

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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Responses to Information Requests

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23 December 2015

CHN105053.E

China: 2014 hukou reform policy and its local implementation; security features and other physical characteristics of hukou [household registry] documents issued in 2013-2014; anti-fraud measures introduced for hukou documents; whether features are standardized across the country
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. 2014 Hukou Reform Policy

According to sources, China's State Council announced a proposal to reform the *hukou* [household registry] system in July 2014 (China Policy Institute 2014; *China Economic Review* 8 Sept. 2014; *The Diplomat* 16 Jan. 2015). Sources indicate that the Chinese government has set a target date of 2020 for nation-wide implementation of the reform policy (*China Daily* 18 Dec. 2013; Migration Policy Institute 10 Dec. 2014). UK-based daily newspaper *The Guardian* reported in July 2014 that the reform is aimed at easing the settlement of 100 million migrant workers into cities over the next six years (31 July 2014).

1.1 Removal of Distinction Between Urban and Rural Populations

East Asia Forum, an online forum that focuses on analysis and research of the Asia Pacific region that is based at the Australian National University (East Asia Forum n.d.), states that the new policy establishes "a single national resident registration (*jumin hukou*) system for both rural and urban populations" (ibid. 13 Jan. 2015). A 2014 policy paper published by the China Policy Institute, a think tank based at the University of Nottingham, which promotes collaborative research that "challenges stereotypes and conventional wisdom on contemporary China" (China Policy Institute n.d.), likewise states that "the new policy will establish a uniform household registration system that does not distinguish between 'agricultural' and 'non-agricultural'" and that instead, "every Chinese citizen will have a 'resident's' hukou registered to their place of origin" (ibid. 2014, 3). Hong Kong-based newspaper *South China Morning Post* (SCMP) reported in July 2014 that "[f]rom now on, citizens will be classified simply as 'residents' rather than as 'agricultural' or 'non-agricultural' workers" (SCMP 31 July 2014).

However, the SCMP states that the social entitlements received by citizens "will still be determined by where they are registered, and in rural areas these will remain far lower than in cities for years to come" (ibid.). *The Guardian* reports that "[t]he reforms include exemptions for major cities" (31 July 2014). Other sources also note that the 2014 hukou reform policy encourages Chinese migrants to settle in smaller cities, and that there are more stringent requirements to settle permanently in larger urban areas (East Asia Forum 13 Jan. 2015; *Business Spectator* 1 Aug. 2014; *The Wall Street Journal* 4 Aug. 2014). The China Policy Institute paper states that

[w]hile small cities (with a population of less than 500,000) will have completely open *hukou* applications, medium to extra-large cities (population 500,000-5 million) will apply various conditions. These become

increasingly strict with size, and include type and seniority of employment, type of housing, payment into urban social insurance schemes and length of residence. (2014, 4)

According to sources, China's largest cities will continue to apply a "points" system, which will eliminate a large number of hukou applicants (*China Economic Review* 8 Sept. 2014; *The Wall Street Journal* 4 Aug. 2014; *Business Spectator* 1 Aug. 2014). East Asia Forum states that "as city size increases, local authorities can set stricter settlement criteria by specifying a narrower list of occupations, more years of residency, or higher levels of social insurance contributions" (East Asia Forum 13 Jan. 2015). According to *Business Spectator*, an online Australian business news source (*Business Spectator* n.d.), the new policy "has only lowered entry barriers for smaller and medium-sized cities. Mega cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou are still fortresses for migrant workers," which means that it will get "progressively harder for migrants to get urban residential permits as the size of the city gets bigger" (ibid. 1 Aug. 2014).

1.2 Local Implementation of 2014 Hukou Reforms

In a report on the reform of the hukou system, the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office describes guidance issued by China's State Council in July 2014 on hukou reform measures that should be taken as "the first concrete statement from the centre clarifying for local government what reform should involve" (UK 15 Aug. 2014).

