

AFRIKANERS

AN INTRODUCTION FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS



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This cultural backgrounder aims to help U.S. resettlement agencies (RAs), local affiliates, service providers, and practitioners better understand and support newly arrived Afrikaners in the U.S.

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BRIEF HISTORY

Prior to Dutch settlement, South Africa was home to indigenous groups such as the Khoisan and Bantu-speaking peoples. In the 17th century, Dutch settlers arrived and laid the foundation for Afrikaner culture, identity and language. These settlers' descendants came to be known as Boers, from the Dutch word for "farmer." At the turn of the 19th century, the British Empire took control of the Dutch Cape Colony. This prompted the Great Trek, during which thousands of Boers moved inland, displacing native peoples, to establish independent republics. During the Anglo-Boer War at the turn of the 20th century, the British interned around 145,000 Boers and 140,000 Black Africans in concentration camps, and upwards of 50,000 died. These events helped consolidate a concept of Afrikaner nationalism through collective suffering at the hands of the British. From 1948 to 1994, Afrikaners participated in establishing and implementing the South African government's system of Apartheid, a regime of racial segregation. In the post-Apartheid era, South Africans including Afrikaners continue to grapple with issues of identity, reconciliation, and socio-economic transformation.

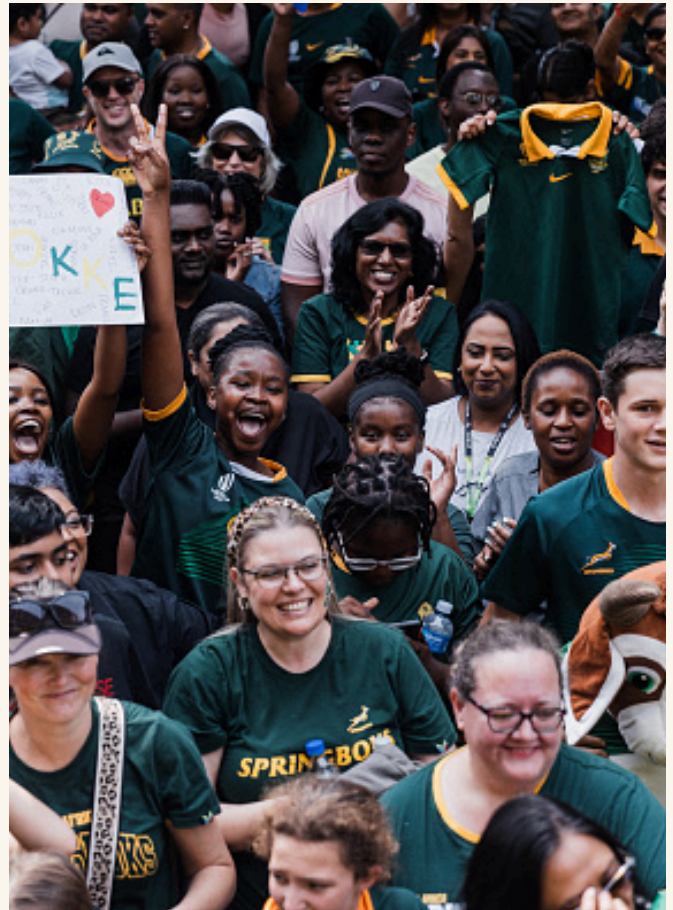
RESETTLEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES



In February 2025, the President of the United States issued a presidential action prioritizing humanitarian relief, including admission and resettlement through the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), for Afrikaners from South Africa. Afrikaners resettled through the USRAP arrive with refugee status and are eligible for services offered through the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), including Preferred Communities. However, as of May 2025, they do not receive post-arrival services from the Bureau of Populations, Refugees, and Migration (PRM). Afrikaner refugees are also eligible for “mainstream” (non-ORR funded) federal benefits, such as cash assistance through Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), health insurance through Medicaid, and food assistance through Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The initial cohort resettled in May 2025 numbers around 30 cases, or 68 individuals. Approximately half of this group have family members and friends already living in the United States (“U.S. Ties”). However, many of those U.S. Ties have lived and worked in the United States on temporary H-2A (agricultural worker) visas, rather than having permanent status in the United States.

LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION STYLE

South Africa recognizes 12 official languages, including Afrikaans and English. Afrikaans, developed from Dutch, is a defining feature of Afrikaner identity. While the ability to speak Afrikaans often signifies cultural belonging, approximately 90% of Afrikaners also speak English as a first or second language, as it is widely taught in schools and serves as the country's primary language of business. Most South Africans have a direct style of communication, though this can vary among ethnic groups. Generally, South Africans speak confidently and directly, similar to how most Americans communicate. Physical affection and contact are common during conversation and are interpreted as signs of friendliness, warmth, and trustworthiness.



RELIGION

Afrikaners generally identify as conservative Christians. Calvinism, especially the Dutch Reformed Church, has historically played a significant role in shaping Afrikaner beliefs and values. While Christian faith remains strong within the Afrikaner community, some generational changes have led to a decline in traditional religious practices and a diversification of beliefs. Afrikaners will often jest that their other religion is rugby, a sport that shares similarities with both soccer and American football. The South African national team is called the Springboks, or the Bokke. On dates when the team is playing key matches, many South Africans wear the Springbok jersey, even to work.



FAMILY DYNAMICS

Afrikaner families are generally affectionate, protective, and expressive. They tend to be small and close-knit, though some may live with extended family members. In urban areas, both women and men work outside the home, but women are often responsible for household duties and raising children. Among older generations, family values are generally conservative and patriarchal, premised on the father being the head of the household, while younger generations may have a more modern and egalitarian approach to family life.

HOLIDAYS AND CELEBRATIONS

South Africa's official holidays are New Year's Day; Easter; Human Rights Day (March 21); Freedom Day (April 27), Workers' Day (May 1); Youth Day (June 16); National Women's Day (August 9); Heritage Day (September 24); Reconciliation Day (December 16), Christmas, and Day of Goodwill (December 26). For more information, see Public Holidays in South Africa.

FOOD

Meat is a staple of the South African diet, although cuisine varies widely according to ethnicity. South Africans love to barbecue, or braai—slowly grilling steaks, chops, and sausages (boerewors) over hot charcoal, or as a stew in a three-legged cast iron pot on the coals. For Afrikaners, the concept of making a fire and cooking meat on it is not merely a means of cooking, but a key form of recreation, socializing, and identity. Other dishes enjoyed by South Africans include wild game and a dried meat snack called biltong, which can be accompanied by potatoes, bread, or rice as a starch. Milk tart, a custard-like pie, is a favorite dessert among Afrikaners, with koeksisters, a deep-fried braid of dough infused with syrup, being a favorite accompaniment to coffee or rooibos tea.



KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR RESETTLEMENT SERVICES

CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

Although South Africa shares some similarities to the U.S. in terms of economic development and technological advancement, cultural adjustment will still be a consideration, as with any arrivals to a new country. Some Afrikaners resettled in the U.S. come from agrarian backgrounds and are known for their self-reliance. This cultural trait may make them less likely to seek or accept assistance, even when needed. Afrikaners may arrive with a strong work ethic and a desire to settle quickly, expecting services like documentation and benefits to be processed promptly. This may lead to frustration when delays occur. Clearly outlining service timelines can help manage expectations and ease the adjustment process.

In a similar vein, Afrikaners tend to avoid interactions with police or local authorities and prefer to handle situations on their own. Some may have prior experiences with lack of protection by the state and may mistrust law enforcement. To help this population understand the role of law enforcement in the U.S, share resources such as [Settle In's How to Interact with Police in the United States](#).

Afrikaners arriving in May 2025 did not receive the standard Cultural Orientation (CO) typically provided under the Reception and Placement (R&P) program. As such, service providers should ensure that families are offered comprehensive community orientation to help them navigate U.S. systems, norms, and daily life. Orientation efforts may be supported through ORR-funded programs such as Preferred Communities.





