

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.

25 November 2013

IRQ104655.E

Iraq: Residence Card and Public Distribution System (PDS) ration card, including purpose and validity; requirements and procedures for the issuance, renewal and replacement of the cards; frequency of fraudulent cards; whether a person can live in the country without these cards (1991-November 2013)

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1. Residence Card

Information about the Iraqi Residence Card [also known as the housing card, or Place of Residence Card] was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

1.1 Purpose and Use

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Iraq Mission, which has over 300 field staff in Iraq working to implement humanitarian and migration initiatives for vulnerable populations affected by displacement (IOM n.d.), said that the purpose of the Residence Card is to prove place of residence (IOM 23 Nov. 2013). Similarly, the *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Iraq* states that the housing card is a document provided to show the address where someone is renting or owning a residence (UN 31 May 2012, 207). According to the UNHCR, the housing card is needed to obtain other identity documents such as ID cards, nationality certificates, PDS cards, or passports (ibid.).

1.2 Procedures to Obtain Residence Card

According to their website, the General Directorate for Nationality of the Ministry of Interior is responsible for the issuance of Residence Cards (Iraq n.d.). The duties of the Directorate also include granting residence approval, updating information on the Residence Cards, and tracking the internal migration of citizens between Baghdad and the provinces (ibid.). The representative of the IOM Iraq Mission said that the Central Information Office of the Ministry of Interior and local police stations issue Residence Cards (23 Nov. 2013). He also indicated that the card has no validity date (ibid.).

According to the IOM representative, the documents required for the issuance, renewal and replacement of the Residence Card are as follows:

1. original and copy of the Nationality Certificate for the applicant and for applicant's wife and his children, if any;
2. original and copy of the National Identity Card for the applicant and for applicant's wife and his children, if any;
3. original and copy of the Residence Card for the applicant's father;
4. original and copy of the Ration Card [for] the applicant or for his father;
5. original and copy of the Marriage contract;
6. Support of the residence from Municipal Council;
7. Four photos with a white background. (IOM 23 Nov. 2013)

The IOM representative said that these requirements had not changed between 1991 and 2013, but that the cards had changed during this time period (ibid.). Further information on changes to the appearance and issuance of the cards could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The UNHCR explains that the procedure to obtain the Card is for the head of household to present the housing deed or rental contract showing his or her name on it (UN 31 May 2012, 207). The UNHCR notes that this is problematic for internally-displaced persons (IDPs) who do not have legal rights to a residence (ibid.). The UNHCR notes that prior to

January 2011, IDPs could obtain a "proof of residency letter" from the local council to use in lieu of a housing card in applications for other documents, but that the Ministry of Interior discontinued this practice (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), a non-governmental organization focussed on strengthening media institutions and local journalism in areas of war, dictatorship and political transition (IWPR n.d.), an Iraqi woman can only be granted a residence card if a male relative vouches for her (29 June 2011). This information could not be corroborated among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2. PDS Ration Card

Information about the PDS Ration Card was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.1 Purpose and Use

Sources indicate that the PDS Ration Card was introduced in the 1990s as part of Iraq's "oil-for-food" deal with the UN, when sanctions were imposed after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait (Aswat al-Iraq 22 Nov. 2010; Al Jazeera 30 Apr. 2012). Agence France-Presse (AFP) notes that the card was implemented in 1991 as a way to help Iraqis survive the international embargo (AFP 12 Nov. 2012). The card reportedly gives the recipient access to monthly food rations of essential items, such as flour, rice, sugar, cooking oil and baby milk (ibid.). The IOM representative similarly indicates that the purpose of the card is to allow the bearer to receive food assistance from the government (IOM 23 Nov. 2013).

According to Refugees International (RI), a Washington DC-based NGO that advocates for the protection of displaced people (RI Apr. 2008), PDS Ration Cards are distributed to each family in the recipients' town of residence (ibid. 26 Mar. 2007). The UN Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) notes that the food rations are available "in principle" for families of all income levels (UN 17 Oct. 2007). According to a representative of the US-based NGO International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) quoted by IRIN in 2004, "virtually every family" in Iraq had a ration card at that time (ibid. 7 June 2004).

Sources indicate that the PDS Ration Card also served as a basis for voter registration during post-war Iraqi elections (ibid.; RI 26 Mar. 2007).

According to Aswat al-Iraq, an independent Iraqi news agency (Aswat al-Iraq n.d.), prior to November 2010, the ration card was also used as an "official document" when citizens interacted with various governmental departments; citizens were required to show their ration cards, along with other identity documents, when dealing with government officials (Aswat al-Iraq 22 Nov. 2010). However, in November 2010, the Secretariat-General for Iraq's Council of Ministers directed cabinet ministers to discontinue the use of the ration card as an "official" document for use in obtaining other documents (ibid.).

