



USCIS Update

March 5, 2008

USCIS BIOMETRIC CHANGES FOR RE-ENTRY PERMITS AND REFUGEE TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

WASHINGTON – U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has issued revised instructions for USCIS Form I-131, Application for Travel Document. The instructions include changes, which will become effective March 5, 2008, that require applicants for re-entry permits and refugee travel documents to provide biometrics (e.g., fingerprints and photographs) at a USCIS Application Support Centers (ASC) for background and security checks and requirements for secure travel and entry documents containing biometric identifiers. As indicated in the instructions, when the biometrics requirement becomes effective, USCIS will notify applicants of their appointment at the designated ASC after submission of the I-131 application.

The new instructions for Form I-131 require that applicants for re-entry permits and refugee travel documents who are ages 14 through 79 provide biometrics before departing from the United States. Applicants also are strongly encouraged to apply, whenever possible, well in advance of their anticipated travel dates to allow time to attend their ASC appointments and to receive their travel documents. Shortly after filing an I-131 form for a Refugee Travel Document or a Re-entry Permit, USCIS will mail the applicant his or her receipt and an ASC scheduling notice. The I-131 instructions also provide guidance for certain persons who are abroad at the time of filing to visit a U.S. Embassy or consulate for fingerprinting, although all applicants are urged to file *before* leaving the United States.

The instructions also discuss the requirement for applicants for re-entry permits and refugee travel documents who are in the United States to pay the \$80 biometrics services fee, or to submit a biometrics fee waiver request with sufficient documentation to support their inability to pay the fee. As in the past, the application fee for the I-131 form cannot be waived.

In addition, if applicants require expedited processing, the instructions provide specific information for submitting pre-paid express mailers with the I-131 for USCIS to send the applicant his or her receipt and ASC appointment notice, as well as the completed Re-entry Permit or Refugee Travel Document, if approved. A request for expedited processing should contain the applicant's reasons for such processing.

Changes to the Form I-131 instructions concerning biometrics are vital to the security of the immigration process, as well as to help ensure that USCIS complies with congressional mandates for issuance of secure documents. The added biometric requirements will provide the agency with an opportunity to conduct more in-depth security background checks for applicants for immigration benefits or re-entry permits and refugee travel documents for entering the United States. These requirements also improve USCIS' capability to verify identity and for applicants to obtain secure documents that are less subject to fraud and abuse.

The updated Form I-131 and instructions are available on the USCIS website at www.uscis.gov.

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