



Saudi Arabia: Exit procedures and documents required for resident foreigners who leave the country; exit visas and their appearance; whether the Iqama is cancelled when a resident leaves the country; whether someone holding a valid Iqama can return to the country after leaving; whether foreign workers who are forced to retire can remain in the country. [SAU105398.E]

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. Exit Procedures

1.1 Exit/Re-Entry Visa

According to sources, in order to exit and re-enter Saudi Arabia, the traveller must possess an exit/re-entry visa (CDHR 6 Jan. 2016; US 21 Nov. 2014) [sometimes called an exit/re-entry permit (Canada 6 Jan. 2016; EUI and GRC 2014, 6)] from the Ministry of Interior (Canada 6 Jan. 2016; US 21 Nov. 2014). In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, the Director of the Center for Democracy and Human Rights in Saudi Arabia (CDHR), a "non-profit educational organisation" that gathers, analyses and distributes information on human rights issues in Saudi Arabia (CDHR n.d.), stated that all visas are issued by the Saudi government and the sponsor is responsible for initiating the process for their workers (6 Jan. 2016). The US Department of State travel information report for Saudi Arabia similarly states that sponsors "must request exit or exit/re-entry visas on [their employees] behalf" from the Saudi Ministry of Interior Passport Office (US 21 Nov. 2014).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative from Helen Ziegler & Associates Inc., a Toronto-based company that specializes in recruiting healthcare staff for hospitals in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar and Kuwait (Helen Ziegler & Associates n.d.), stated that as long as an individual possesses an "'exit/re-entry' visa," their Iqama [residency card (US n.d.)] remains valid (6 Jan. 2016). According to the Director, the issuance of an exit/re-entry visa is dependent upon "the sponsors' satisfaction with their expatriate employee's performance and compliance with Saudi laws," and even if a visa has been issued, the sponsor or government "could cancel the visa after the employee has left" (CDHR 6 Jan. 2015). The source also stated that there is "no judicial oversight or recourse available for the employee" (ibid.). According to a 2014 report produced by the Migration Policy Centre of the European University Institute (EUI) [1] and the Gulf Research Center (GRC) [2], the sponsorship system in Saudi Arabia is

both administered and regulated by the [Ministry] of Interior. In practical terms, this means that the institution that grants migrant workers their residency rights is the same one that enforces those decisions without outside intervention by the courts or other governmental bodies. (EUI and the GRC 2014, 4)

Corroborating information on visas that have been cancelled by the sponsor or by the government could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Sources state that there are "single" and "multiple" exit/re-entry visas (KFUPM n.d.b; Emigra Worldwide n.d.b). Emigra Worldwide, a global immigration consulting firm with offices in 14 countries (Emigra Worldwide n.d.a), further states that the type of visa issued "depends upon the nationality and profession" of the employee (ibid. n.d.b). The same source states that once the visa is obtained, it must be used within the stated validity period, otherwise the company will pay a penalty (ibid.). According to sources, the exit/re-entry visa is valid for six months from the date of departure (KFUPM n.d.b; EUI and GRC 2014, 6). A document produced by King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM), located in Dharan (KFUPM n.d.a), indicates that for international staff, the validity of both single and multiple exit/re-entry visas is "subject to Iqama Expiry (Maximum 180 days from the day of departure)" (KFUPM n.d.b).

According to Emigra Worldwide, if an expatriate leaves permanently on an exit/re-entry visa, rather than on a final exit visa, they may be unable to apply for a Saudi visa in the future (Emigra Worldwide n.d.b.). *Arab News*, "Saudi Arabia's first English-language newspaper" (*Arab News* n.d.), cites the Director of Public Relations at the Passport Department, Col. Mohammad Al-Saad, as stating that expatriates who leave Saudi Arabia on exit/re-entry visas and fail to return before they expire "will be banned from re-entering the Kingdom for 3 years" (*Arab News* 4 June 2015).

