



COI QUERY

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Title	Citizenship: Requirements and procedures for persons born in Pakistan to parents originally from Bangladesh
Reference period	January 2023 to 13 October 2025
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COI QUERY RESPONSE – Pakistan

Citizenship: Requirements and procedures for persons born in Pakistan to parents originally from Bangladesh

1. Background information on persons in Pakistan with Bangladeshi origin

There are two main categories of persons considered as having Bangladeshi origin in Pakistan.¹ The first group is people who were living in West Pakistan before the 1971 war² and remained there, and the second category are Bengalis who had immigrated to Pakistan after 1971.³ While anyone able to prove that they were in Pakistan before 1978 is eligible for Pakistani citizenship, the majority of ethnic Bengalis were issued distinct identity cards introduced in 1973.⁴ In 2000, a new computerized documentation system was created, the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) for citizens, and the National Alien Registration Authority (NARA) for foreigners.⁵ Following this development, many Bengalis were forced to register as aliens, effectively losing their rights to Pakistani nationality.⁶

Bengalis have faced discrimination and racism when accessing documentation⁷ and the majority of an estimated three million Bengalis in Pakistan are ‘stuck at some stage of the identification process’⁸ and stateless or at risk of statelessness.⁹

While there are around 200 Bengali settlements across Pakistan,¹⁰ the majority of Bengalis in Pakistan reside in Karachi, Sindh province, and many live in around 120 settlements in the city.¹¹ Even though Bengalis identify as both Bengali and Pakistanis,¹² the majority do not have

¹ Aaj English TV, Navigating Pakistan's citizenship rights in Karachi, 27 April 2023, Photo essay: Identity crisis - Life & Style, [url](#)

² Also referred to as the Liberation War of 1971, when West and East Pakistan split into Pakistan and Bangladesh, respectively. See: Mazhar, A. et al., What Does It Mean to Be a Bengali in Pakistan?, 2024, [url](#), p. 133

³ Aaj English TV, Navigating Pakistan's citizenship rights in Karachi, 27 April 2023, Photo essay: Identity crisis - Life & Style, [url](#)

⁴ Aaj English TV, Navigating Pakistan's citizenship rights in Karachi, 27 April 2023, Photo essay: Identity crisis - Life & Style, [url](#)

⁵ Aaj English TV, Navigating Pakistan's citizenship rights in Karachi, 27 April 2023, Photo essay: Identity crisis - Life & Style, [url](#)

⁶ Netherlands, General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan July 2024, 5 July 2024, [url](#), p. 45

⁷ Iqbal, H. et al, Suspended identity: statelessness, citizenship challenges and the impermanence of identity status faced by Pakistani Bengalis, 3 July 2025, [url](#), p. 167

⁸ Aaj English TV, Navigating Pakistan's citizenship rights in Karachi, 27 April 2023, Photo essay: Identity crisis - Life & Style, [url](#)

⁹ Iqbal, H. et al, Suspended identity: statelessness, citizenship challenges and the impermanence of identity status faced by Pakistani Bengalis, 3 July 2025, [url](#), p. 160

¹⁰ Mazhar, A. et al., What Does It Mean to Be a Bengali in Pakistan?, 2024, [url](#), p. 133

¹¹ Iqbal, H. et al, Suspended identity: statelessness, citizenship challenges and the impermanence of identity status faced by Pakistani Bengalis, 3 July 2025, [url](#), pp. 162, 169

¹² Mazhar, A. et al., What Does It Mean to Be a Bengali in Pakistan?, 2024, [url](#), p. 140



identity cards and ‘are living like aliens and illegal migrants in their own country’, according to a Bengali community representative.¹³

Additionally, an estimated 170 000 Urdu-speaking people referred to as Biharis, who originally came from the Bihar province in India to East Pakistan (present day Bangladesh) after the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, were repatriated from Bangladesh to Pakistan in 1974.¹⁴ Like ethnic Bengalis, Biharis are another community at a risk of statelessness.¹⁵