EDUCATION

The education system in South Africa consists of early childhood education, primary and secondary schooling, and higher education and training. Primary education in South Africa spans from Grade R (Reception Year) to Grade 7 for children aged five to 13 years old. Secondary education spans Grades 8 to 12, catering to students aged 14 to 18 years old. Higher education includes universities and vocational training institutions.

According to the South African Schools Act 1996, compulsory education in South Africa starts at the age of six and continues until 15. The academic year in South Africa commences in January and continues until December. Parent involvement in school is common in South Africa and should be encouraged for new families resettling to the U.S. While the U.S. and South African school systems are similar in many ways, providing school orientation to new Afrikaner families will help ensure that children adjust to this transition.

Most Afrikaner adults arriving in the U.S. are likely to have completed at least secondary education, though levels of higher education and vocational training vary. Digital literacy may also differ based on age, prior access to technology, and work experience.

EMPLOYMENT

Resettled Afrikaners may have experience in farming and skilled trades, which may translate well in rural economies in the U.S. Others may possess backgrounds in financial services, hospitality, and office administration, making them suited for roles in the broader job market. Additionally, widespread competence in English will improve employment opportunities for newly arriving Afrikaners.

Some Afrikaners resettling in the U.S. may have high expectations of quickly securing employment. Service providers can assist in setting realistic expectations by offering guidance on the job market and providing support in navigating the employment process.

In comparison to the U.S., South African labor laws generally offer stronger protections for workers in areas including paid leave, working hours, and collective bargaining. For example, Afrikaners may be accustomed to standardized access to paid sick, vacation, and parental leave. Additionally, in South Africa, working hours are legally capped at 45 hours per week. Resettled Afrikaners should be prepared for a more flexible and employer-driven work schedule. Reviewing common labor practices on the federal and State level may help manage employment expectations for this population.



HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH

South Africa's health care system uses a hybrid approach between the public and private sectors. The public universal health care system is managed by the government and serves the majority of the population, especially in rural areas. It is based on a primary health care approach, where patients first visit local clinics for basic health care and then receive referrals to district hospitals, provincial hospitals, or specialized facilities for more advanced care. Private health care can range from general practices to large hospitals. The private health care sector is funded through private insurance and out-of-pocket payments. Private health care may provide high-quality care with shorter wait times, but it comes at a higher cost to patients.

Afrikaner refugees are eligible for health coverage upon arrival, including Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA) or Medicaid, depending on their circumstances. Being aware of Afrikaner families' previous experiences with health care and providing orientation to the U.S. health care system may help manage expectations and provide appropriate support.

Mental health and wellness is another consideration. Some Afrikaners arriving in the initial May 2025 cohort have witnessed or experienced acts of extreme violence. Utilizing a trauma-informed care approach is recommended as a best practice. For more information, see Switchboard's guide *Trauma Informed Care: An Introduction for Service Providers*.

HOUSING

Afrikaners may arrive in multigenerational families and prefer to live all together, which may be challenging due to higher housing costs and limited availability in the U.S. Many new arrivals may have high expectations for their new living situations and may hope for a stand-alone home, not an apartment. This preference may need to be balanced with the practical realities of resettlement and available resources.

The cost of living and housing in the U.S. is generally higher than in South Africa. Afrikaners may find that expenses for rent, utilities, and everyday necessities are significantly greater in the U.S., impacting their budgeting and financial planning.

Access to safe and stable housing is a foundational component of successful resettlement. Afrikaners arriving in May 2025 did not receive housing assistance through the Reception and Placement (R&P) program. As such, providers should note that ORR-funded programs, such as Preferred Communities (PC) or Refugee Support Services (RSS), may offer supports including rental assistance, housing orientation, and referrals to community-based housing providers. For more information, see Refugee Housing Solutions' [Engaging with ORR-Eligible Populations: A Housing Stakeholder's Guide](#).

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