[A-Number/Alien Registration Number/Alien Number (A-Number or A#)](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary#)

A unique seven-, eight- or nine-digit number assigned to a noncitizen by the Department of Homeland Security. Also see [USCIS Number](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary#).

[Accredited representative](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary#)

This is a person who is approved by the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) to represent aliens before immigration courts, the BIA, and USCIS. They must work for a specific nonprofit, religious, charitable, social service, or similar organization that the BIA has authorized to represent aliens

[Adjustment to immigrant status](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary#)

This procedure allows certain aliens already in the United States to apply for immigrant status. Aliens admitted to the United States in a nonimmigrant, refugee, or parolee category may have their status changed to that of lawful permanent resident if they are eligible to receive an immigrant visa and one is immediately available.

[Alien](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary#)

Any person not a citizen or national of the United States. “Foreign national” is a synonym and used outside of statutes when referring to noncitizens of the U.S.

[Asylee](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary#)

A foreign national in the United States or at a port of entry who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her country of nationality, or to seek the protection of that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution. Persecution or the fear thereof must be based on religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion.

[BIA](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=b#)

Abbreviation for the Board of Immigration Appeals.

[Bond](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=b#)

The amount of money set by the Department of Homeland Security or an immigration judge as a condition to release a person from detention for an immigration court hearing at a later date.

[Border crosser](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=b#)

An alien resident of the United States reentering the country after an absence of less than six months in Canada or Mexico; or

A nonresident alien entering the United States across the Canadian border for stays of no more than six months or across the Mexican border for stays of no more than 72 hours.

[CBP](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=c#)

Abbreviation for U.S. Customs and Border Protection, an agency within the Department of Homeland Security.

[CFR](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=c#)

Code of Federal Regulations abbreviation.

[Child](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=c#)

Generally, an unmarried person under 21 years of age who is:

A child born in wedlock;

A child born through assisted reproductive technology to a non-genetic gestational mother who is also the legal mother under the law of the relevant jurisdiction at the time of birth;

A stepchild, provided that the child was under 18 years of age at the time that the marriage creating the stepchild relationship occurred;

A legitimated child, provided that the child was legitimated while in the legal custody of the legitimating parent;

A child born out of wedlock, when a benefit is sought on the basis of its relationship with its mother, or to its father if the father has (or had) a bona fide relationship with the child;

A child adopted while under 16 years of age who has lived with and been in the legal custody of the adopting parent for at least two years; or

An orphan under 16 years of age who has been adopted abroad by a U.S. citizen or has an immediate-relative visa petition submitted in his or her behalf and is coming to the United States for adoption by a U.S. citizen.

[DACA](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=d#)

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, a program launched in 2012. For more information, go to the [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals 2017 Announcement page](https://www.uscis.gov/daca2017).

[Deferred action](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=d#)

A type of prosecutorial discretion that allows an individual to remain in the United States for a set period of time, unless the deferred action is terminated for some reason. Deferred action is determined on a case-by-case basis and only establishes lawful presence. It does not provide immigration status or benefits of any kind. DACA is one type of deferred action.

Denial (as compared to reject) – When USCIS notifies applicants or petitioners that the benefit will not be granted, or that they have not shown they are eligible for the benefit they have requested.

DHS - [Department of Homeland Security](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=d#)

Department of the executive branch of the U.S. government charged with homeland security. This includes:

* Preventing terrorism and managing risks to critical infrastructure;
* Securing and managing the border;
* Enforcing and administering immigration laws;
* Safeguarding and securing cyberspace; and
* Ensuring resilience to disasters.

DOJ - [Department of Justice](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=d#)

Department of the executive branch of the U.S. government with the primary responsibilities to:

* Enforce the law and defend the interests of the United States according to the law;
* Ensure public safety against threats foreign and domestic;
* Provide federal leadership in preventing and controlling crime;
* Seek just punishment for those guilty of unlawful behavior; and
* Ensure fair and impartial administration of justice for all Americans.