2. Legal framework

Citizenship rules in Pakistan are governed by several laws including the Naturalization Act of 1926, the Pakistan Citizenship Act of 1951, the Pakistan Citizenship Rules of 1952, and the Naturalization Rules of 1961.¹⁶ Furthermore, the Protection of Pakistan Act of 2014 defines persons excluded from the *jus soli* principle.¹⁷ Additionally, the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) Ordinance of 2000¹⁸ establishes NADRA as the national authority responsible for issuing Pakistani identity cards.¹⁹

The Directorate General of Immigration and Passports of the Ministry of Interior explains that there are ‘three categories of declared citizens of Pakistan including citizens by birth, by descent and by migration.’²⁰

The Pakistan Citizenship Act of 1951 stipulates that:

‘4. Citizenship by birth. Every person born in Pakistan after the commencement of this Act shall be a citizen of Pakistan by birth: Provided that a person shall not be such a citizen by virtue of this section if at the time of his birth —

- (a) his father possesses such immunity from suit and legal process as is accorded to an envoy of an external sovereign power accredited in Pakistan and is not a citizen of Pakistan; or
- (b) his father is an enemy alien and the birth occurs in a place then under occupation by the enemy.

¹³ Dawn, National ID cards — still a distant dream for many, 26 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴ Netherlands, General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan July 2024, 5 July 2024, [url](#), p. 45

¹⁵ Iqbal, H. et al, Suspended identity: statelessness, citizenship challenges and the impermanence of identity status faced by Pakistani Bengalis, 3 July 2025, [url](#), p. 160

¹⁶ Globalcit, Global Nationality Laws Database, Pakistan, n.d., [url](#); Pakistan, Ministry of Interior, Directorate General of Immigration and Passports, Learn about Immigration to Pakistan, Citizenship of Pakistan, last updated 1 November 2023, [url](#)

¹⁷ Iqbal, H. et al, Suspended identity: statelessness, citizenship challenges and the impermanence of identity status faced by Pakistani Bengalis, 3 July 2025, [url](#), pp. 168-169

¹⁸ Pakistan, National Database and Registration Authority Ordinance, 2000, [url](#)

¹⁹ Pakistan, Ministry of Interior and Narcotics Control, NADRA, Pak Identity, n.d., [url](#)

²⁰ Pakistan, Ministry of Interior, Directorate General of Immigration and Passports, Learn about Immigration to Pakistan, Citizenship of Pakistan, last updated 1 November 2023, [url](#)



5. Citizenship by descent. Subject to the provisions of section 3 a person born after the commencement of this Act shall be a citizen of Pakistan by descent if his 2 [parent] is a citizen of Pakistan at the time of his birth [...]

6. Citizenship by migration. ___ (1) The [Federal Government] may, upon his obtaining a certificate of domicile under this Act, register as a citizen of Pakistan by migration any person who 2 [after the commencement of this Act and before the first day of January, 1952, has migrated] to the territories now included in Pakistan from any territory in the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent outside those territories, with the intention of residing permanently in those territories: [...]²¹

Additionally, the Act stipulates the following about the naturalisation:

‘9. Citizenship by naturalisation. The [Federal Government] may, upon an application made to it in that behalf by any person who has been granted a certificate of naturalisation under the Naturalisation Act, 1926 (VII of 1926), register that person as a citizen of Pakistan by naturalization: Provided that the [Federal Government] may register any person as a citizen of Pakistan without his having obtained a certificate of naturalisation as aforesaid.’²²

As stipulated by the Pakistan Citizenship Act, article 4(b), every person born on the territory of Pakistan is considered a Pakistani citizen, unless the child’s father is defined as an ‘enemy alien’, a term defined in the Protection of Pakistan Act of 2014 as a person ‘who fails to establish Pakistani citizenship and is suspected of engaging in war or insurrection against Pakistan’.²³ In practice, two groups have been particularly affected by this provision, namely Afghan refugees and their descendants and persons who have chosen to ‘go to Bangladesh after the 1971 Liberation War’.²⁴

