

# Compulsory Renewal of OCI

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**Source:** *The Hindu*

**Manifest pedagogy:** Citizenship is an important and controversial issue in India today. It has a lot of Nuance and numerous clauses and provisions and it is an issue which is continuously developing. In this context the issues like OCI and PIO are beyond the scope of standard texts. This article covers the entire issue of OCI.

**In news: Compulsory Renewal of OCI card goes**

**Placing it in syllabus:** Citizenship Act

**Static dimensions:**

- OCI and features
- OCI and PIO merger

**Current dimensions:** What is the issue?

**Content:**

**OCI and features:**

- The Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) Scheme was **introduced by amending the Citizenship Act, 1955 in August 2005.**
- It was **launched during the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention 2006** at Hyderabad.
- The **Scheme provides for registration** as OCI of all Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) who were
  - citizens of India on 26th January, 1950 or thereafter or
  - were eligible to become citizens of India on 26th January, 1950 except who is or had been a citizen of Pakistan, Bangladesh or such other country as

the Central Government may specify.

### **Features:**

- A registered OCI is granted **multiple entry, multi purpose, life-long visa** for visiting India.
- He/she is **exempt from registration with Foreign Regional Registration Officer** for any length of stay in India.
- He/she is entitled to **general parity with Non-Resident Indians** in respect of all facilities available to them in economic, financial and educational fields except in matters relating to the acquisition of agricultural or plantation properties.
- He/she can **also apply for a Permanent Account Number (PAN) card.**
- OCI is not to be misconstrued as 'dual citizenship'.
- It **does not confer political rights.**
- The registered OCI shall **not be entitled to the rights** conferred on a citizen of India **under article 16** of the Constitution.
- It is **mandatory** for registered OCIs **to carry their passports** which carry the Universal visa sticker for entry into/exit from India.

### **OCI and PIO merger:**

- From **January 9, 2015**, the PIO card scheme was merged with the OCI card scheme.
- The PIO and OCI schemes **were merged to maximize benefits and reduce immigration procedures for non-resident Indians (NRIs)** visiting India.
- Now all PIO cardholders are deemed OCI cardholders and anyone holding a PIO card at the time of the PIO and OCI merger as a result **inherits the benefits and rights of the OCI card scheme.**
- This service was made available until September 30, 2019 after which the PIO card would be deemed invalid and traveling without a valid OCI card is not advisable.

## *Benefits of PIO and OCI merger*

- Existing PIO cardholders will be **free from various procedural requirements** like registration and reporting obligations.
- PIOs who wish to travel India can apply for the OCI category and assume the benefits that are available to the OCI.
- This will provide PIO Card Holders **visa-free travel to India, rights of residency and participation in business and educational activities** in the country.

A total of 32,53,912 foreign nationals have been registered as OCI cardholders and 4,14,906 OCI cards have been issued in lieu of PIO cards till March 2019.

## **What is the issue?**

- The Union Home Ministry has **relaxed the provisions for OCI card holders** that made it compulsory for those **aged above 50 and below 20 to renew their cards on renewal of their passports.**
- The move was taken as several OCI card holders were not able to travel to India due to this issue and many were stopped by airlines and immigration authorities at various airports due to the mismatch.
- A **recent order by Home Ministry** has stated that OCI card holder is required to **re-register each time a new passport is issued until 20 years of age and once after 50 years of age.**
- However re-issuance of OCI registration is not mandatory each time a new passport is issued between the ages of 21 and 50.
- This requirement has been **relaxed till 30th June, 2020.**
- The OCI cardholders should carry existing OCI card along with old and new passport.