

Help Me Leave!

Get Your Documents Ready

Use this expanded checklist to prepare your essential documents before starting a visa or asylum application. Each section includes the required items, steps, estimated costs, and processing times.

1. Passport

- ☐ Valid passport (6+ months before expiry)
- ☐ Proof of citizenship (birth certificate, naturalization, etc.)
- ☐ Application form (from official government site)
- ☐ Passport photos

Steps:

- Gather required documents: proof of citizenship, valid government-issued photo ID, passport photo, and parental consent/custody papers if applying for a child.
- Complete the DS-11 application form: download and print from travel.state.gov. Fill it out on paper but do not sign until your appointment.
- Book an appointment at a passport acceptance facility (post office, clerk of court, etc.).
- Bring your documents, completed form, and payment (check or money order).
- Submit in person.
- Wait for processing: 6–8 weeks (standard) or 2–3 weeks (expedited).

Type	Cost (USD)	Processing Time
Standard (Adult)	\$165	6–8 weeks
Expedited (Adult)	\$225	2–3 weeks
Standard (Child)	\$135	6–8 weeks
Expedited (Child)	\$195	2–3 weeks

2. Birth Certificate

- ☐ Certified copy of original birth certificate
- ☐ Government-issued ID to request copy
- ☐ Payment method (card, money order, etc.)

Steps:

- Gather required information: full name, date of birth, place of birth, parents' full names, and valid government-issued ID.
- Go online to your state's vital records office or VitalChek.com.
- Select 'Order Certificate' → 'Birth Certificate'.

- Choose whether requesting for yourself or for a child.
- Enter personal details and reason for request (e.g., personal use/records).
- Verify information and submit payment.
- Receive certified copy by mail in 2–4 weeks (varies by state).

Item	Cost (USD)	Processing Time
Certified Copy	\$20–\$35	2–4 weeks

3. REAL ID (or Equivalent Government ID)

- ☐ Proof of identity (birth certificate or passport)
- ☐ Proof of address (utility bill, lease, or bank statement)
- ☐ Social Security Number (if required)

Steps:

- Gather required documents: proof of identity, current state-issued ID/driver's license, proof of address, and payment method.
- Go online to your DMV/MVA website and schedule an appointment.
- At the DMV, request an upgrade to REAL ID.
- Submit documents, complete renewal process, and pay the fee.
- Receive a temporary card (same day) and permanent REAL ID by mail in 2–4 weeks.

Item	Cost (USD)	Processing Time
REAL ID Driver's License / State ID	\$30–\$60	Same day issue; 2–4 weeks delivery

4. Additional Records (if applicable)

- ☐ Marriage or Divorce Certificates
- ☐ Custody or Court Orders for children
- ☐ Financial Proof (bank statements, tax returns, employment letters)
- ☐ Medical Records (prescriptions, diagnoses, asylum-related evidence)
- ☐ Educational Records (diplomas, transcripts)

Steps:

- Request certified copies of marriage or divorce certificates from the relevant state vital records office.
- Obtain certified copies of custody or court orders from the issuing court.
- Gather recent financial proof such as bank statements, tax returns, and employment letters.

- Collect relevant medical records including prescriptions, diagnoses, and treatment history.
- For education, request official transcripts or diploma copies from your school or university.

5. Apostille / Legalisation

- ☐ Request apostille for birth/marriage certificates if needed abroad
- ☐ Request apostille for court orders, diplomas, or adoption records if required

Steps:

- Identify which documents will be used abroad (birth, marriage, divorce, court orders, diplomas).
- Check if the destination country is part of the Hague Apostille Convention.
- If yes: request apostille from your Secretary of State (for state-issued documents) or the U.S. Department of State (for federal documents).
- If no: request full legalisation through the foreign embassy or consulate of the destination country.
- Submit documents and fees (\$10–\$20 per state document, \$20 per federal document).
- Processing time: 1–3 weeks (state) or 4–6 weeks (federal).
- Collect apostilled/legalised documents and include them in your visa application.

Tips

- ☒ Always order certified copies, not photocopies.
- ☒ Keep both digital and paper copies.
- ☒ Store securely but ensure quick access.
- ☒ For asylum: collect evidence of persecution (reports, news articles, personal statements).