



Expanding the OCI Card Scheme

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Why in News?

Recently, India has been contemplating **extending the [Overseas Citizenship of India \(OCI\) Card privileges to overseas Indians in Fiji and other nations](#)** after relaxing the rules for Suriname.

- In 2023, India announced an extension of the eligibility criteria for OCI card of the original Indian immigrants in Suriname, **from the fourth generation to the sixth generation.**



What is Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) Card?

▪ About:

- The concept of OCI was introduced in response to demands for dual citizenship by the Indian diaspora, particularly in developed countries.
- The [Ministry of Home Affairs](#) defines an OCI as a person who:
 - Was a citizen of India on or after 26th January 1950; or
 - Was eligible to become a citizen of India on 26th January 1950; or
 - Is a child or grandchild of such a person, among other eligibility criteria.
 - According to **Section 7A** of the OCI card rules, an applicant is not eligible for the OCI card if he, his parents, or grandparents have ever been a citizen of Pakistan or Bangladesh.
- The category was introduced by the government in 2005. The Government of India via the [Citizenship \(Amendment\) Act, 2015](#) merged the [Person of Indian Origin \(PIO\) category](#) with the OCI category in 2015.

▪ Historical Background:

- The OCI Card scheme was launched during the [Pravasi Bharatiya Divas](#) in 2005.
- It was introduced as an **acknowledgment** of the persistent emotional attachment of the Indian diaspora to their country of origin.

▪ Limitations and Restrictions:

- They do not have the right to vote.
- They cannot hold constitutional offices or government jobs.
- They cannot purchase agriculture or farmland.

▪ OCI Card and Civil Rights:

- The OCI Card does not confer political rights.
- Holders cannot participate in elections or hold public office, reflecting the government's stance on maintaining clear boundaries between citizenship and overseas citizenship.

▪ Benefits of the OCI Card:

- Multiple entry, multi-purpose lifelong visa to visit India.
- Exemption from registering with the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO) regardless of the duration of their stay.
- Parity with [Non-Resident Indians \(NRIs\)](#) in financial, economic, and educational fields.

▪ Current Scenario:

- The OCI card scheme has been a key element of the Indian government's effort to deepen its relationship with its [diaspora](#).
- As of March 2020, the Home Ministry had issued over 3.5 million OCI cards. According to the [Ministry of External Affairs \(MEA\)](#), this number had exceeded 4 million by early 2022.
 - The **vast majority were issued to foreign nationals** in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada.
- The focus on expanding the OCI card scheme **highlights India's efforts to engage with and support its overseas Indian communities** around the world.

Person of Indian Origin (PIO)

- **PIO refers to a foreign citizen** (except a national of Pakistan, Afghanistan Bangladesh, China, Iran, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Nepal) **who**:
 - at any time held an Indian passport or
 - who or either of their parents/ grandparents/ great grandparents were born and permanently resident in India as defined in Government of India Act, 1935 and other territories that became part of India thereafter or
 - is a spouse of a citizen of India or a PIO.

Prelims

Q. With reference to India, consider the following statements: (2021)

1. There is only one citizenship and one domicile.
2. A citizen by birth only can become the Head of State.
3. A foreigner once granted citizenship cannot be deprived of it under any circumstances.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 1 and 3
- (d) 2 and 3

Ans: (a)

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