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Iran: Military identification for active and completed military service, including military cards; content, appearance, and security features of military identification; whether military service cards or military service exemption cards are used as identity cards (2021-February 2023) [IRN201365.E]

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

1. Overview

For information on Iran's military, including on mandatory military service and on exemption from military service, see Response to Information Request IRN200614 of December 2022.

The US Department of State's reciprocity schedule for Iran indicates that military cards (*Kart-e Sarbazi*), service completion cards (*Kart-e Payan-e Khedmat doreye Zaroorat*), and exemption cards (*Kart-e Mo'afiyat az khedmate doreye zaroorat*) are issued by the Iranian Public Conscription Organization under the Law Enforcement Force of the Islamic Republic of Iran (NAJA) [the Iranian police] (US n.d.).

The US reciprocity schedule states that men in active military service typically cannot obtain a passport until after they have completed their service or been granted an exemption to exit the country (US n.d.). According to the website of Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, individuals seeking their first passport (who have also not appeared as a "travelling companion" in another person's passport) (Iran n.d.a) or individuals seeking a passport renewal (Iran n.d.b), must submit the original and a photocopy of their Certificate of Completion of Military Service or their Exemption from Service, or a form requesting permission to exit Iran once per year despite not having completed their service or obtained service exemption, if they meet certain criteria [1] (Iran n.d.a; Iran n.d.b).

2. Military Cards, Including Appearance and Content

The US reciprocity schedule notes that all service cards

show [the person's] national ID number, given name, surname, father's name, date of birth (Persian), dates of service, card issuance date, rank, photo, and contain a chip. Older cards include detailed biographical information such as blood type, hair color, weight, height, eye color, physical [disability or injury], and sometimes level of education. (US n.d.)

2.1 Military Service Completion Cards

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an associate fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (TWI) [2], who specializes in security and defence affairs of Iran and the Persian Gulf, indicated that the official name of military service completion cards is "Exigency

(Compulsory) Military Service Completion Card" (کارت پایان خدمت دوره ضرورت) (03-02-2023). The same source added that in 2011, new "smart" military service completion cards were "rolled out" and authorities initiated a program to replace all existing service completion cards that were issued between 1981 and 2010; the program continued until March 2020 – after which point these "old" cards became no longer valid – and is reported to have replaced over 10 million old cards with smart cards (Associate Fellow 2023-02-03). The Associate Fellow indicated that those still in possession of an old "paper" card can still apply for, and receive, a new card (2023-02-03). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.1.1 Smart Cards

Two separate samples of the front side of a smart military service completion card were provided by the Associate Fellow and are attached to this Response (Attachment 1 and Attachment 2). A sample featuring both sides of a military service completion card is attached to this Response (Attachment 3), and appears on an Iranian document translation company's website, a link to which was sent to the Research Directorate by a retired professor at York University -- and founding director of York's School of Public Policy and Administration -- who has published books and articles in English and Persian on the leftist movement in Iran, religious fundamentalism, secularism, multiculturalism, and the diaspora (2023-01-31).

The information in the following paragraph was provided by the Associate Fellow:

Smart service completion cards are "very similar" in dimension to a standard credit card and are made of polyvinyl chloride acetate (PVCA). The front of the card displays the following information:

- The cardholder's photograph, which is "only a headshot";
- A unique card number;
- The cardholder's national card number;
- The date of issuance of the card;
- The cardholder's first and last name;
- The cardholder's service rank;
- The cardholder's father's given name;
- The cardholder's birth certificate number;
- The cardholder's birth date;
- The cardholder's service start date;
- The cardholder's service end date.

