to sponsor their elderly parents as dependents, but that hospitals have declined these requests (HZA 7 Jan. 2019). The representative added that the individual's parents can obtain a "visit visa" that is "usually" valid for between one and three months, depending on the nationality, and can be renewed (HZA 7 Jan. 2019).

On their website, PwC indicates that Saudi Arabia does not allow the following to be sponsored as dependents: "civil partners," "siblings," "unmarried partners," "same-sex partners," "cohabitees," and "children of unmarried parents" (PwC n.d.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources state that since July 2017, foreign workers who sponsor family members to live in Saudi Arabia have to pay a monthly tax for each dependent they sponsor (*Pakistan Today* 13 July 2017; *The Times of India* 21 June 2017). The same sources add that in 2017, the fees were 100 Saudi Riyals (SAR) [approximately C\$36] per dependent, but that this amount was set to be raised by 100 SAR each year until July 2020, when the monthly fee will be 400 SAR per dependent [approximately C\$143] (*Pakistan Today* 13 July 2017; *The Times of India* 21 June 2017).

## **2. Cancellation of Residence Permit by the Sponsor**

Information on the cancellation of residence permits by sponsors was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources indicate that a residence permit can be cancelled by the employer, including without notice (Expat.com [2017]; ExpatWoman.com 6 Aug. 2018). The same sources add that family members' residence permit would also be cancelled (Expat.com [2017]; ExpatWoman.com 6 Aug. 2018). According to *The Arab Weekly*, an English-language weekly publication with editions in the UK, the UAE, and the US (*The Arab Weekly* n.d.), in order to cancel a residence permit, a sponsor can "log on [to the Absher portal], enter the expat's residency permit number, sponsor identification number, visa number and passport number. Exit visas are then automatically processed" (*The New Arab* 16 Oct. 2016). Further and corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Information on documentation provided to a foreign worker that confirms that their iqama has been cancelled, or sponsorship has been revoked, 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.

## References

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## Additional Sources Consulted

**Internet sites, including:** Amnesty International; eoi.net; Freedom House; Human Rights Watch; Norway – Landinfo; UN – Refworld; US – Department of State.