However, sources report that local governments have authority over the implementation of hukou reform (EU July 2013; *China Dialogue* 22 Oct. 2013). A 2013 report by the Directorate General for Economic and Financial Affairs at the European Commission notes that "[t]he modalities of reform vary greatly across provinces and municipalities as a result of the devolution of responsibility for hukou controls to the local government in the late 1990s" (EU July 2013). According to the China Policy Institute paper, "it is unclear how successfully the new regulations can be implemented locally, especially since compliance will be encouraged... rather than rigidly enforced" (China Policy Institute 2014, 6). *The Guardian* states that "analysts say key measures are not enforceable by the centre" (31 July 2014).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a lecturer in Chinese politics and development at the Lau China Institute, King's College London, stated, in reference to the 2014 reform policy, that while the "2014 national reforms provide a clear national guideline," it is "nonetheless ... up to the provincial-level governments how and when to implement the changes, so the pace of hukou reform varies" (Lecturer 26 Jan. 2015). The same source explained that,

[s]ince September 2014 the central government has urged provincial governments to replace urban/rural hukous with a new, unified "resident" hukou. Pilot experiments for doing this had already been in operation in certain provinces, since around 2004, and a total of 12 provinces and one autonomous region had already modified hukou registration before the 2014 reforms.

...

Henan, Heilongjiang, Hebei and Xinjiang have already abolished the rural/urban distinction. Guizhou and Jiangxi are supposed to abolish the distinction this month (January 2015), but perhaps with slightly different results - Guizhou, for example, has proposed registering households as "collective" or "family" households depending on whether they register their hukou through an organization such as an employer or through their family. Even within those provinces which have already scrapped the rural/urban distinction, there are different rates of take-up, since people can convert their hukou at local public security stations as and when they choose. (ibid.)

English-language daily newspaper *China Daily* similarly reports in November 2014, that Henan, Heilongjiang and Hebei provinces and Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region had removed the rural/urban distinction and that Guizhou and Jiangxi provinces had introduced draft reform plans (21 Nov. 2014). The UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office also notes that the province of Guangdong had previously announced its own hukou reforms in June 2014, but added that

while the policy reforms announced satisfy all the requirements set out in the State Council guidance, their impact is likely to be limited. The main focus is on making it easier for university educated rural residents to get a Hukou. (UK 15 Aug. 2014)

According to sources, local governments are reluctant to implement hukou reforms due to financial burdens (*The Diplomat* Oct. 2013; *Business Spectator* 1 Aug. 2014). A 2013 article published by the *Diplomat*, a current-affairs magazine covering the Asia-Pacific region (*The Diplomat* n.d.), states that "it is estimated that while local government is responsible for around four fifths of expenditure, they only receive half of this from tax ... Consequently local governments are deeply opposed to hukou reform" (ibid. Oct. 2013). Referring to the 2014 reform policy, *Business Spectator* reports that "under the new system, cities are allowed to set their own admission standards for migrant workers under an over-arching framework and many are reluctant to take on

the additional spending responsibility" (*Business Spectator* 1 Aug. 2014). The same source notes that "[l]ocal governments must also bear most of the responsibility for social security spending ... it is understandable why municipal governments are not in a hurry to open their gates to admit rural migrants in a larger number until their fiscal positions have been improved" (*ibid.*).

2. Physical and Security Characteristics of Hukou Documents

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an official from the Embassy of Canada in Beijing stated that "most" hukou documents have "a burgundy coloured jacket with stitched light blue pages" (Canada 30 Jan. 2015). The same source added that

Hukou documents may vary slightly in size but the majority of them measure ~14cm by length and ~10.4cm by width. Hukou documents issued prior to 2006 were comprised of a booklet and loose pages. Since 2006, hukou pages are stitched to the booklet. Persons are known to have added or removed pages and stitched them back in. (*ibid.*)

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. An example of a hukou document provided to the Research Directorate by a professor of international relations at the Georgia Institute of Technology is attached to this Response.

