



home affairs

Department:
Home Affairs
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

MEDIA STATEMENT

Minister of Home Affairs invites public comment on the Draft Revised White Paper on Citizenship, Immigration and Refugee Protection

12 December 2025

Following approval by Cabinet, the Minister of Home Affairs, Dr Leon Schreiber, has today published the Draft Revised White Paper on Citizenship, Immigration and Refugee Protection in the Government Gazette for public comment. In keeping with a directive by Cabinet to maximise public participation beyond the festive season, the period for public comment will be open until 31 January 2026.

The Draft Revised White Paper updates the existing White Paper. It reviews and enhances certain policy propositions, and adds the necessary detail to proposals contained in the original version. The priorities of the Government of National Unity (GNU), the visa review done through Operation Vulindlela (OV), and the Department of Home Affairs' digital transformation agenda have all been incorporated into the revised version.

The Draft Revised White Paper outlines a vision for the most fundamental reform to South Africa's citizenship, immigration and refugee protection frameworks in a generation. It is designed to clamp down on fraud and abuse, enhance national security, improve service delivery, and promote economic development.

Key reforms proposed in the Draft Revised White Paper include:

- Refugee management reforms

The refinement and implementation of the "First Safe Country Principle," which states that asylum seekers who have been granted refugee status or lawful protection in another country, or who pass through safe third countries to reach South Africa, are ineligible for asylum in South Africa.

This is designed to combat the phenomenon of applicants “picking and choosing” South Africa as their preferred destination to claim asylum, while passing through other safe countries on the way. In order to mitigate the risk of refoulement, this reform will require the Minister of Home Affairs to, on an annual basis, designate safe third countries that have ratified the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, and to withdraw such designation as and when the need arises. It will also mandate the government to enter into bilateral agreements with safe third countries in order for the burden of migration in sub-Saharan Africa to be shared on a more equitable basis. By adopting this focus on regional migration flows, South Africa will be positioned to support the implementation of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)’s route-based approach that seeks to move away from focusing on individual countries towards entire routes of migration.

- Citizenship reforms

These reforms introduce merit-based criteria for naturalisation and an annual window period for the submission of applications to prevent backlogs, a Citizenship Advisory Panel (CAP) to objectively consider and advise on applications, and a point-based system for economic pathways to citizenship. This is a new, merit-based approach to the granting of citizenship, as opposed to basing qualification solely on the number of years a foreigner has resided in the country. This new system will operate in parallel to the existing principle that a child with at least one parent who is a South African citizen at the time of birth automatically becomes a citizen, while a child born to non-South African parents have to apply for naturalisation.

- Immigration reforms:

Reforms to the immigration system are designed to ensure alignment of the visa system with the recommendations of OV and to the Department’s digital transformation agenda. This includes the introduction of new visa categories for remote-work, start-ups, skilled workers (which combines the existing critical skills and general work visas into one category), sports and culture, and the replacement of corporate visas with sectoral work visas for specific industries. It also introduces a new, merit-based points-based system for certain visas and permanent residency, and supports the rollout of the Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) to record biometrics for every foreigner in South Africa.

- Civil registration reforms

Civil registration reforms are anchored in the transformation of South Africa's National Population Register (NPR) into a modern, digitally-enabled Intelligent Population Register (IPR) as the foundation for a Digital ID system. Unlike the existing NPR, which simply records basic information, including names, births, and deaths, an IPR uses advanced technologies, such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, biometrics, interoperability and real-time data integration, to improve governance, integrated service delivery, and national planning. Further detail on key elements and the functionality of the IPR will be covered in a standalone policy on Digital ID that is under development by the Department. This will be augmented by the introduction, through digital channels, of mandatory birth and death registration for citizens and foreigners who reside in the country.

The publication of the Draft Revised White Paper opens a formal public consultation period from 12 December 2025 to 31 January 2026, during which individuals, organisations, and interested parties are invited to submit written comments and participate in provincial and national public consultation sessions.

A series of public consultations will take place between 15 and 30 January 2026, covering all nine provinces. A national stakeholder consultation session will also be convened to engage government departments, Chapter 9 institutions, business, labour, academia, civil society, and multilateral organisations.

The Department of Home Affairs will work closely with the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS), provincial governments, and social partners to ensure that the public is informed about the consultation processes and opportunities to participate. The gazette is available [here](#).

How to Submit Comments

Comments may be submitted in writing between 12 December 2025 and 31 January 2026 to:

Email: Whitepaper@dha.gov.za

Postal: The Director-General, Department of Home Affairs, Private Bag X114, Pretoria, 0001

The Draft Revised White Paper on Citizenship, Immigration and Refugee Protection is available on the Department's website and through the

Government Gazette. Members of the public are encouraged to provide their inputs on the content of the Revised White Paper, thus playing a critical role in shaping the future governance of citizenship, immigration and refugee protection in South Africa.

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