The reverse side of smart cards does not include any information about the individual. In contrast to old service completion cards, smart cards "all look the same" regardless of the branch or unit to which the individual belonged (2023-02-03).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, representatives from Human Rights Activists in Iran (HRAI; also known as HRA) – a US-based NGO which also operates its own news agency, Human Rights Activists News Agency (HRANA) (HRANA n.d.) – stated that current military service completion cards indicate the "military force," such as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corp (IRGC), or the army, or the police force, but do not reveal the person's rank [and specialty], such as the artillery or armoured unit (HRAI 2023-02-14). In contrast, the Associate Fellow indicated that smart service completion cards do not specify the individual's service branch, but do list their rank (2023-02-03). The same source added that the individual's listed rank "usually gives away whether the person served in Artesh [the Iranian army] or the IRGC" (Associate Fellow 2023-02-03).

According to the Associate Fellow, smart service completion cards contain a chip storing personal and service information, including "confidential service and security information" (2023-02-03). The same source added that these cards are also equipped with a "perforated stamp on the top left

side of the card" (Associate Fellow 2023-02-03). The Associate Fellow stated that the information stored in the card's security features can reportedly only be "decoded and read" by "'highly secured' readers" (2023-02-03).

2.1.2 Old Cards

The information in the following two paragraphs was provided by the Associate Fellow:

The old service completion cards were "made of thin paper," approximately 10.5cm by 7.5cm in dimension, and which had to be "laminated by the recipient" using "clear, hard, plastic film". The front of old cards contains the following information:

- The cardholder's photograph;
- The unique card number;
- The cardholder's first and last name;
- The cardholder's father's given name;
- The cardholder's birth certificate number;
- The location where the birth certificate was issued;
- The cardholder's birth year and location;
- The service dispatcher region;
- The unique dispatch number (called the 'basic register number'), "which is usually the same as the birth certificate number";
- A "seven-digit number called 'details register number'";
- The cardholder's training unit;
- The cardholder's discharging unit or organization;
- The date of issuance of the card;
- The name, rank, and signature of the discharge officer or their acting deputy;
- Information indicating whether or not the discharged person had completed his military service as a conscript, or as a cadre member.

The following information appears on the back of old cards:

- The cardholder's biometric information;
- The cardholder's rank;
- The cardholder's service type ("infantry, marine, artillery, medic, etc.");
- The cardholder's "[s]pecialist code (a code unique to every service type ... for example, [the] specialist code for an infantry service member is 111, or 118 for a drill instructor)";
- The cardholder's highest academic degree at the commencement of service;
- The cardholder's personnel number;
- The cardholder's duration of service, including their start and end dates;
- The name and signature of the card issuer.

Some old service completion cards included the cardholder's "service branch/unit" – such as, for example, "IRGC Ground Forces" – and their rank. The card's photo "should clearly" portray the cardholder's shoulders, revealing the "rank insignias" on the individual's uniform. The old service completion cards for individuals belonging to the IRGC, the Basij, the Artesh / Ministry of Defence, and the NAJA, all "looked very different" from one another, as each had "their own cards" (Associate Fellow 2023-02-03).

A sample of the front side of an old IRGC military service completion card was provided by the Associate Fellow and is attached to this Response (Attachment 4).

The Associate Fellow noted that old, non-smart service completion cards contained almost no security features (2023-02-03).

The US reciprocity schedule states that military service completion cards and exemption cards are "readily available" in Iran (US n.d.).

2.2 Military Service Exemption Cards

A sample of the front side of a military service exemption card was provided by the Associate Fellow and is attached to this Response (Attachment 5).

The US reciprocity schedule indicates that exemption cards have a photo border that is different from military service cards (US n.d.). The Associate Fellow notes that in accordance with the "new 'smart' card system," all service exemption cards "now look identical," and one could not "distinguish [the] service branch without using a special card reader" (2023-02-03). According to the Associate Fellow, military service exemption cards have the same appearance as service completion cards, with the exception that service details are replaced with a single line identifying the type of service exemption (2023-02-03).

Other sources similarly report that [some (Australia 2020-04-15, para. 3.161)] exemption cards contain the reason for exemption (US n.d.; Australia 2020-04-15, para. 3.161), and the US reciprocity schedule adds that this information appears in the location of the card ordinarily reserved for dates of military service (US n.d.). HRAI indicated that a person's reason for exemption is "also specified" on their exemption cards in the form of a corresponding "code" (2023-02-14).

