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India: The unique identification number (IUD) known as Aadhaar; its features and enrolment process; access to data in database
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Aadhaar, which means "foundation," is the name given to India's unique identification number (UID) being issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) (India n.d.a; *Guardian* 2 Mar. 2011). The process involves the collection of biometric information (ibid.; Indian n.d.a); individuals are assigned a specific number linked to their biometric information (ibid.). An article on the Poverty Matters blog of the London-based newspaper *Guardian*, explains that Aadhaar aims to be "the overarching identity to the faceless millions residing in India," comparable to a social security number in other countries (*Guardian* 2 Mar. 2011). Other media sources similarly state that Aadhaar's purpose is to provide a unique identity for every Indian resident (*The Hindu* 12 Mar. 2011; *The Business Times* 23 Dec. 2009; *India Today* 13 Sept. 2010). Aadhaar is purported to be a solution for many people who formerly had no official identity document (DNA 19 Mar. 2011; *Guardian* 2 Mar. 2011). The lack of such identification has reportedly been particularly problematic among poor people (DNA 19 Mar. 2011; India n.d.a), as well as some children, women, migrant workers, homeless people and nomadic tribes (ibid. n.d.b).

Media sources indicate that Aadhaar is a 12-digit number (*Guardian* 2 Mar. 2011; DNA 19 Mar. 2011; IANS 11 Mar. 2011). According to the website of the UIDAI, the government department that oversees implementation of the Aadhaar, the number is universal throughout India--service providers can contact the UID database from anywhere in India to confirm the person's identity (India n.d.a). *India Today*, a news magazine published in five languages that is based in Mumbai and New Delhi, states that the Aadhaar number will make "online authentication of identity" possible (13 Sept. 2010).

Governmental and media sources indicate that individuals can use Aadhaar to access services (DNA 19 Mar. 2011; *Guardian* 2 Mar. 2011; India n.d.a). The Mumbai-based *Daily News and Analysis* (DNA) reports that Aadhaar may be used to prove identity when "applying for a bank account, passport, driving license or booking e-tickets" (19 Mar. 2011). The *Guardian* blog notes that the objective of Aadhaar is to allow recipients better access to government-sponsored social programs, such as the food subsidy program and the national employment guarantee program (2 Mar. 2011). UIDAI notes that although Aadhaar is not compulsory, agencies may require beneficiaries to provide their Aadhaar numbers

in order to access services (India n.d.a).

Media sources report that the Indian government plans to enrol 600 million residents in Aadhaar by 2014 to 2016 (*Guardian* 2 Mar. 2011; *The Hindu* 12 Mar. 2011; *India Today* 13 Sept. 2010). *The Hindu*, a Chennai-based newspaper, indicates that as of March 2011, three million people were enrolled (12 Mar. 2011). According to the New Delhi-based Indo-Asian News Service (IANS), the Delhi state government plans to complete the enrolment of residents in Aadhaar by October 2011, beginning with below-poverty line (BPL) families (11 Mar. 2011).

Procedures to enrol in Aadhaar

According to the UIDAI website, to enrol in Aadhaar, an applicant must complete an application form and, if possible, provide proof of identity and proof of address documents (India n.d.b). Proof of identity documents contain the applicant's name and photo, while proof of address documents contain the applicant's name and address (ibid.). The UIDAI lists several documents as being potentially acceptable as proof of identity or address, including a passport, PAN [Permanent Account Number] card, a ration card, a voter ID, a driving licence, a government photograph ID card, a photograph ID issued by a recognized educational institution, an arms licence, an ATM bank card with photograph, a credit card with photograph, a utility bill (within the past three months), a property tax receipt (within the past three months), a credit card statement (within the past three months), a registered sale or lease agreement, a caste and domicile certificate issued by the state government with photo, a pensioner card with photograph, and others (ibid.).

The UIDAI explains that those who do not have any proof of identity documents can be enrolled in Aadhaar through a pre-authorized "introducer," who must be registered with the UIDAI (ibid.). UIDAI notes that some introducers are registrar employees, elected members, local administrators, teachers, doctors and representatives of local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (ibid.).

Sources indicate that in the Aadhaar enrolment process, biometric and demographic information is collected from the applicant (DNA 19 Mar. 2011; IANS 11 Mar. 2011; India n.d.a). The biometric information collected is a photo, 10 fingerprints and iris scans (ibid.; IANS 11 Mar. 2011). The UIDAI reports that the demographic information is the applicant's name, date of birth, gender, address, parent or guardian details (optional for adults but mandatory for children), and optional contact information, such as a phone number or e-mail address (India n.d.a). The UIDAI also notes that its policy does not allow for the collection of sensitive information related to religion, caste, community, class, ethnicity, income and health (ibid. n.d.c).

Access to Aadhaar database

The UIDAI states that "the UID database will be guarded both physically and electronically by a few select individuals with high clearance" (India n.d.c.). The UIDAI also notes that data will be encrypted and stored in a "highly secure" data vault, and access details to the database will be logged (ibid.). With the consent of the individual being verified, the UIDAI will either confirm or deny verification of identity, but will not reveal personal information in the database (ibid.). The UIDAI also notes that the UID database is not linked to information

held in other databases (ibid.).

In addition, the UIDAI indicates that it has security and storage policies in place to protect the information in the database (ibid.). The UIDAI states that penalties for security violations of the database will be "severe"; it will penalize the disclosure of identity information, data tampering and unauthorized access to the database (such as hacking) (ibid.).

However, media sources report that there are potential problems associated with the Aadhaar system, such as the possibility of identity theft (*The Business Times* 23 Dec. 2009; *India Today* 13 Sept. 2010) and issues related to the right to privacy (ibid.; *Guardian* 2 Mar. 2011; *India Today* 13 Sept. 2010). The *Guardian* blog notes that there is no data protection statute in India because data throughout the country was previously stored in a decentralized manner (ibid.).

India Today states that the Aadhaar project raises "crucial issues relating to profiling, tracking and surveillance, both by the state and the market" (13 Sept. 2010). The New Delhi-based newspaper also quotes an economist who expressed concern that Aadhaar "'is being introduced at a time of growing state authoritarianism, and opens the door to an unprecedented degree of state control'" (*India Today* 13 Sept. 2010). Other media sources report that Aadhaar may be used as a means to combat "terrorism and illegal immigration" (*The Business Times* 23 Dec. 2009) or to identify criminals (DNA 19 Mar. 2011). *The Business Times* of Singapore notes that there were no debates or studies conducted on the need for or potential problems with the Aadhaar plans (23 Dec. 2009).

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.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Internet sites, including: Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR), European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), United Nations Refworld.

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