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a professor of international relations at the Georgia Institute of Technology, who has published research on China's hukou system, stated that "[t]here have been ... national regulations on the standardization of the main hukou-related documents such as the hukou booklet and personal ID card, and the forms for the digital networks of hukou files" (Professor 20 Jan. 2015). However, the same source notes that "there are clear regional variations of the appearances (style and color of the cover, for instance) of some hukou documents such as residence permit and temporary permits" (*ibid.*). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a senior researcher at the China Law Center at Yale University Law School, who has conducted independent research on hukou documents, stated that the physical and security features of hukou documents are standardized across the country and that the Ministry of Public Security "issues the standard formats" of the documents (Senior Researcher 26 Jan. 2015). Conversely, according to the embassy official, "hukou document registration is not centralized, standardized, nor well regulated" (Canada 30 Jan. 2015). However, the same source notes that "[h]ukou documents are relatively the same in terms of appearance and security features (the primary one being the stamp). There may be some slight differences between provinces, municipalities, and rural regions, especially among older hukou documents" (*ibid.*).

2.1 Anti-fraud Features of Hukou Documents

According to the embassy official,

[t]he primary anti-fraud feature of a hukou document is the stamp ... There are no ultra-violet or electronic security features. Page numbers are not indicated in the booklet. The paper quality and print font is verified upon examination. It is considered not unusual to come across altered hukou documents. (*ibid.*)

A diagram illustrating how to detect fraudulent hukou stamps provided by the embassy official is attached to this Response.

The Professor of international relations stated that hukou documents since 2008 "use better anti-fraud technology," noting that Chinese authorities can verify the authenticity of hukou documents by logging into the "national hukou network" and examining "various stampings" on the surface of the document (Professor 23 Jan. 2015). The same source noted that there have "always been various and numerous incidents of fraud regarding hukou. The PRC government does not release systematic data on that. Anecdotal reporting suggests that such fraud has not had [a] meaningful decrease [since 2008]" (*ibid.*, 20 Jan. 2015). For further and corroborating information on fraudulent documents in China, including hukou registries, see Response to Information Request CHN104579.

2.2 Enforcement of Anti-Fraud Measures for Hukou Document Security

Information on local level enforcement of anti-fraud measures against hukou fraud was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. According to the embassy official, "hukous may be verified with the local Public Security Bureau (PSB, which issues hukous), however many local PSBs will only verify hukous in person" (Canada 30 Jan. 2015).

According to the Professor of international relations, the "Chinese government at all levels has been trying to control and reduce [hukou] fraud, but the effectiveness of such effort is limited and an elimination of

hukou-related fraud remains to be largely an ideal than [a] reality" (20 Jan. 2015). The lecturer similarly stated that "many local authorities do attempt to eliminate fraudulent hukous, but how active these campaigns are varies considerably by region and over time" (26 Jan. 2015).

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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Oral Sources: China – Embassy in Ottawa; professor of business administration, Harvard Business School; professor of economics, University of Buffalo; professor of political science, McGill University; professor of political science, University of Chicago; professor of politics, Goldsmith's University of London; professor of politics and international relations, University of Auckland; professor of political science and international relations, Victoria University of Wellington.

Internet sites, including: Amnesty International; Asian Legal Information Institute; Association of American Geographers; Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation; Bloomberg Businessweek; British Broadcasting Corporation; Brookings Institution; Canada – Embassy to China; Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; China – Public Security Bureau; China Law Blog; Chinalawinfo; Dui Hua Foundation; eoi.net; The Economist; Eurasian Geography and Economics; Factiva; Freedom House; Fujian Provincial Public Security Department; Guangdong Provincial Public Security Department; The Heritage Foundation; Human Rights Watch; Ireland – Refugee Documentation Centre; Keesing's Documentchecker; The Paulson Institute; Pkulaw.cn; Quartz; Radio Free Asia; Reuters; United Kingdom – Home Office; United Nations – Economic and Social Council, Refworld, World Bank; United States – Congressional-Executive Commission on China, Department of State; University of Washington – Perspectives; Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars; Xinhua News Agency.

Attachments

China. N.d. "Example of Hukou Document." Sent to the Research Directorate by a professor at the Georgia Institute of Technology, 20 January 2015.

Canada. N.d. "Hukou Stamps." Sent to the Research Directorate by an official at the Embassy of Canada in Beijing, 30 January 2015.

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