

Update on South Africa's immigration, travel and Home Affairs services

By [Ahlisha Yesmariam](#)

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The pandemic has resulted in many changes to the way we live and travel, as well as substantially impacting the administrative processing of personal and travel documents in South Africa and around the world. Level 1 lockdown came into effect in South Africa from 1 October 2021, coinciding with the reopening of offices of the Department of Home Affairs. There have been numerous recent developments and guidelines regarding the processes around domestic and international travel, in addition to the resumption of Home Affairs services. These developments are summarised below.



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International and domestic travel

Inter-provincial travel is now permitted. The 20 land borders that were fully operational before 1 October remain open and the 33 land borders which were previously closed, remain closed.

Traveling to and from South Africa is now permitted, subject to the below:

1. Daily commuters from neighbouring countries who attend or teach at a school in South Africa and who are permitted entry into and exit from South Africa are subject to compliance with protocols relating to:
 - Screening for Covid-19 and quarantine or isolation, where necessary
 - Wearing a face mask
 - Transportation
 - Sanitisation and social distancing measures as per the relevant health protocols on safety and prevention of the spread of Covid-19
2. International air travel is restricted to the following airports in South Africa:

- Cape Town International Airport
- King Shaka International Airport
- Kruger Mpumalanga International Airport
- Lanseria International Airport
- OR Tambo International Airport

Long-haul flight departures and landings at these airports are permitted during the hours of curfew (currently 12am [midnight] until 4am daily), provided that the person traveling is in possession of a valid boarding pass as proof of flight or a copy of the airline ticket. All international travellers arriving at the airports listed above must:

- Provide a valid certificate of a negative Covid-19 test, recognised by the World Health Organisation, which was obtained not more than 72 hours before the date of travel.

- In the event of the traveller's failure to submit a certificate as proof of a negative Covid-19 test, the traveller will be required to do an antigen test on arrival at their own cost, and in the event of a traveller testing positive for Covid-19, they will be required to isolate themselves at their own cost, for a period of 10 days.

3. All commercial seaports will remain open and small crafts will be allowed entry into seaports, in line with all health and border law enforcement protocols.

Validity period of different categories of temporary visas

The validity period of legally issued visas or asylum permits, which expired during the lockdown period, has been extended to 31 December 2021. This extension applies to people who have applied for waivers in terms of section 31(2)(c) of the Immigration Act, 2002, and holders of asylum seeker visas or permits or refugee status. Holders of such visas are permitted to remain in the country under the conditions of their current visas until the expiry of their applicable extension. Those persons who wish to be repatriated to their countries of residence within this period can depart without being declared undesirable persons. The extension, however, does not apply to people who entered South Africa from 15 March 2021. People who enter South Africa from 15 March 2021 will have to adhere to the normal validity period of their respective visas.

People who arrived in South Africa between December 2019 and 14 March 2021 with valid visitor visas and who have not departed South Africa since the announcement of the National State of Disaster in March 2020, were deemed to have been valid until 30 September 2021, and were given an opportunity to extend their visas or leave South Africa on or before 30 September 2021.

Refugee Reception Centres remain closed to walk-ins. The validity period of asylum and refugee permits that expired during the lockdown and whose holders could not use the online extension service has been extended until 31 December 2021. Asylum seekers and refugees are encouraged to continue renewing their permits via the online platform.

Holders of a visa or permit in South Africa must adhere to the terms and conditions of their visa and any activity not endorsed onto their visa or permits is prohibited.

Department of Home Affairs resumption of services

The operating times of the front offices of the Department of Home Affairs were temporarily extended by two and a half hours from 8am – 5.30pm from 18 October 2021. This extension is to assist with the high demand for services that the Home Affairs offices are currently experiencing. Some 197 of the 412 Home Affairs offices are modernised Live Capture offices, which are able to process Smart ID cards and passports. These are the offices that will operate for extended hours.

Applications for identity documents (IDs) are now open for people who were issued with temporary ID certificates and those who have lost their IDs. These IDs will be available for collection within 13 days from the day of application.

The suite of services available at Home Affairs are:

- Applications and collection of identity card or document.
- Applications and collection of passports.
- Applications for retention and renunciation of citizenship.
- Applications for rectifications and amendments of personal particulars.
- Applications for temporary identity certificates.
- Applications for travel documents for persons who are to take up employment or studies abroad, attend funerals or other emergency situations, on submission of proof thereof.
- Applications for unabridged birth, marriage and deaths certificates, including vault copies.
- Birth registration.
- Death registration.
- Late registration of birth.
- Re-issuance of birth, marriage and death certificates.
- Online renewal of refugee status and asylum seeker permits/visas.
- Solemnization and registration of marriages.
- Visa services in terms of the Immigration Act.

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