2.2 Procedures to Obtain PDS Ration Card

The representative of the IOM Iraq Mission stated that the Ministry of Commerce issues the PDS Ration Card, which is valid for one year (IOM 23 Nov. 2013). Further information about the issuing agent and period of validity could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the IOM representative, the documents required for the issuance, renewal and replacement of the PDS Ration Card are as follows:

1. original and copy of the Nationality Certificate for the applicant and for applicant's wife and his children, if any;
2. original and copy of the National Identity Card for the applicant and for applicant's wife and his children, if any;
3. original and copy of the residence card for the applicant or applicant's father and original and copy of the residence card for the father of applicant's wife
4. original and copy of the Ration Card to the applicant's father and original and copy of the Ration Card for the father of applicant's wife
5. original and copy of the Marriage contract. (ibid.)

The IOM representative said that these requirements had not changed between 1991 and 2013, but that the cards had changed during this time period (ibid.). Further information on changes to the appearance and issuance of the cards could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), an international NGO affiliated with the Norwegian Refugee Council that monitors internal displacement worldwide (IDMC n.d.), the civil status identification document and the Iraqi nationality certificate are required documents to access food through the PDS (10 Oct. 2011, 35). The IRIN article states that accessing food rations requires proof of citizenship and a fixed address (UN 17 Oct. 2007).

According to the IWPR, an Iraqi woman can only be granted a ration card if a male relative vouches for her (29 June 2011). This information could not be corroborated among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

IRIN reports that, according to an Iraqi immigration official, shortly after the 2003 US-led invasion, temporary ration cards were given to Iraqi returnees, even though they did not show proper identification to prove that they were from Iraq (10 June 2004).

2.2.1 Transferring Ration Card to New Location

According to RI, displaced Iraqis who acquire a residence permit in a new location can theoretically request to have their ration card transferred to their new location (RI 26 Mar. 2007). The same source notes that an application for a transfer of the ration card must be sent to Baghdad, but that, in practice, families have had difficulty transferring their ration cards when they move; they blame the inability to access rations on "bureaucratic resistance, general inefficiency, and rampant corruption" (ibid.). The IRIN article also notes that some families have been unable to receive their subsidized food rations because they could not transfer their ration cards to their new location when they moved (UN 8 Jan. 2008). In 2008, RI said it was "virtually impossible" for displaced Iraqis to transfer their PDS rations to a new location (RI Apr. 2008, 3). RI notes that authorities in the towns are "reluctant to allow families to take their ration cards when they move" because the cards are also used for voter registration (ibid. 26 Mar. 2007).

3. Ability to Live in Iraq Without Residence and Ration Cards

Information on whether Iraqis could live in Iraq without these cards could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. However, the following information may be of interest.

According to RI, 80 percent of the Iraqi population was dependent on the PDS food rations before 2003 (RI Apr. 2008, 3). In 2007, Iraq's trade minister, Abed Falah al-Sudani, reportedly said that more than 60 percent of Iraqis were dependent on the food distributed through the ration card at that time (Al Jazeera 5 Dec. 2007). In 2012, Al Jazeera reported that Iraqis continued to depend on the PDS food rations at that time, and that 15 percent of Iraqis had problems securing enough food, and that another 32 percent would be food insecure if the PDS was discontinued (ibid. 30 Apr. 2012).

An Iraqi sociologist, who was living in exile during Saddam Hussein's rule, wrote for the IWPR that ration cards, along with other rights and privileges, were suspended for members of "suspect" organizations that Saddam Hussein viewed as possible opponents (IWPR 21 Feb. 2005). This information could not be corroborated among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the UNHCR, many IDPs in Iraq do not have ration cards and housing cards (UN 31 May 2012, 54). IDMC indicated that 60-80 percent of IDPs and returnees have a PDS Ration Card (10 Oct. 2011, 45).

4. Fraudulent Cards

The representative of the IOM Mission in Iraq indicated that there was widespread fraud of identity documents, including Residence Cards and PDS Ration Cards (23 Nov. 2013). Further information about the frequency of fraudulent Residence Cards and PDS Ration Cards 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.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts to contact representatives of the following were unsuccessful within the time constraints of this Response: Canada – Embassy of Canada in Amman; Iraq – Consulate of Iraq in Washington DC, General Directorate for Nationality, Ministry of Interior. The following organizations were unable to provide information: Embassy of Iraq in Ottawa; Middle East Consultancy Services; Middle East Media Research Institute; National Documentation Centre, Canada Border Services Agency.

Internet sites, including: ecoinet; Factiva; Iraq – Embassy of Iraq in Canada, Embassy of Iraq in Washington DC, General Directorate for Nationality, Ministry of Interior; Middle East Media Research Institute; Minority Rights Group International; United Kingdom – Border Services Agency; United Nations – Refworld.

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