The Associate Fellow stated that types of exemption can include medical circumstances, "family sponsorship," being a veteran, age criteria, being a family's only son, or "'special reasons'"; the source noted that they were unaware of the specific criteria required to obtain exemption for "'special reasons'" (2023-02-03). A country information report from Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), states that "[m]en whose homosexuality or transgenderism has been established (through an intrusive medical examination) are exempted from military service and given the designation 'mentally ill' on their military [exemption] cards"; this "can lead" to "difficulties" for the individual when they seek employment (Australia 2020-04-15, para. 3.150). A 2016 article by 6Rang, the Iranian Lesbian and Transgender Network, which is dedicated "to rais[ing] awareness on sexual rights" (6Rang n.d.), notes that if the reason for exemption is the person's sexual orientation or gender identity, the reason is identified on the individual's military exemption cards (6Rang 2016-05-20). A follow-up article by the same source, published in May 2021, notes that a gay man in the city of Ahvaz was "kidnapped by a group of men from his family, [and] beheaded" following "the revelation" of his sexual orientation that occurred when his half-brother opened an envelope containing his military service exemption card (6Rang 2021-05-10).

Sources report that in cases of wartime mobilization (Associate Fellow 2023-02-03; Azodi 2022-03-11), an individual exempted from military service "can" be "called to service" (Associate Fellow 2023-02-03) or will be "required to report for duty" (Azodi 2022-03-11). The Associate Fellow added that the individual could have their service exemption card "revoked" in such circumstances (2023-02-03).

The DFAT report notes that while "[s]econdary forms of documentation like military exemption cards are technically more vulnerable to fraud" because they contain "less robust security features," obtaining fraudulent cards would be expensive (Australia 2020-04-15, para. 5.42).

2.2.1 Alternative Military Exemption Documents

According to the US reciprocity schedule, in instances of mass exemption, a copy of the exemption announcement and the individual's birth certificate – which serves as "proof of their condition" – can be used in place of an exemption card (US n.d.).

The US reciprocity schedule indicates that in cases where a student is seeking to study abroad before completing their military service, a temporary student exemption can be "substantiated by a letter from the conscription authority" alongside proof of the person's bond payment to exit the country (US n.d.).

3. Whether Military Cards Are Used as Identity Cards

According to the Associate Fellow, military service completion cards and service exemption cards can "certainly" be used as identity cards, "especially" for people who do not possess a driver's license (2023-02-03). The same source added, however, that these cards "should be considered as secondary ID cards," since the national ID card has "now practically replac[ed]" the birth certificate booklet as the "main identity paper" in Iran (Associate Fellow 2023-02-03). HRAI stated that military service completion cards are used as identification cards in Iran (2023-02-14).

A thematic report by the Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre (Landinfo) on Iranian identification and civil status documents – citing information derived from the Iranian national register, National Organization for Civil Registration (NOCR) – notes that military service completion cards or exemption cards can be used as "valid ID documents" that contain a photo as part of a person's application package for a new *shenasnameh* [3] (Norway 2019-01-05, 14).

The Landinfo report, citing information from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – including from its Main Office for Consular Services – indicates that male applicants of conscription age seeking a passport are required, "in principle," to attach to their application a "card showing completion of or exemption from military service, both in original and copy" (Norway 2019-01-05, 32).

The Associate Fellow stated that if an individual loses their service completion card or service exemption card, they can apply for a replacement card, which are "clearly" identified as such on the card (2023-02-03).

4. Other Military Identification Cards

The Constitution of the Revolutionary Guards (1982) provides the following:

Article 41: Members of the Army of Twenty Million are categorized as follows:

...

c) Special members. These are active members who have the qualifications to be a Revolutionary Guard and have an educational and personal record and, when needed, shall be placed at the disposal of the Revolutionary Guards on a full-time basis. These individuals hold a special card and are in the Revolutionary Guards' organized ranks. (Iran 1982)

For additional information on the organization of Iran's army, including its different branches, ranks, roles, duties, types of service, and criteria for promotion, see Response to Information Request IRN200614 of December 2022.