Stateless persons who cannot access CNICs can receive the Alien Registration Card (ARC) that give their holders rights to stay in Pakistan, to work, to travel, and to open a bank account.²⁵

The previous paper-based identity document system that had been in force since 1972 has been replaced by the Smart National Identity Card (SNIC) [Referred to also as the National Identity Card (NIC) or Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC)].²⁶ The system was introduced in 2001 by the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA).²⁷ CNIC is considered the most important identity document in Pakistan,²⁸ needed to access education,

²¹ Pakistan, The Pakistan Citizenship Act, 1951, [url](#)

²² Pakistan, The Pakistan Citizenship Act, 1951, [url](#)

²³ Pakistan, The Pakistan Citizenship Act, 1951, [url](#)

²⁴ Iqbal, H. et al, Suspended identity: statelessness, citizenship challenges and the impermanence of identity status faced by Pakistani Bengalis, 3 July 2025, [url](#), p. 169

²⁵ SEAP, Nationality For All, Pakistan, last updated 15 August 2025, [url](#)

²⁶ Dawn, Pakistan's Kafkaesque Identity Problem, 6 October 2024, [url](#)

²⁷ Open Global Rights, Privacy and digital identity: The case of Pakistan’s NADRA, 4 February 2022, [url](#)

²⁸ Dawn, Pakistan's Kafkaesque Identity Problem, 6 October 2024, [url](#); SEAP, Nationality For All, Pakistan, last updated 15 August 2025, [url](#)



healthcare, and other essential services.²⁹ It is a document that ‘serves as official recognition of an individual’s citizenship status.’³⁰ CNIC has been described as ‘de facto mandatory’ because it is directly linked to access to essential services.³¹ CNIC is also required for the passport application.³² As of 2024, 209 million people in Pakistan were registered in the NADRA database.³³

In January 2025, the Digital Nation Pakistan Act was passed; the Act provides legal framework for ‘the transformation of Pakistan into a digital nation, enabling a digital society, digital economy, and digital governance’.³⁴ The Act also covers digital ID systems for citizens, and defines legal identity as ‘legal, secure, verifiable credentials issued to an eligible individual, enabling access to digital services, transactions, and interactions which shall be developed, issued and managed by National Database and Registration Authority under the National Database and Registration Authority Ordinance, 2000’.³⁵ New rules introduced by the legislation are that all applicants between 10 and 18 years old must submit biometric data and child births must be registered in order to get the Child Registration Certificate (CRC) [Also referred to as B-Form].³⁶

3. Procedures and practical implementation

The procedure to obtain Pakistani citizenship is described on the website of the Ministry of Interior, Directorate General of Immigration and Passports.³⁷ The applicant has to submit one of the application forms available on the Directorates’ website or in person in the office in Islamabad and in the regional offices in Karachi, Lahore, Multan, Peshawar, and Quetta.³⁸ The application must be submitted at the department of the provincial governments.³⁹ Upon the submission of the application and all the required attachments, the applicant is issued a receipt.⁴⁰ Once the application is approved, the new passport is issued in the Directorate in Islamabad or through its regional offices.⁴¹

The Directorate differentiates between the following categories of applicants and sets out requirements for each one of them:

- Foreign Ladies Married to Pakistani Nationals.