[Deportation](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=d#)

This is the formal removal of an alien from the United States when they have been found removable for violating the immigration laws. An immigration judge orders deportation without imposing or contemplating any punishment. Before April 1997, deportation and exclusion were separate removal procedures. The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 consolidated these procedures. After April 1, 1997, aliens in and admitted to the United States may be subject to removal based on deportability. Now called “removal,” this function is managed by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

EOIR - [Executive Office for Immigration Review](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=e#)

This is the part of the Department of Justice that is responsible for immigration courts and the Board of Immigration Appeals.

[FOIA](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=f#)

This is an abbreviation for the Freedom of Information Act.

[Foreign National](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=f#)

A person without U.S. citizenship or nationality (may include a stateless person).

[Green Card](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=g#)

Also known as a Permanent Resident Card, Form I-551, or alien registration card. USCIS issues Green Cards to foreign nationals as evidence of their lawful permanent resident status in the United States. For Form I-9, it is acceptable as proof of identity and employment authorization. Although some Green Cards do not have an expiration date, most are valid for 10 years. Cards issued to individuals with conditional permanent resident status are valid for two years.

[ICE](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=i#)

An abbreviation for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, an agency of the Department of Homeland Security.

[Immediate Relative](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=i#)

Immediate relatives include:

The spouses of U.S. citizens,

The children (unmarried and under 21 years of age) of U.S. citizens,

The parents of U.S. citizens at least 21 years old, and

Widows or widowers of U.S. citizens if the U.S. citizen filed a petition before his or her death or if the widow(er) files a petition within 2 years of the citizen’s death.

[Immigration Act of 1990](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=i#)Public Law 101-649 (Act of November 29, 1990), which increased the limits on legal immigration to the United States, revised all grounds for exclusion and deportation, authorized temporary protected status to aliens of designated countries, revised and established new nonimmigrant admission categories, revised and extended the Visa Waiver Pilot Program, and revised naturalization authority and requirements.

[Immigration and Nationality Act](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=i#)An act of Congress that, along with other immigration laws, treaties and conventions of the United States, relates to the immigration, temporary admission, naturalization and removal of foreign nationals.

[Immigration judge](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=i#)This is an attorney appointed by the Attorney General to act as an administrative judge within the Executive Office for Immigration Review. They are qualified to conduct specified classes of proceedings, including removal proceedings.

[Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA),Public Law 99-603, 100 Stat. 3359 (enacted November 6, 1986)](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=i#)

An act of Congress passed into law to control and deter illegal immigration to the United States. Its major provisions stipulate legalization of undocumented foreign nationals who had been continuously unlawfully present since 1982, legalization of certain agricultural workers, sanctions for employers who knowingly hire undocumented workers and increased enforcement at U.S. borders.

[Inadmissibility](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=i#)Not being allowed to lawfully enter the United States or obtain a visa abroad based on acts or conduct that is listed as an inadmissibility ground in section 212 of the Immigration and Nationality Act.

[Inadmissible](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=i#)This is an alien seeking admission at a port of entry who does not meet the criteria in the INA for admission. The alien may be placed in removal proceedings or, under certain circumstances, allowed to withdraw their application for admission.

[Lawful permanent resident](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=l#)

Any person not a citizen of the United States who is living in the U.S. under legally recognized and lawfully recorded permanent residence as an immigrant. Also known as “permanent resident alien,” “resident alien permit holder,” and “Green Card holder.”

[Migrant](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=m#)

A person who leaves their country of origin to seek residence in another country.

MPP -Migrant Protection Protocol

[Naturalization](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=n#)

The manner in which a person not born in the United States voluntarily becomes a U.S. citizen.

[Nonimmigrant](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=n#)

A foreign national who is admitted to the United States for a specific temporary period of time. There are clear conditions on their stay. There are a large variety of nonimmigrant categories, and each exists for a specific purpose and has specific terms and conditions. Nonimmigrant classifications include:

Foreign government officials;

Visitors for business and for pleasure;

Foreign nationals in transit through the United States;

Treaty traders and investors;

Students;

International representatives;

Temporary workers and trainees;

Representatives of foreign information media;

Exchange visitors;

Fiancé(e)s of U.S. citizens;

Intracompany transferees;

NATO officials; and

Religious workers.

Most nonimmigrants can be accompanied or joined by spouses and unmarried minor (or dependent) children.

