

I've Applied for a Green Card. How Long Do I Have to Wait to Get My Immigrant Visa?

1. U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) must approve the first application (for family sponsors, this is the I-130 Petition).

How long this takes can vary. If you are still waiting for a response to the first application, see the MLP's one-pager "How To Check the Status of an Immigration Application." Once your first application is approved, you will get a Form I-797 "Notice of Action" – keep it safe!

2. Once the government has approved the first application (I-130 Petition), you may still have to wait until there is a visa available.

This depends on what "category" you are in. For example, if you are the "immediate relative" of a U.S. citizen (spouse; unmarried child under 21 years; parent of a U.S. citizen 21 years or older), you do not need to wait. For other categories, there is a limit on the number of visas the government gives every year (and no more than 7% to any country), and so there is a "line" to get the visa.

If I am not an immediate relative, how can I see where I am in the line for visas?

First, you need to know your "category" that you applied under. Here are the categories if you are not an immediate relative:

F1	Unmarried Adult Children (21 or older) of U.S. Citizens
F2A	Spouses & Unmarried Children (under 21) of Permanent Residents (Green Card Holders)
F2B	Unmarried Adult Children (21 or older) of Permanent Residents (Green Card Holders)
F3	Married Children (all ages) of U.S. Citizens
F4	Siblings of Adult U.S. Citizens

Second, you need to know your "priority date." It will be on your Form I-797 "Notice of Action" that the government sent you to let you know your first application (I-130 Petition) was approved.

Department of Homeland Security
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

I-797, Notice of Action

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

RECEIPT NUMBER WAC-1	CASE TYPE I130 PETITION FOR ALIEN RELATIVE
RECEIPT DATE November 1, 2010	PRIORITY DATE October 28, 2010
NOTICE DATE January 29, 2015	PAGE 1 of 1
PETITIONER John Doe	
BENEFICIARY Jane Doe	
Notice Type: Approval Notice Section: Brother or sister of US Citizen, 203(a)(4) INA	

Third, go to this website and then click "Current Visa Bulletin":

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/legal/visa-law0/visa-bulletin.html>

If you are applying from outside the U.S., go down to the chart "Dates For Filing Family-Sponsored Visa Applications."

If you are applying from inside the U.S., then the process is called “adjustment of status.” Check this website (<https://www.uscis.gov/visabulletininfo>) to see if you should use that same “Dates For Filing Family-Sponsored Visa Applications” chart or use the “Final Action Dates For Family-Sponsored Preference Cases” chart. There are two charts because the “Dates for Filing” chart shows when the National Visa Center will start to contact you to submit required documents, even though a visa is not available yet. The “Final Action Dates” chart shows when the visa is actually available. Sometimes USCIS allows you to submit your “adjustment” application on the earlier date; sometimes they ask you to wait for the later date.

Here is how you read the chart.

1. Find the column for your country. If it is not one of the listed countries, use “All Chargeability Areas Except Those Listed.”
2. Find the row for your “category.”
3. What is the date in the rectangle for that column and row? Once that date is **later than** your priority date, then the National Visa Center will contact you about getting your visa and you can continue the process.

For example, let’s say 1) I am from the Philippines, 2) my sister sponsored my application so I am in the F4 category, and 3) my priority date is October 28, 2010. I find the rectangle for F4 and the Philippines in the chart. It says 01SEP01, which means the date September 1, 2001. That is earlier than my priority date of October 28, 2010, and so there is no visa available yet. Once that square says 28OCT10 or a later date, then the National Visa Center will contact me to continue applying for my visa. (NOTE: If it says “C” that means the visas are “current” and there is no wait, so the National Visa Center should be contacting me now.)

Family-Sponsored	All Chargeability Areas Except Those Listed	CHINA-mainland born	INDIA	MEXICO	PHILIPPINES
F1	15FEB15	15FEB15	15FEB15	22DEC99	01SEP11
F2A	01MAY20	01MAY20	01MAY20	01MAY20	01MAY20
F2B	01DEC15	01DEC15	01DEC15	22SEP99	01MAY11
F3	15MAR09	15MAR09	15MAR09	15JUL00	15NOV01
F4	31JUL07	31JUL07	01OCT05	08FEB99	01SEP01

June 2020 Chart

3. Finally, once a visa becomes available, the National Visa Center will contact you to continue to submit more documents and the visa fee. You can see how long the National Visa Center is taking to process this step here: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/nvc-timeframes.html>.

If you have a medical emergency, you can ask the National Visa Center to speed up (“expedite”) your application. You can also contact them with any problems or if you have a new address/phone number/email address. Contact them here: <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/ask-nvc.html>