

# REFUGEE APPLICATION GUIDELINES

## ⚠ IMPORTANT NOTE

This document is intended as a general guide to help refugee applicants prepare their personal documents. It does not guarantee that these are the final or complete requirements. The U.S. government might request different or additional information depending on the circumstances. We are assisting voluntarily, and at no cost to anyone, with no official capacity or authority. Each applicant remains responsible for their own process and documentation.

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## Guide for South African Families Applying to the U.S. Refugee Program

Updated: 27 May 2025

⚠ Important Note: As of 12 May 2025, the United States Refugee Admissions Programme (USRAP) is officially accepting Statements of Interest from eligible South African applicants. While we still await full details of the documentation process, the list below offers practical preparation suggestions. This is not a guaranteed list of what will be requested. It is provided as a helpful guide to assist families in preparing relevant information in advance.

### Step 1: Understand What the U.S. Refugee Program Is

The U.S. Refugee Program helps people who are **in danger** or **fear future persecution**. To be considered for resettlement, applicants must:

- Be **South African** nationals.
- Be of Afrikaner ethnicity or a recognized **racial minority** in South Africa.
- Be able to describe either a past experience of persecution or a fear of future persecution.

### ! Important: This Is Not Normal Immigration

- You are **not applying for a job, a visa, or a university placement**.
- This is a **resettlement programme for protection**.
- Once accepted, you receive help to start a new life in the U.S.

### What is Persecution?

- Persecution means being hurt, threatened, or treated unfairly because of who you are. This includes your **ethnicity (such as being white), religion, political beliefs, or the group you belong to**.
- It does **not** mean you must have been physically attacked. Persecution can also include:
  - Being excluded from job opportunities
  - Being denied education or access to services
  - Being unfairly treated by the government
  - Facing social or legal discrimination
- In South Africa, more than 140 laws currently exist that **exclude or disadvantage people based on skin colour**. This ongoing legal discrimination is part of the persecution that many minorities face today.
- So when the form asks about "past persecution," it includes the **current, ongoing unfair treatment** that has already begun – not just past violence or threats. If you feel unsafe or unfairly treated now and fear it may get worse, that is valid to explain.

### Step 2: Who Can Apply Together as One Family

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When you apply to the U.S. Refugee Program, it is important to understand who is considered part of your family for the purpose of applying.

✓ Apply Together (one form for the whole family):

- Husband and wife (**legally married**)
- Children under **21 years** old who are **not married**
- Stepchildren or adopted children (if legal papers are available)
- In some rare cases: **elderly parents** or **disabled adult children who depend on you**

✗ Must Apply Separately (each person must complete their own form):


- Children **over 21** (unless disabled or fully dependent)
- **Married** children (any age)
- **Brothers, sisters, parents** (unless special dependency applies)
- **Grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins**

ⓘ Note: Some relatives may join later through Family Reunification after you are resettled in the U.S. (see Family Reunification Process for Refugees in the U.S.)

### Step 3: Complete the Statement of Interest Form

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- Go to the U.S. Embassy South Africa webpage:  
<https://za.usembassy.gov/refugee-admissions-program-for-south-africans>

 Fill in the online Google form called **Statement of Interest**

The Statement of Interest form can be accessed at the following link: [Statement of Interest](#) 

- One form per family – the main applicant (head of family) completes it.
- Children over 21 must complete their own form.

### Step 3b: Understand the Statement of Interest Form

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**Note on Confusing Wording:** The form mentions that each person must submit a separate application but also asks for how many family members want to resettle. This is because:

- The U.S. wants to know the total size of your household
- Each adult child (21 or older), even if included in your total count, must still fill out their own form as a separate Principal Applicant
- If you are applying with minor children or your spouse, you list them all on one form as a family group

This is normal in refugee applications – It is both a group process (for families) and an individual one (for adults and legal dependents).

