

Strengthen ties with your roots in India through a PIO Card

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I. What is a PIO card?

A PIO card is a type of an identification issued by the Government of India to Indian citizens or their children who have relinquished their citizenships and Indian passports. The Government of India had launched a few years ago, the `PIO card` scheme for the benefit of persons of Indian origin living outside their country for several years and who have relinquished their citizenship and acquired a foreign citizenship. This scheme is aimed at making their travel back to India hassle free, easier and flexible aside from making available to them certain benefits which are available to NRIs and citizens.

II. Eligibility criteria

Any persons is eligible to apply for a PIO card:

- Who held an Indian passport or was an Indian citizen at any point of time: or
- Who himself or herself or either of her/his parent/s or grandparent/s or great grandparent/s was born in and was a permanent resident of India provided that neither was at any time a citizen of any country as specified by the Indian Government from time to time; or
- Who is a spouse of a citizen of India or a Person of Indian Origin

Therefore, this scheme can be availed of non-Indian spouses of Indian citizens or Persons of Indian Origin. The scheme extends to persons upto four generations

What are the benefits available to PIO card holder?

A person who has been issued a PIO card is entitled to several privileges. Firstly, a PIO does not need a visa for travel to India. Usually if a person exceeds the stay in India beyond the visit visa of 6 months, under Indian Immigration rules, he or she is supposed to register the extension of stay with the concerned Foreigners Registration Officer within 30 days of the expiry of 6 months. But a PIO is exempt from this procedural requirement.

Further, a PIO is treated on the same level and accorded the same benefits as are available to NRIs in the area of economic, financial and educational aspects. A PIO can also purchase, hold, transfer or dispose of immovable properties in India except agricultural or plantation properties. Therefore, children of Indian parents who migrate abroad for education, work or marriage and subsequently get the other country's citizenship, can still stake a claim in their inheritance if they register as PIO. However, without a PIO card, even children of India citizens who inherit any properties such as land, houses etc cannot claim any rights in such properties as under the Indian law, foreign citizens cannot own immovable properties. However, a PIO is also entitled the same rights and facilities as NRIs in applying for educational courses in various Management, Engineering, Technology, Medical colleges and various other institutions in terms of admissions and applications under the general categories. The various housing schemes offered by Life Insurance Corporation, state governments and other governmental bodies, which are normally available to citizens and NRIs are

also available to a PIO.

What is the validity of a PIO card?

A PIO card is valid for a period of fifteen to twenty years, however, subject to the validity of the passport.

Does the applicant have to surrender his/ her existing overseas passport to get a PIO card?

No. A PIO card is not equivalent to Indian citizenship as a PIO does not have all the rights as an Indian citizen but serves as an aid to ease many hassles which non-citizens face in their travel to India such as visa applications and also entitles to several financial and economic privileges discussed before.

Can a PIO card holder who is a British citizen be said to have dual citizenship of UK and India?

India still does not have any rules to allow dual citizenship. Hence a PIO card to a British citizen does not bestow dual citizenship. Hence, a PIO cannot for example, vote in Indian elections, neither can he/she contest elections. The only way you can get any rights closest to dual citizenship is an OCI card, that is An Overseas Citizen of India Card, which will be covered in the article in the next edition.

Are there any restrictions on applications of PIO?

Any person who has been a citizen of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Nepal, Pakistan or Sri Lanka at any time, cannot apply for a PIO card.

Are the foreign born children of Indian citizens eligible?

Yes. The children of Indian citizens who are born outside India are also eligible to get the PIO card. Also, if either of the grandparents or great grand-parents were born in or permanently resident in India, the person is eligible to get a PIO card.

Is a PIO entitled to work in India?

Yes. A PIO can work and be employed in India except in government employment.

Can a PIO inherit any properties in India?

Yes. A PIO can inherit any properties in India including agricultural and plantation properties.

Can a PIO apply for Indian citizenship?

Yes. A PIO can apply for Indian citizenship after being ordinarily resident in India for a period of seven years. However, since India does not allow dual citizenship, the person will have to surrender his existing citizenship.

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