Permanent Residence (Green Card)

Permanent Residents (often called green card holders) are authorized to live and work on a permanent basis in the U.S. Whereas most nonimmigrants must document their intent to depart the U.S. after a period in the U.S., green card holders should have the intent to remain in the U.S.

There are several ways to obtain permanent residency in the U.S, including:

- A petition from an employer
  - The employment-based green card application system allows for five preference categories, commonly abbreviated as EB-1, EB-2, etc. Each preference category may have several sub-categories.
- Marriage to a U.S. citizen
- Sponsorship by a close relative who is a U.S. citizen or legal permanent resident
- The U.S. Department of State diversity lottery program.

While each application process ultimately leads to the same goal, the green card, the application procedures and associated costs vary. The timeline for completing a green card application heavily depend on the type of application as well as the country of birth of the applicant. Applications under the first employment-based preference category might be completed in as little as 6-8 months, whereas the process for individuals born in India or mainland China under the second and third preference categories will take years. Please consult with FSIS to discuss the timeline of a given green card application.

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