Here is a simple guide to help you fill out the form correctly:

- **Surname, First Name, Middle Name** – Use the exact names shown in your passport or birth certificate.
- **Primary Phone Number** – Give a contact number where you can be contacted.
- **Primary Email** – Use your personal email. If you do not have one, create a free email address (e.g., Gmail).
- **Country of Residence** – Tick South Africa if you are currently living there. If not, choose “Other” and write the country.
- **How many people in your family want to resettle?** – Count yourself and all family members who want to move to the U.S. Include children. This helps them understand the size of your family group.
- **Do you all have valid South African passports?** – Tick YES if everyone applying already has a valid passport. If some are still applying or waiting for Home Affairs to issue a passport, tick NO. You can still apply even if your passport is being processed.
- **How soon can your family travel?** – Be honest about the earliest realistic time you could leave South Africa. Consider how long your documents will take to prepare.

- **Refugee Claim – Why do you want protection?** Choose the reasons that apply to your situation. **If you are unsure which option fits your case, please go back to the section above titled “What is Persecution?” for a clear explanation.** Here is what each option means (they refer to both past and current experiences):

- **Past persecution based on race** – You or your family were or are being targeted, harmed, threatened, or discriminated against because of your skin colour or ethnic group, such as being treated unfairly or excluded for being white.
- **Past persecution based on religion** – You or your family were or are being targeted, harmed, threatened, or discriminated because of your faith or religious beliefs.
- **Past persecution based on nationality** – You or your family were or are being targeted, harmed, threatened, or discriminated because of your national identity, language, or cultural background, such as discrimination for being white South African.
- **Past persecution based on political opinion** – You or your family were or your family are experiencing being targeted, harmed, threatened, or discriminated because of your political views or party support (for example, being outspoken against the government).
- **Past persecution based on membership in a particular social group** – You or your family were or are being targeted, harmed, threatened, or discriminated because you belong to a specific group, such as a farming community, cultural group, or organisation that is being targeted.
- **Fear of future harm** – You or your family believe you are not safe in South Africa and may be harmed in the future for any of the above reasons (race, religion, nationality, political view, or group).
- **None of the above** – Only choose this if you have not experienced and do not fear any danger based on the reasons above. Choosing this may make it harder to qualify.

#### Step 4: Gather Your Documents

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Not every document listed below will apply to every person or family. Please prepare only the documents relevant to your personal situation.

#### Required Documents (For All Applicants)

##### 1. Passport(s)

- A valid passport is required for each traveller, including infants and children.
- At the time of writing, there are no restrictions preventing South Africans from applying for or receiving a passport.

Important: For children of divorced or separated parents, both parents are usually required to be present when applying at Home Affairs

## 2. Unabridged Birth Certificates

- Full birth certificates showing both parents' details.
- Required for all applicants to confirm identity, family links and legal relationships (**required to apply for a green card**).
- **Children cannot travel internationally without an unabridged birth certificate.**
- If the certificate is unavailable or delayed, a police affidavit confirming birth details may assist as supporting evidence, although it is not guaranteed to be accepted.

### Helpful Tips

- *Be honest in all forms and interviews. Do not lie or exaggerate.*
- *Keep a file for each person with their documents.*
- *Write down a short timeline of important events.*
- *Start collecting documents early, even if you are unsure.*

*This is a long process. Approval is not guaranteed.*

## 3. Marriage Certificate

This may be requested to confirm:


- The marriage relationship, particularly if applying as a couple.
- Differences in surnames between spouses or between a parent and child.
- Legal or financial matters in the host country, such as pensions, tax, or insurance.
- Proof of connection if one spouse is listed as a dependent on the application.

## 4. Parental Consent Letter (if one parent is not travelling)

- A signed and certified affidavit from the non-travelling parent granting permission for the child to travel.
- A certified copy of the non-travelling parent's ID or passport.

## 5. Court Orders or Death Certificates

- If one parent has full custody, a certified copy of the court order may be required.
- If a parent is deceased, a certified copy of the death certificate will be required as supporting documentation.