1.2 Final Exit Visa

Sources state that foreign workers leaving Saudi Arabia must possess a final exit visa (Human Rights Watch 15 Nov. 2015; Emigra Worldwide n.d.b; UK 25 Mar. 2013) and that the issuance of exit visas is controlled by the employees' sponsor (India n.d; AI July 2014, 52; EUI and the GRC 2014, 7). Emigra Worldwide indicates that "all unpaid traffic fines, electricity bills, phone bills, etc." must be settled "well in advance" of an expatriate's departure in order for them to be able to leave the country (Emigra World Wide n.d.b). A document produced by the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office for UK nationals working in Saudi Arabia similarly notes that in order to obtain a final exit visa, applicants must settle "all debts and fines," transfer any vehicles, cell phones, lines of credit, and close their Saudi Arabian bank accounts (UK 25 Mar. 2013). Sources state that in addition to possessing a final exit visa, the employees Iqama must be relinquished prior to leaving the country (*Arab News* 18 Jan. 2014; KFUPM n.d.b; PSCCQ n.d., 9). According to the representative from Helen Ziegler & Associates Inc., if a foreign worker leaves Saudi Arabia with an "'exit only' visa," it means that the foreign worker has completed his or her contract and the Iqama "becomes invalid" (Helen Zeigler & Associates Inc. 6 Jan. 2016).

According to the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, fingerprints are taken at the airport, and linked to the individuals' visa, upon entering and exiting Saudi Arabia (UK 25 Mar. 2013). A document produced by the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs (MOIA) states that "[s]ince all expatriate workers are now finger-printed on arrival, it is not possible to leave Saudi Arabia without a sponsor's clearance" (India n.d.). The *Saudi Gazette*, an English-language daily newspaper, similarly reports that fingerprint registration is mandatory for issuing both exit/re-entry and final exit visas (15 Dec. 2014).

According to Emigra Worldwide, the final exit visa is stamped in the passport with a "separate piece of paper stapled to the passport" (Emigra Worldwide n.d.b). The Saudi Gazette cites a spokesman from the Saudi Passport Department [*Jawazat*] as stating that after a boarding pass has been issued, immigration officers check the validity of the passport and visa, and then stamp the passport for departure (10 Dec. 2015).

According to sources, upon the issuance of a final exit visa, the employee must leave within 60 days (US n.d.; EUI and GRC, 7). According to the KFUPM document, the individual must depart "on the authorized date" (KFUPM n.d.b).

1.2.1 Appearance

For a copy of a final exit visa, see the attachment to this Response. Further information on the appearance of exit visas could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. The appearance of exit/re-entry visas could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2. Retirement

Information on the ability of non-Saudi nationals to retire in Saudi Arabia was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. According to the representative from Helen Ziegler & Associates Inc., if an employee wishes to work past the age of 60, they must re-apply to work each year; otherwise, they must leave the country when their work permit expires (Helen Ziegler & Associates Inc. 7 Sept. 2015). The Director stated that foreign workers are unable to retire in Saudi Arabia and that there is "no retirement system or benefits for migrant workers" (CDHR 6 Jan. 2015). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

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] The European University Institute (EUI) is an "international centre for doctorate and post-doctorate studies" in economics, history and civilization, law, and political and social sciences, located near Florence, Italy (EUI n.d.).

[2] The Gulf Research Center (GRC) is a non-profit organization that conducts research on political, economic, security, environmental, and science and technology issues in the Gulf States (GRC n.d.).

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Audhali Law Firm; Kingdom of Saudi Arabia – Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, Ottawa; Magrath LLP; The Law Firm of Mohamed Al-Sharif; Mohammed S. AL-Ghamdi Law Firm in Association with Fulbright & Jaworski.

Internet sites, including: Al Arabiya; ecoi.net; Factiva; India – Embassy of India Riyadh; Keesing's Document Checker; Kingdom of Saudi Arabia – Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, Washington DC, Passport Department; Magrath LLP; Overseas Filipinos Worldwide (OFW) Empowerment; UN – Refworld.

Attachment

Copy of Final Exit Visa. Sent to the Research Directorate by a representative at Helen Ziegler & Associates Inc.