²⁹ Dawn, Pakistan’s Kafkaesque Identity Problem, 6 October 2024, [url](#); Open Global Rights, Privacy and digital identity: The case of Pakistan’s NADRA, 4 February 2022, [url](#)

³⁰ SEAP, Nationality For All, Pakistan, last updated 15 August 2025, [url](#)

³¹ SEAP, Nationality For All, Pakistan, last updated 15 August 2025, [url](#)

³² Pakistan, Ministry of Interior and Narcotics Control, NADRA, National Identity Card, n.d., [url](#)

³³ Iqbal, H. et al, Suspended identity: statelessness, citizenship challenges and the impermanence of identity status faced by Pakistani Bengalis, 3 July 2025, [url](#), p. 170

³⁴ SEAP, Nationality For All, Pakistan, last updated 15 August 2025, [url](#)

³⁵ SEAP, Nationality For All, Pakistan, last updated 15 August 2025, [url](#)

³⁶ SEAP, Nationality For All, Pakistan, last updated 15 August 2025, [url](#)

³⁷ Pakistan, Ministry of Interior, Directorate General of Immigration and Passports, last updated 4 October 2023, [url](#)

³⁸ Pakistan, Ministry of Interior, Directorate General of Immigration and Passports, last updated 4 October 2023, [url](#)

³⁹ Pakistan, Ministry of Interior, Directorate General of Immigration and Passports, last updated 4 October 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁰ Pakistan, Ministry of Interior, Directorate General of Immigration and Passports, last updated 4 October 2023, [url](#)

⁴¹ Pakistan, Ministry of Interior, Directorate General of Immigration and Passports, last updated 4 October 2023, [url](#)



- Commonwealth Citizens who Transfer Rs.5/- Million worth of Foreign Exchange.
- Persons holding Naturalization Certificate issued under the Naturalization Act, 1926 (Sec. 9 of PCA 1951).
- Minor Children (below 21 years of Age) of Pakistan Citizen.⁴²

Identity documents issued by NADRA include:

- Smart National Identity Card (SNIC)
- National Identity Card for Overseas Pakistani (NICOP)
- Pakistan Origin Card (POC)
- Family Registration Certificate (FRC)
- Child Registration Certificate (CRC)
- Cancellation Certificate (CC).⁴³

Every Pakistani citizen aged 18 and above can apply for the National Identity Card (NIC).⁴⁴

Each card includes a 13-digit unique number, a photograph, signature, and a microchip that contains their fingerprints and iris scans.⁴⁵ The NIC is necessary to access essential services, including driver's license, national tax number (NTN), bank account, passport, and cellular connections.⁴⁶ Children aged less than 18 years old can apply for a B-Form,⁴⁷ also known as the Child Registration Certificate (CRC). To receive the B-Form, the applicant must submit the birth certificate and the CNIC of at least one parent.⁴⁸

While the registration for NIC was previously done either in person at a NADRA office or online through NADRA's website,⁴⁹ the website states that it is now done 'exclusively' through a dedicated mobile phone application called the Pak Identity.⁵⁰ The NADRA website indicates that other actions such as a modification or renewal of NIC or SNIC can be done both in person in a NADRA office or through the application.⁵¹ The application requires creating a profile, uploading a photo not older than 6 months, paying a fee and uploading other required documentation.⁵²

Even though the government describes getting a Pakistani identity card through NADRA as 'just a few clicks away',⁵³ sources reported on significant challenges occurring in the

⁴² Pakistan, Ministry of Interior, Directorate General of Immigration and Passports, Grant of Pakistan Citizenship, last updated 4 October 2023, [url](#). For the application forms, see: Pakistan, Ministry of Interior, Directorate General of Immigration and Passports, Downloads, last updated 1 November 2023, [url](#)

⁴³ Pakistan, Ministry of Interior and Narcotics Control, NADRA, Pak Identity, n.d., [url](#)

⁴⁴ Pakistan, Ministry of Interior and Narcotics Control, NADRA, National Identity Card, n.d., [url](#)

⁴⁵ Dawn, National ID cards — still a distant dream for many, 26 July 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁶ Pakistan, Ministry of Interior and Narcotics Control, NADRA, National Identity Card, n.d., [url](#)

⁴⁷ Mazhar, A. et al., What Does It Mean to Be a Bengali in Pakistan?, 2024, [url](#), p. 138

⁴⁸ SEAP, Nationality For All, Pakistan, last updated 15 August 2025, [url](#)