 **Notes for Previously Married Women:** Women who have been previously married, especially those who have remarried more than once, should be prepared to submit documentation for all prior marriages and divorces. Providing a clear history of name changes helps prevent delays during identity checks or application reviews. This includes:

- Copies of previous marriage and divorce certificates.
- Any name changes, including alias names or former surnames, as they may appear in supporting documents such as passports, birth certificates or financial records.

## ■ Recommended Documents (If Possible)

### 1. Vaccination Records

Proof of routine childhood vaccinations (applicable to children).

### 2. National ID Card

While a national ID card is not required for international travel or immigration processes such as refugee resettlement, it may still serve useful administrative or legal purposes, such as:

- **Future pension or retirement claims:** Pension funds might request an ID card for verification if a claim is made from outside South Africa.
- **Property or financial matters:** If an individual has bank accounts, property, or insurance policies in South Africa, an ID may be needed for administrative updates, access or cancellations.

## ■ Only if Asked (Persecution-Based Evidence)

These documents are not required for everyone. They are **only useful if the U.S. government specifically asks for additional proof** or if you are personally comfortable sharing more information to support your story. Many applicants do not have these and can still qualify. You do not need to collect these items unless they clearly apply to you and your situation.

### 1. Police or Government Reports

- If available, any documents relating to reported threats, harm, or persecution.
- May include: case numbers, screenshots of online threats or social media posts, photographs, messages, or videos.

### 2. Witness Letters or Community Statements

- If possible, letters from people who can confirm the applicant's experience.
- This is not always necessary, but may help support the case.

### 3. Proof of Membership (Political, Religious, or Ethnic Groups)

- This could include membership to civil organisations such as Solidarity, AfriForum, or similar groups that are linked to cultural, social, or advocacy-based activities.

## Step 5: Understand the Interview and Checks

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### 1. Interview Process

- Interviews might be conducted by USCIS officials, possibly supported by the U.S. embassy or consulates.
- Interviews may include detailed questions about the applicant's background, family, travel history, and reasons for applying.
- Children aged 14 and older might be required to attend interviews
- Always tell the truth. Do not lie or exaggerate.
- Write a simple summary of your life, key events, and problems. This helps with your interview.

## 2. Biographic and Biometric Data

- Applicants may need to complete forms from the U.S. Department of State or USCIS.
- Biometric screening might include fingerprints and photographs.
- Security and background checks may also be carried out.

## 3. Medical Examination

- Medical screening may be required for all applicants who are approved for resettlement.
- This may include checks for communicable diseases, proof of vaccinations, and a general health assessment.
- Applicants will be informed which travel clinic or doctor to use if required.

## FAMILY REUNIFICATION PROCESS FOR REFUGEES IN THE U.S.

### U.S. Family Reunification Options

Once you are in the U.S., you may be able to bring close family members through family reunification.

#### Option 1: U.S. Refugee/Asylee Relative Petition – Immediate Family

You can apply for:

- Spouse (must have been married before arriving in the U.S.)
- Children under 21 who are unmarried
- Must apply within 2 years of arrival
- No need for financial sponsorship
- The family member does not have to go through the full refugee process again.

#### Option 2: Priority 3 (P-3) Family Reunification Program – Certain Relatives

You can apply for:

- Parents
- Spouse
- Children (any age, if unmarried)
- Requires proof of family relationship and refugee status
- All family members must pass background and medical checks

📌 Only available for certain nationalities

#### Option 3: Immigration Sponsorship (Later, After Green Card or Citizenship)

Once you are a refugee in the U.S.:

- You can apply for a Green Card after 1 year
- You can become a citizen after 5 years
- Then, you may apply to bring more family:
  - Green Card holders: spouse and unmarried children
  - U.S. citizens: spouse, children (any age), parents, brothers and sisters

🕒 Note: These processes take a long time and need financial support.