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COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT TRAVELING AS A REFUGEE

What is a Convention Travel Document (CTD)?

It allows refugees to travel to countries outside of their country of asylum, similar to a passport, in accordance with article 28 of the 1951 Refugee Convention or the 1954 Statelessness Convention, and article 6 of the 1969 OAU Convention.

- ▲ You can often get a visa with a CTD.
- ▲ In some cases, refugees can use their home country passport instead of a CTD (e.g. Afghans in Pakistan). Ask your local UNHCR office which one to use.
- ▲ CTDs don't allow refugees to visit their country of origin.



How to Get a CTD

- ▲ CTDs are only issued for a valid reason to travel, e.g. a conference, training or further studies. Supporting documents (e.g. official invitation letters, admission letters) are required.
- ▲ CTDs are usually granted by the immigration services of the asylum country. Required steps and time varies greatly, so consult your local UNHCR office on how to apply.



Challenges that May Arise when Traveling with a CTD

- Some countries, like Kenya, don't issue a machine readable CTD. In this case, carry all documents used to apply for the CTD and visa (e.g. invitation letters, proof of refugee status, proof of travel insurance), and expect visa delays. Missing documents could lead to travel cancellation.
- Airports with electronic immigration stations (e.g. U.S.) may not recognize your CTD. Ask an immigration agent for assistance.
- Many countries don't issue visas on arrival for CTD holders. Apply for visas before traveling.
- CTDs aren't easily recognized by immigration agents at airports. Be prepared for many questions and delays. Try to remain patient and calm.
- Some asylum countries require additional documentation for travelers to return (e.g. Lebanon, Jordan, Pakistan, Iraq). Check with your local UNHCR office for country specific requirements.

How to Prepare for Studying Outside your Country of Asylum

- Most institutions require copies of identity documents, educational certification and records.
- You'll likely need a valid passport or CTD. If you don't have these, ask if alternative documentation would be accepted.
- Most institutions will inform you of visa requirements. It's your responsibility to renew your visa/permit to maintain your lawful residency status.
- Confirm the visa processing time, and be aware of restrictions applicable in the host country, e.g. the right to work.
- The scholarship granting institution should be able to assist you with issues such as a passport/visa that expires during your studies.



Scenario 1 - Obed

Obed, a refugee in Rwanda, received a U.S. scholarship. He applied for a CTD and a visa. However, the visa was only valid for two months, while the scholarship was for two years. Later, he was told this is normal, and after arrival to approach the university's International Department to request a longer visa.

★ *Tip: When traveling abroad for studies, ask the university directly about the visa and travel process.*



Scenario 2 - Asal

Asal, a refugee in Pakistan, was invited to a College Board event in Rwanda. She wasn't sure if she had to apply for a visa online, at an embassy, or upon arrival. She also heard of refugees not being allowed to return after traveling. She consulted UNHCR, and asked the event organizers to advocate for her visa issuance. Using her home country passport she got her visa online and traveled to Rwanda and back without issues.

★ *Tip: Communicate proactively, use all available sources of official information, and seek support from event/institution organizers.*