⁴⁹ PakVoter, NIC Registration, n.d., [url](#)

⁵⁰ Pakistan, Ministry of Interior and Narcotics Control, NADRA, Pak Identity, n.d., [url](#)

⁵¹ Pakistan, Ministry of Interior and Narcotics Control, NADRA, National Identity Card, n.d., [url](#)

⁵² Pakistan, Ministry of Interior and Narcotics Control, NADRA, Pak Identity, n.d., [url](#)

⁵³ Pakistan, Ministry of Interior and Narcotics Control, NADRA, Pak Identity, n.d., [url](#)



application process in practice, in particular to certain population groups.⁵⁴ In practice, experiences of individual applicants can widely vary based on their ethnicity, gender, social class, or based on their knowledge of their rights⁵⁵ and the applicants in practice face ‘many bureaucratic and discriminatory bumps and barriers’.⁵⁶

Certain categories of the population are reportedly *de facto* ‘excluded’ from CNIC. These include women, migrant workers, transgender individuals, Biharis, and ethnic Bengalis.⁵⁷ In practice, certain formal requirements can exclude applicants, for example, a requirement to link each application to father or husband.⁵⁸ As a result, an estimated 10 million women in Pakistan do not have national identity cards⁵⁹ and up to 80 % of Bengalis remain without documentation.⁶⁰

Due to the challenges when accessing the identity documentation in practice, ‘large groups of undocumented individuals’ remain in Pakistan.⁶¹ Communities in Pakistan who are stateless or at risk of statelessness include ‘Rohingya refugees, undocumented ethnic Bengalis, undocumented Afghans, and Biharis’.⁶² According to a July 2025 study, ‘with a few strict exceptions, those Bengalis not living in West Pakistan on or before 1971, or who had since migrated to Bangladesh were not able to claim Pakistani citizenship. Citizenship was granted to those living in West Pakistan before the specified date and who remained there.’⁶³

For example, in Sindh province, ethnic Bihari, Bengali and Burmese are known as ‘stateless communities’ who face ‘tremendous issues’ when applying for identity documents and accessing services.⁶⁴ According to a study on experiences of Bengalis in Karachi, Sindh, published in July 2025, there is a strong understanding of Bengalis in Pakistan as ‘foreigners’ and ‘outsiders’ and this perception has led to their widespread discrimination.⁶⁵ The study found that this perception has had a strong impact on how Bengali applicants have been treated at NADRA offices.⁶⁶ According to the study, factors like ‘the officials they encounter, whether they have connections, and their social or economic status’ all determine whether they will remain stateless or not. Additionally, because many Bengalis were forced to register

⁵⁴ SEAP, Nationality For All, Pakistan, last updated 15 August 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁵ Iqbal, H. et al, Suspended identity: statelessness, citizenship challenges and the impermanence of identity status faced by Pakistani Bengalis, 3 July 2025, [url](#), p. 171

⁵⁶ Netherlands, General Country of Origin Information Report on Pakistan July 2024, 5 July 2024, [url](#), p. 46

⁵⁷ SEAP, Nationality For All, Pakistan, last updated 15 August 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁸ SEAP, Nationality For All, Pakistan, last updated 15 August 2025, [url](#)

⁵⁹ HRCP, State of Human Rights in 2024, 2025, [url](#), p. 343

⁶⁰ Aaj English TV, Navigating Pakistan's citizenship rights in Karachi, 27 April 2023, Photo essay: Identity crisis - Life & Style, [url](#)

⁶¹ Iqbal, H. et al, Suspended identity: statelessness, citizenship challenges and the impermanence of identity status faced by Pakistani Bengalis, 3 July 2025, [url](#), p. 160

⁶² Iqbal, H. et al, Suspended identity: statelessness, citizenship challenges and the impermanence of identity status faced by Pakistani Bengalis, 3 July 2025, [url](#), p. 160

