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India: The aadhaar number

Introduction

The aadhaar number is a unique and individually assigned 12-digit number. It was introduced in 2011 as a mean of registering the population, and is controlled by the centralised institution, *the Unique Identification Authority of India* (UIDAI).¹ It is also referred to as the *unique identification number*.²

Any person residing more than 182 days in India are eligible for an aadhaar number and card, and there is no upper or lower cap on the age.³

Through the aadhaar system, any municipal office in India can verify an identity by contacting the UIDAI.⁴ Originally, the aadhaar registration was intended to be voluntary, but has since 2016 been mandatory in order to receive governmental services.⁵

Aadhaar registration and issuance of the card

The aadhaar registration leads to the issuance of a unique identification number as well as an identity card. This identity card can be issued as both a physical and a digital card. It contains information regarding the holder's name, date of birth, gender, address and parents or guardians. Sensitive information about religion and caste does, however, not appear on the card.⁶

In order to have an aadhaar number and card issued, the applicant must be able to prove their identity and address. The information collected is:

- Address
- Name
- Gender
- Date of birth

¹ Unique Identification Authority of India C, year of issue n/a.

² New Delhi Cantonment General Hospital, New Delhi, April 2018.

³ Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, May 2018.

⁴ New Delhi Cantonment General Hospital, New Delhi, April 2018.

⁵ Human Rights Watch, January 2018.

⁶ New Delhi Cantonment General Hospital, New Delhi, April 2018.

The information provide must be corroborated by supporting documents, proving identity, date of birth and address. UIDAI operates with a list of acceptable supporting documents for verification. The list contains 27 different types of proof of identity, 13 types of proof of date of birth and 28 types of proof of address.⁷

UIDAI will collect biometric information from the applicant in connection with the application in the form of two iris scans, ten fingerprints and facial photos.⁸ When registering children under the age of five, only the facial images will be recorded. Iris scan and fingerprints are recorded when the child is five years old and updated when 15 years old.⁹

Because the applicant's biometrics and demographic information is collected and stored when applying for an aadhaar number, it is only possible to register once. All following attempts of registering again will be denied.¹⁰

Changing personal information

It is possible to change the biometric information connected to one's aadhaar number (iris scan/facial image and finger prints). It is recommended by UIDAI that all holders of an aadhaar number update their biometric information every 10 years.¹¹ According to information on UIDAI's website, the aadhaar number will remain unchanged after an update of biometric information.¹²

Corruption

In 2021 India was ranked as number 85 out of 180 countries on the Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, with a score of 40 on a scale from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean).¹³ According to a Landinfo publication from 2012, genuine documents containing false information are widely available in India due to an insufficient system of civil registration and the general level of corruption.¹⁴

It has not been possible to establish to what extent the level of corruption in India specifically influences the aadhaar number or aadhaar card from the available information. However, according to a publication from Home Office UK, press reports of fraudulently obtained aadhaar cards exist.¹⁵

⁷ Unique Identification Authority of India, January 2023.

⁸ New Delhi Cantonment General Hospital, New Delhi, April 2018; Unique Identification Authority of India C, year of issue n/a.

⁹ Unique Identification Authority of India A, year of issue n/a.

¹⁰ Unique Identification Authority of India B, year of issue n/a.

¹¹ Unique Identification Authority of India A, year of issue n/a.

¹² Unique Identification Authority of India A, year of issue n/a.

¹³ Transparency International, 2021.

¹⁴ Landinfo, April 2012.

¹⁵ United Kingdom: Home Office, February 2015.

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