



Immigration and  
Refugee Board of Canada

Commission de l'immigration  
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# Democratic People's Republic of Korea/Republic of Korea: Whether North Korean defectors to South Korea are issued government documents that indicate they are genuine defectors

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## 1. Documentation of North Korean Defectors

According to sources consulted by the Research Directorate, defectors from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) to the Republic of Korea (South Korea) are not issued documents by the South Korean government to indicate that they are genuine defectors (Canada 14 Feb. 2012; Republic of Korea 14 Feb. 2012; HanVoice 22 Feb. 2012). However, sources indicate that the South Korean government keeps a record of defectors arriving in South Korea from North Korean (ibid.; Republic of Korea 1997). Article 12 of the Act on the Protection and Settlement Support of Residents Escaping from North Korea states the following:

[translation]

Article 12 (Register)

(1) The head of an agency that establishes or operates a settlement-support facility □ shall □ maintain and preserve a register recording the necessary particulars such as the reference place of registration, the family composition and the personal history of any person subject to protection [North Korean defector] □.

(2) The Minister of Unification shall integrate all registers and shall maintain and preserve [the resulting integrated register]. For this purpose, the Director of the National Intelligence Service shall report to the Minister of Unification the particulars recorded in the registers maintained and preserved pursuant to paragraph 1. (Republic of Korea 1997, Art. 12)

## 2. South Korean Citizen Identity Card

Upon obtaining South Korean citizenship, defectors are issued the regular South Korean citizen identity (ID) card [also referred to in English as the resident ID card or national ID card] (Canada 14 Feb. 2012; Republic of Korea 14 Feb. 2012). According to an official at the Canadian embassy in Seoul, naturalized defectors are considered to be Korean and so there is no legal distinction between them and other South Koreans (Canada 14 Feb. 2012). This statement is corroborated by the Executive Director of HanVoice (22 Feb. 2012), a Canadian advocacy organization for North Korean human rights (HanVoice n.d.).

A 2011 report on North Koreans in South Korea by the International Crisis Group indicates that the citizen identity card displays each resident's registration number and that the second and third of the last seven digits indicates the place of registration (14 July 2011, 19). In the past, all North Korean defectors were reportedly registered in the city in which they received their initial resettlement training, Ansung, which has a city code of 25 (International Crisis Group 14 July 2011, 19, 19 n. 196; Canada 14 Feb. 2012). North Korean defectors could therefore be identified by these digits (International Crisis Group 14 July 2011, 19; Republic of Korea 14 Feb. 2012). The International Crisis Group indicates that citizens registered or even born in Ansung face anti-North "prejudice," including difficulty in finding work and obtaining visas to China (14 July 2011, 19). In June 2007, the government changed its registration policy and began issuing registration numbers based on the first place of residence after leaving the resettlement centre (International Crisis Group 14 July 2011, 19-20, 20 n. 197). The International Crisis Group also reports that the Act on the Protection and Settlement Support of Residents Escaped from North Korea was revised to allow defectors to change their registration number if it had been issued in Ansung (ibid., 20). According to a representative of the South Korean embassy in Ottawa, the law was changed in 2010 so that citizen identity cards could no longer be used to determine whether a person was a defector (Republic of Korea 14 Feb. 2012).

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.

## References

Canada. 14 February 2012. Embassy of Canada to Korea, Seoul. Correspondence from an official to the Research Directorate.

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International Crisis Group. 14 July 2011. *Strangers at Home: North Koreans in the South*. Asia Report No. 208. [Accessed 17 Feb. 2012]

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\_\_\_\_\_. 1997 (amended 2010). Act on the Protection and Settlement Support of Residents Escaping from North Korea. Translated by the Translation Bureau, Public Works and Government Services Canada. [Accessed 22 Feb. 2012]

## Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources:** A representative of the National Committee on North Korea could not provide information within the time constraints of this Response. The Korean Institute for Peace and Unification Studies was unable to provide information for this Response. Attempts to contact a professor at Indiana State University and a representative of the Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights were unsuccessful.

**Internet sites, including:** Amnesty International; *Asian Perspective*; BBC; The Brookings Institution; CanKor; *The Chosun Ilbo*; Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights; *Daily NK*; Freedom House; *The Hankyoreh*; Human Rights Watch; International Organization for Migration; Korea Ministry of Unification; *The Korea Times*; law.go.kr; Life Funds for North Korean Refugees; National Committee on North Korea; National Public Radio; *The New York Times*; NK News; North Korean Refugees Foundation; Privacy International; Seoul National University; United Kingdom Border Agency; United Nations Human Rights Council; United States Department of State; Yonhap News Agency; Yonsei University College of Medicine.

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