⁶³ Iqbal, H. et al, Suspended identity: statelessness, citizenship challenges and the impermanence of identity status faced by Pakistani Bengalis, 3 July 2025, [url](#), p. 176

⁶⁴ Dawn, Pakistan's Kafkaesque Identity Problem, 6 October 2024, [url](#)

⁶⁵ Iqbal, H. et al, Suspended identity: statelessness, citizenship challenges and the impermanence of identity status faced by Pakistani Bengalis, 3 July 2025, [url](#), p. 161

⁶⁶ Iqbal, H. et al, Suspended identity: statelessness, citizenship challenges and the impermanence of identity status faced by Pakistani Bengalis, 3 July 2025, [url](#), p. 161



as aliens in the past, this has had impact on their children's status, as well, resulting in 'intergenerational statelessness'.⁶⁷

Sources indicated that the Pakistani state is systematically keeping the Bengali population stateless.⁶⁸ To obtain citizenship, Bengalis have to prove their residency of them or their family in Pakistan before 1978, and those who came after 1978 could only get the aliens identity card from NARA.⁶⁹ The creation of NARA and the new type of cards has also caused thousands of already issued identity cards to be cancelled or blocked.⁷⁰ This has impacted 'hundreds of thousands of Bengalis', according to a 2024 study.⁷¹ One study described Bengali Pakistanis having their CNIC cards blocked because of stating Bangla as their mother tongue, and the issue of subsequent blocking of previously issued cards has been assessed as 'extensive'.⁷² There were reports on Bengali and Bihari individuals who could not acquire or renew their citizenship despite providing documentation required by the law.⁷³

A 2024 study on the situation of Bengalis in Pakistan indicated that Bengalis who wanted to register for CNIC were at risk of losing a possibility of getting the B-Form documentation for their children.⁷⁴ Additionally, while an ID of only one parent is required to issue an ID child for a minor, this is not always applied in practice 'due to systemic corruption and discrimination towards the Bengali community'.⁷⁵

The consequences of being excluded from the citizenship keep Bengalis 'at the bottom of the economic and social hierarchy', leaving them 'vulnerable to harassment and exploitation' and forced to accept low-paid work.⁷⁶

⁶⁷ Iqbal, H. et al, Suspended identity: statelessness, citizenship challenges and the impermanence of identity status faced by Pakistani Bengalis, 3 July 2025, [url](#), p. 161, 168

⁶⁸ Iqbal, H. et al, Suspended identity: statelessness, citizenship challenges and the impermanence of identity status faced by Pakistani Bengalis, 3 July 2025, [url](#), p. 174; Mazhar, A. et al., What Does It Mean to Be a Bengali in Pakistan?, 2024, [url](#), p. 138

⁶⁹ Iqbal, H. et al, Suspended identity: statelessness, citizenship challenges and the impermanence of identity status faced by Pakistani Bengalis, 3 July 2025, [url](#), pp. 167, 172

⁷⁰ Aaj English TV, Navigating Pakistan's citizenship rights in Karachi, 27 April 2023, Photo essay: Identity crisis - Life & Style, [url](#)

⁷¹ Mazhar, A. et al., What Does It Mean to Be a Bengali in Pakistan?, 2024, [url](#), pp. 138, 143

⁷² Iqbal, H. et al, Suspended identity: statelessness, citizenship challenges and the impermanence of identity status faced by Pakistani Bengalis, 3 July 2025, [url](#), pp. 171-172

⁷³ Open Global Rights, Privacy and digital identity: The case of Pakistan's NADRA, 4 February 2022, [url](#)

⁷⁴ Mazhar, A. et al., What Does It Mean to Be a Bengali in Pakistan?, 2024, [url](#), p. 138

⁷⁵ Aaj English TV, Navigating Pakistan's citizenship rights in Karachi, 27 April 2023, Photo essay: Identity crisis - Life & Style, [url](#)

⁷⁶ Mazhar, A. et al., What Does It Mean to Be a Bengali in Pakistan?, 2024, [url](#), p. 140

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