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] Those born after 1959 who have yet to complete their military service, and who are not exempt from military service, can fill out form 104 to request permission to leave the country once per

year, provided they meet additional stipulations regarding their previous stay outside of Iran (Iran n.d.a; Iran n.d.b).

[2] The Washington Institute of Near East Policy (TWI) is a think tank that seeks to "advance a[n] ... understanding of American interests in the Middle East" and "promote the policies that secure them" (TWI n.d.).

[3] All Iranian citizens, upon their registration of birth, are issued a *shenasnameh*. The ID booklet comes in two versions – one for children up to age 15, and another for people over 15 years of age. The booklet is updated continuously throughout a person's life, in accordance with changes to their marital status and family relations (Norway 2021-01-05, 4).

References

6Rang. 2021-05-10. ["Murder of a Young Ahwazi Gay Man After the Revelation of His Sexual Orientation Through a Military Exemption Card."](#) [Accessed 2023-01-20]

6Rang. 2016-05-20. ["Confessing to Having Same-Sex Relations Is the New Norm for Military Service Exemptions in Iran."](#) [Accessed 2023-02-15]

6Rang. N.d. ["About Us."](#) [Accessed 2023-01-20]

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Australia. 2020-04-14. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). [DFAT Country Information Report: Iran.](#) [Accessed 2023-01-23]

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Iran. N.d.b. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. ["Passport Renewal."](#) [Accessed 2023-01-31]

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Retired Professor, York University. 2023-01-31. Correspondence with the Research Directorate.

United States (US). N.d. Department of State. ["Iran Reciprocity Schedule."](#) [Accessed 2022-01-17]

[The Washington Institute for Near East Policy \(TWI\)](#). N.d. ["About."](#) [Accessed 2022-11-02]

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: adjunct research professor at a Canadian university, and former criminal and human rights lawyer in Iran; Amnesty International; Middle East Institute; professor at a university in Georgia (US) who specializes in international relations and Iran; professor at a university in Massachusetts who specializes in social development and political change in Iran; professor at a university in New York state who specializes in Iranian politics and social change; professor at a university in Tennessee who the politics of Middle Eastern and North African authoritarian regimes; professor at a university in Washington state who specializes in Iranian law and justice; senior fellow at the MacDonald-Laurier Institute who has expertise in international human rights law and Canada-Iran relations.

Internet sites, including: Amnesty International; Associated Press; Austrian Red Cross – ecoi.net; Center for Strategic and International Studies; EU – EU Agency for Asylum; Factiva; Fars News Agency; France – Office français de protection des réfugiés et apatrides; Global Citizenship Observatory; Human Rights Watch; International Crisis Group; IranWire; Iranian Students News Agency; Islamic Republic News Agency; Janes; Justice for Iran; Mehr News Agency; Middle East Institute; Reuters; UK – Home Office; *The Washington Post*.

Attachments

1. Iran. N.d. Front side of a smart military service completion card. Sent to the Research Directorate by the Associate Fellow, 2023-02-03. Translated into English and French by the Translation Bureau, Public Services and Procurement Canada.
2. Iran. N.d. Front side of a smart military service completion card. Sent to the Research Directorate by the Associate Fellow, 2023-02-03. Translated into English and French by the Translation Bureau, Public Services and Procurement Canada.
3. Iran. N.d. [Front and reverse side of a military service completion card](#). Translated into English and French by the Translation Bureau, Public Services and Procurement Canada.
4. Iran. N.d. Front side of an old Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) military service completion card. Sent to the Research Directorate by the Associate Fellow, 2023-02-03. Translated into English and French by the Translation Bureau, Public Services and Procurement Canada.
5. Iran. N.d. Front side of a military service exemption card. Sent to the Research Directorate by the Associate Fellow, 2023-02-03. Translated into English and French by the Translation Bureau, Public Services and Procurement Canada.