

A **green card** is a life-long visa ("pass") allowing a foreigner to live and work in the United States. The card itself is a government-issued plastic i.d. card that serves as proof of this permanent resident status in the United States. In size and format, it generally resembles a driver's license.

The official title of the card is "*Permanent Resident Card*" and as it so happens, the card is not green. The nickname may have come from the symbolic nature of the color green in the United States: Green has come to mean "go," as it does on a traffic light.

A green card is not citizenship. A green card can be revoked if a person does not maintain permanent residence in the United States, travels outside the country for too long, or breaks certain laws.

Sponsorship

If you find employment in the U.S. and the employer is willing to sponsor you, you are also eligible for a green card. The more education and skills you have and the more necessary your job is in the U.S., the sooner you will be able to enter the U.S. and obtain your green card. Computer software engineers and nurses, for example, are in short supply, while waiters and mechanics are not.

Eligibility

U.S. immigration laws base eligibility for a green card on either work or family relationships. If you are the immediate relative of an American citizen - spouse, child, parent, or sibling - you can apply for a green card. If you are a spouse or a minor child of a U.S. citizen, your application will be reviewed and a visa will be immediately available for you. Other family members will have to wait for a visa to become available, which could take several years. The reason for this wait is that obtaining visas to enter the United States is a two-step process involving two government agencies. The Immigration and Naturalization Service, a unit of the Justice Department, reviews and approves visa applications, while the State Department actually issues the visas. Sometimes the INS will approve a visa but the State Department has no visas available.

Lottery

Finally, there is a green card lottery every year that makes green cards immediately available to people from different areas of the world on a rotating basis. If you are from a country selected for the lottery that year, you can submit a one-page application with your information and, if you are picked, the State Department will grant you a green card. Like all lotteries, however, your chances of winning are slim.

Ways to get a green card

The United States offers several ways to become a Permanent Resident (Green Card holder). A Green Card allows you to live and work permanently in the U.S.

Family based immigration

- Spouse
- Unmarried child (under the age of 21)
- Unmarried stepchild (under the age of 21)
- Adopted child (under the age of 18) or

- Parent or stepparent

Employment Based Immigration

- Persons with extraordinary ability
- Outstanding professors and researchers
- Managers and executives in multinational companies
- Professionals with advanced degrees

National Interest Waiver (NIW)

- Persons with exceptional ability involved in activities that will substantially benefit the U.S.
- Advanced degree professionals involved in activities that will substantially benefit the U.S.
- Professionals with a U.S. bachelor's or foreign equivalent degree
- Skilled workers
- Unskilled workers

Investors

- Foreign entrepreneurs who invest \$500,000 in a commercial enterprise in a targeted employment area that will benefit the U.S. economy and create at least 5 full-time U.S. jobs.
- Foreign entrepreneurs who invest \$1,000,000 in a commercial enterprise that will benefit the U.S. economy and create at least 10 full-time U.S. jobs.

Adoption

- Children under sixteen years of age adopted by U.S. citizens or green card holders.

Registry

- Foreign Nationals who have resided continuously in the U.S. since January 1, 1972.

Diplomats

- High-level diplomats on A-1 visa who are unable or unwilling to return to their home country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution.

Asylum

- Foreign nationals in the U.S. who are unable or unwilling to return to their home country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, or membership in a particular social or political group.

Refugee

- Foreign nationals displaced by war, famine, and civil and political unrest or, unable or unwilling to return to their home country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution.
- Foreign nationals in their home country who have

experienced persecution in the past or have a well-founded fear of persecution in the future.