



# What is a Green Card: Here's all you need to know, from eligibility to the application process, new updates, and more

Express Web Desk

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The United States government issued a document called the Permanent Resident Card, commonly known as the Green Card, which grants immigrants the right to permanently live and work in the United States.

However, the green card approval rate has recently reached a new low, with pending green card applications increasing from 10 million in 1996 to almost 35 million today. In the same period, approvals have fallen from 7.6% to under 4%.

According to a recent report by the CATO Institute, only about 3% of people who applied for green card applications in FY 2024 will receive permanent status in the United States, while the remaining 97% will not.

In response to this, the 2023 Eliminating Backlogs Act was introduced to address the backlog of green card applications and reduce the critical labour shortages in the United States.

Furthermore, certain individuals who have been waiting in long lines from high-immigration countries with caps, such as India, China, the Philippines, and Mexico, would be granted immediate eligibility for green cards.

Additionally, the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has launched myUSCIS organisational accounts, which allow multiple people within an organisation and their legal representatives to collaborate on and prepare H1B registrations, H-1B petitions, and any associated Form I-907, Request for Premium Processing Service.

The White House recently stated that the US President, Joe Biden, is currently taking steps to improve the H-1B visa process and address the green card backlog, along with other issues related to the country's legal immigration system.

Here's everything one needs to know about green cards, including eligibility criteria, the application process, and other relevant details.

## What are the eligibility criteria for Green Card?

To be considered for a green card, one must meet the eligibility criteria outlined in the categories below. Upon identifying the category that aligns with your circumstances, click the provided link

to access details on eligibility prerequisites, application procedures, and the possibility of your family members applying alongside you.

### **1. Family-based Green Cards:**

- **Immediate Relatives of U.S. Citizens:** This includes spouses, unmarried children under the age of 21, and parents of U.S. citizens (the petitioner must be at least 21 years old to petition for a parent).
- **Other Family Members:** This includes unmarried sons and daughters of U.S. citizens and their children, spouses and unmarried children (minor and adult) of permanent residents, married sons and daughters of U.S. citizens, their spouses and children, and siblings of adult U.S. citizens and their spouses and minor children.

**2. Employment-Based Green Cards:** Categories range from EB-1 to EB-5, covering priorities from persons with extraordinary ability, outstanding professors and researchers, multinational executives, professionals with advanced degrees or exceptional ability, skilled workers, and investors who create employment opportunities in the U.S.

**3. Refugee or Asylee Status:** Individuals granted asylum or refugee status can apply for a Green Card one year after their designation.

**4. Diversity Lottery:** The Diversity Immigrant Visa Programme makes up to 50,000 immigrant visas available annually, drawn from random selection among all entries from countries with low rates of immigration to the United States.

**5. Special Immigrant Status:** This category includes several specific groups such as religious workers, employees of U.S. foreign service posts, retired employees of international organisations, alien minors who are wards of courts in the United States, and others.

**6. Victims of Abuse, Crime, or Human Trafficking:** This includes VAWA (Violence Against Women Act) self-petitioners (abused spouses, children, or parents of U.S. citizens or permanent residents), U visa holders (victims of certain crimes), and T visa holders (victims of human trafficking).

**7. Long-Time Residents:** Individuals who have lived continuously in the U.S. since before January 1, 1972, may be eligible to apply for a Green Card.

### **How to apply for a Green Card:**

Applying for a green card, officially known as becoming a lawful permanent resident, involves several steps, which can vary depending on your eligibility category. Here's a general overview of the process for the most common categories:

**Step 1. Determine your eligibility category:** Identify under which category you qualify for a green card. Common categories include family sponsorship, employment, refugee or asylee status, and the diversity visa lottery.

**Step 2. Have someone file a petition for you (if applicable):** For most categories, the process begins with someone else (a family member or employer, for example) filing a petition on your behalf. The petition usually goes to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

- Family-based: A relative files Form I-130 (Petition for Alien Relative).
- Employment-based: An employer files Form I-140 (Immigrant Petition for Alien Worker).
- Special categories: Depending on the category, there might be different forms or procedures. For example, a U Visa requires Form I-918, and a self-petition under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) requires Form I-360.

**Step 3. Wait for a decision on the petition:** Once the petition is filed, wait for it to be approved. Approval times can vary widely depending on the category and specific circumstances.

**Step 4. File your green card application:** After your petition is approved (or if you are eligible to file a petition and a green card application simultaneously), you can apply for the green card. The application process varies depending on whether you are applying from within the United States (adjustment of status) or from outside the United States (consular processing).

- **Adjustment of Status (within the U.S.):** File Form I-485 (Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjust Status) with USCIS.
- **Consular Processing (outside the U.S.):** Wait for the National Visa Centre (NVC) to notify you to submit the necessary immigrant visa documents, pay the fees, and then attend a visa interview at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate in your country.

**5. Attend the biometrics appointment:** If you are applying from within the United States, USCIS will schedule a biometrics appointment for you to provide fingerprints, a photo, and a signature. This is used to conduct a background check.

**6. Attend the interview (if required):** USCIS or the consulate may require you to attend an interview. Be prepared to answer questions about your application and background.

**7. Wait for a decision:** After your interview, USCIS or the consular office will decide on your Green Card application. The time it takes to receive a decision can vary.

**8. Receive the Green Card:** If approved, you will either receive your Green Card in the mail (if adjusting one's status in the U.S.) or a visa to enter the U.S. as a permanent resident (if processing abroad).