

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	652
Land:	Irak
Kilde:	Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada
Titel:	Iraq: Civil Status Identification Card
Udgivet:	25. november 2013
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	10. juni 2014



Immigration and
Refugee Board of Canada

Commission de l'immigration
et du statut de réfugié du Canada

Iraq: Civil Status Identification Card, including purpose and validity; requirements and procedures for the issuance, renewal and replacement of cards, including the location of issue; frequency of fraudulent identity cards (2011–November 2013)

Publisher [Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada](#)

Publication
Date 25 November 2013

Related
Document [Iraq : information sur la carte d'état civil, y compris sa fonction et sa validité: les exigences et les procédures ayant trait à la délivrance, au renouvellement et au remplacement des cartes, y compris le lieu de délivrance: la quantité de cartes frauduleuses \(2011-novembre 2013\)](#)

Cite as Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, *Iraq: Civil Status Identification Card, including purpose and validity; requirements and procedures for the issuance, renewal and replacement of cards, including the location of issue; frequency of fraudulent identity cards (2011–November 2013)*, 25 November 2013, available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/52cd0a934.html> [accessed 26 April 2014]

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1. Purpose and Use of the Civil Status Identification Card

Sources indicate that the Iraqi Civil Status Identification Card [also known as al-Bitaqat al-Shikhsiya (MECS 9 Sept. 2012), the Civil Status Identification Document (IDMC 10 Oct. 2011, 35), or the National Identity Card (US 20 May 2013, 5)] is one of the main identity documents in Iraq (MECS 9 Sept. 2012; IDMC 10 Oct. 2011, 35; IOM 23 Nov. 2013). Middle East Consultancy Services (MECS), a London-based company that provides, among other services, authentication of documents from the Middle East (MECS n.d.), describes the Civil Status ID as "perhaps the most important official document in Iraq" and notes that it is "treated like a birth certificate" (9 Sept. 2012). Similarly, 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 it is the "basic" ID and "main card" for identification in Iraq and that it should be possessed by all citizens (23 Nov. 2013).

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 ID and the Nationality Certificate are needed to access public services, including food assistance through the Public Distribution System (PDS), healthcare, employment, education and housing, as well as to obtain a passport (IDMC 10 Oct. 2011, 35). According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), employers require employees to have a Civil Status ID in order to obtain work (UN 31 May

2012, 54). The US Department of State's International Religious Freedom Report for 2012 indicates that the Civil Status ID is required to register children in school and to obtain passports (US 20 May 2013, 5).

Information about the appearance of the Civil Status ID was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. MECS indicates that the Civil Status ID contains a photo of the bearer (9 Sept. 2012). Sources indicate that the Civil Status ID contains the religion (US 20 May 2013, 5; US 28 Apr. 2011) and ethnicity of the bearer (ibid.). According to the International Religious Freedom Report for 2012, the Civil Status ID does not specify if someone is Sunni or Shia Muslim (US 20 May 2013, 5).

According to the IOM Iraq Mission representative, there is no date indicating the duration of validity of the Civil Status ID (23 Nov. 2013). Further information about the validity period for the Civil Status ID could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

2. Issuance Procedures

The General Directorate for Nationality of the Ministry of Interior is reportedly responsible for the issuance, replacement and renewal of the Civil Status ID (Iraq n.d.c; IOM 23 Nov. 2013). According to MECS, the Civil Status ID is issued in accordance to Article 65 of the Iraqi Nationality Status Law of 1972 (MECS 9 Sept. 2012). The General Directorate for Nationality indicates their Directorate is responsible for the implementation of "Civil Status Law No. 65 of 1972 as amended" (Iraq n.d.c). However, further information about this law could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the representative of IOM's Iraq Mission, the requirements and procedures for the issuance, renewal and replacement of the Civil Status ID include the submission of the following:

original and copy of the Nationality Certificate for the applicant

original and copy of the National Identity Card for the applicant's father

original and copy of the residence card to the applicant or for his father

original and copy of the Ration Card to the applicant or for his father

Four photos with a white background

If the issuance for [n]ewborn, original and copy [s]tatement of the birth of the child [i]n addition to the above documents (IOM 23 Nov. 2013)

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs explains the procedures for an Iraqi citizen to apply for a Civil Status ID from abroad as follows:

Apply to the embassy and specify the reason the identity card is needed;

Have the head of the family, guardian, or attorney fill in the request form, sign it, and include the address;

Include two color photographs with the request;

Include an official document that supports the identity of the person submitting the request (Iraq n.d.a).

Procedures to obtain a new Civil Status ID if the original is lost or damaged, is explained by the Ministry

of Foreign Affairs as follows:

Submit a request to obtain a substitute Civil Status ID Card for one that has been lost or damaged;

Attach the application form (available at the embassy) to the request;

The application is filled out by the "master of the family, mistress of the family, record holder, guardian or attorney at law, with their explicit signatures and full names";

The Consul will take a statement from the applicant on the reverse of the form and include the applicant's full name and thumb print. The Consul will sign the statement (Iraq n.d.b).

The Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs explains that prior to applying for a Civil Status ID for a child, the citizen must register the marriage and the birth of the child with the Civil Status Department (ibid.; ibid. n.d.a).

According to the UNHCR, a housing certificate (which is a document given to people who rent or own a residence) is a prerequisite for obtaining a Civil Status ID (UN 31 May 2012, 207). According to the IDMC, the procedures to obtain Iraqi documentation are "lengthy, complex and costly" (IDMC 10 Oct. 2011, 35).

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 (n.d.), an Iraqi woman can only be granted a Civil Status ID 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.

Further information about the procedures for obtaining the Civil Status ID could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the UNHCR, many Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Iraq lack the documentation needed to access public services, including Civil Status ID (UN 31 May 2012, 54). Both the UNHCR and IDMC note that the lack of identity documents restricts freedom of movement and puts IDPs at risk of "arbitrary arrest" (ibid.; IDMC 10 Oct. 2011, 35); the UNHCR adds that it limits their ability to access health services, education and food rations through the PDS (UN 31 May 2012, 54).

The representative of the IOM Mission in Iraq indicated that there was "widespread fraud" of identity documents, including the Civil Status ID (23 Nov. 2013). Further information about fraudulent Civil Status IDs could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

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

Internet sites, including: Al Jazeera; ecoi.net; Factiva; Institute for War and Peace Reporting; Iraq - Embassy of Iraq in Canada, Embassy of Iraq in Washington, DC; Middle East Media Research Institute; Minority Rights Group International; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty; Refugees International; United Kingdom - Border Security Agency; United Nations - Integrated Regional Information Networks, Refworld.

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