

U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services

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Green Card (Permanent Residence)

A permanent resident is someone who has been granted authorization to live and work in the United States on a permanent basis. As proof of that status, a person is granted a permanent resident card, commonly called a "green card." You can become a permanent resident several different ways. Most individuals are sponsored by a family member or employer in the United States. Other individuals may become permanent residents through refugee or asylee status or other humanitarian programs. In some cases, you may be eligible to file for yourself.

The steps to become a permanent resident are different for each category and will depend on if you are currently living inside or outside the United States. The main categories are listed below. More information is available in the links to the left.

- **Green Card Through Family**
How to apply for permanent residence when a family member petitions for you
- **Green Card Through a Job**
How to apply for permanent residence based on a job offer or employment
- **Green Card Through Refugee or Asylum Status**
How to apply for permanent residence when you have been granted refugee or asylum status
- **Other Ways to Get a Green Card**
Learn about the many other ways that you may qualify for permanent residence

If you are unsure which immigration path best fits your particular situation, see the "Green Card Processes & Procedures" link to the left which includes:

- **Green Card Eligibility**
Learn who can apply for permanent residence
- **Adjustment of Status**
Learn about the multi-step process for individuals inside the United States that want to get a green card
- **Consular Processing**
Learn about the multi-step process for individuals outside the United States that want to get a green card

If you are already a permanent resident, see the "After the Green Card Is Granted" link for more information about renewing or replacing your green card, travel outside the United States, your rights and responsibilities as a permanent resident, conditional residency, and more.

Categories:

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Green Card Through Family

Many people become permanent residents (get a green card) through family members. The United States promotes family unity and allows U.S. citizens and permanent residents to petition for certain relatives to come and live permanently in the United States. You may be eligible to get a green card through a family member who is a U.S. citizen or permanent resident, or through the special categories described below. For more information on the categories below, see the links to the left.

There are two distinct paths through which you can get your green card. Many family members who are already in the United States may qualify for adjustment of status to permanent residence in the United States, which means they are able to complete their immigrant processing without having to return to their home country. Those relatives outside the United States or those who are not eligible to adjust status in the United States may be eligible for consular processing through a U.S. embassy or consulate abroad that has jurisdiction over their foreign place of residence. For more information on these processes, see the links to the left under “Green Card Processes & Procedures.”

If Your Family Member is a U.S. Citizen

You may be able to get a green card as an immediate relative or as a family member in a preference category if your U.S. citizen relative files a Form I-130, Petition for Alien Relative, for you. For more information on immigrant petitions, see the “Family” link to the right.

- **Immediate Relative of a U.S. Citizen**

You are an immediate relative of a U.S. citizen if you are:

- The child (unmarried and under 21 years old) of a U.S. citizen
- The spouse (husband or wife) of a U.S. citizen
- The parent of a U.S. citizen (if the U.S. citizen is 21 years or older)

- **Family Member of a U.S. Citizen in a Preference Category**

You are a family member of a U.S. citizen in a preference category if you are:

- An unmarried son or daughter (21 years or older) of a U.S. citizen
- A married son or daughter (any age) of a U.S. citizen
- A sibling (brother or sister) of a U.S. citizen

- **If Your Family Member is a Permanent Resident**

You may be able to get a green card as a family member in a preference category if your family member filed a Form I-130 on your behalf. For more information on immigrant petitions, see the “Family” link to the right.

- **Family member of a permanent resident in a preference category**

You are a family member of a permanent resident in a preference category if you are:

- The spouse of a permanent resident
- The child (unmarried and under 21 years old) of permanent resident
- The unmarried son or daughter (21 years or older) of a permanent resident

Green Card Through Special Categories of Family

You may also be eligible to get a green card if you:

- Are a battered child or spouse of a U.S. citizen
- Entered the United States with a K visa as the fiancé(e) or spouse of a U.S. citizen or an accompanying child
- Obtained V nonimmigrant status
- Are a widow(er) of a U.S. citizen
- Are born to a foreign diplomat in the United States