[Parole](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=p#)

The discretionary decision that allows inadmissible foreign nationals to leave an inspection facility freely so that, although they are not admitted to the United States, they are permitted to be physically present in the United States. Parole is granted on a case-by-case basis for urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit. Parole is not an “admission” or “entry.” The paroled foreign national is treated as an applicant for admission. Parole falls under INA section 212(d)(5)(A).

[Parole in place](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=p#)

Discretion that allows foreign nationals who are already physically present in the U.S. without inspection or admission an opportunity to stay in U.S. for urgent humanitarian reasons or significant public benefit. Parole in place falls under INA section 212(d)(5)(A).

[Per country limit](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=p#)

This is the maximum number of family-sponsored and employment-based preference visas that we can issue to citizens of any country in a fiscal year. We calculate the limits each fiscal year depending on the total number of family-sponsored and employment-based visas available. We cannot issue more than 7% of visas to natives of any one independent country in a fiscal year, and we cannot issue more than 2% of visas to any one dependency of any independent country. The per-country limit does not indicate, however, that a country is entitled to the maximum number of visas each year, just that it cannot receive more than that number. Because of the combined workings of the preference system and per-country limits, most countries do not reach this level of visa issuance.

[Petitioner](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=p#)

This is a person who files an immigration petition or application.

[Port of entry](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=p#)

Any location in the United States or its territories that is designated as a point of entry for foreign nationals and U.S. citizens. All district offices and service centers are also considered ports, because they become locations of entry for foreign nationals adjusting to immigrant status.

[Priority date](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=p#)In the USCIS immigrant visa petition application process, the priority date is the date the petition was filed. If the alien relative has a priority date on or before the date listed in the visa bulletin, then they are eligible for a visa.

[Prosecutorial discretion](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=p#)The legal authority to choose whether or not to take action against an individual for committing an offense.

[Provisional waiver](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=p#)Waiver for individuals who are otherwise inadmissible due to more than 180 days of unlawful presence in the United States, based on a showing of extreme hardship to certain U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident family members, which allows the individual to return after departure for an immigrant visa interview at a U.S. embassy or consulate. For more information, go to the [Provisional Unlawful Presence Waivers](https://www.uscis.gov/family/family-us-citizens/provisional-waiver/provisional-unlawful-presence-waivers) page.

[Refugee](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=r#)Generally, any person outside his or her country of nationality who is unable or unwilling to return to that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution based on the person’s race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. For a legal definition of refugee, see section 101(a)(42) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA).

[Removal](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=r#)The expulsion of an alien from the United States. This expulsion may be based on grounds of inadmissibility or deportability.

[Sponsor](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=s#)In the immigration field, the term “sponsor” often means to bring to the United States or “petition for.” If you would like to sponsor a relative, please see the [Family section](https://www.uscis.gov/family) of our website. If you would like to sponsor an employee, please see our [How Do I Guides for Employers](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/how-do-i-guides/how-do-i-guides-employers). If you would like to sponsor an overseas orphan, please our [adoption brochure (PDF, 230 KB)](https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Resources/A3en.pdf). If you are a refugee or an asylee and wish to sponsor a relative, please see our [How Do I Guides for Refugees and Asylees webpage](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/how-do-i-guides/how-do-i-guides-refugees-and-asylees).  
Another meaning of the term “sponsor” is a person who completes [Form I-864, Affidavit of Support Under Section 213A of the Act](https://www.uscis.gov/i-864). However, this type of sponsorship is not the first step in any immigration process. To be a sponsor and file Form I-864, the following conditions must be met:

You have already petitioned for your relative;

We already notified you that we approved the petition;

The visa for your relative is currently available;

Your relative is scheduled to appear overseas at a U.S. Consulate to submit their application for an immigrant visa, or is preparing to file for adjustment of status to that of a lawful permanent resident (on Form I-485, Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjust Status) in the United States. If your relative is overseas, we will notify you as to where and when to submit Form I-864. If your relative is in the United States, you must complete Form I-864 and give it to your relative to file along with their Form I-485.

[Temporary protected status (TPS)](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=t#)The secretary of the Department of Homeland Security may designate a foreign country for TPS due to conditions in that temporarily prevent the country’s nationals from returning safely, or in certain circumstances, where the country is unable to handle the return of its nationals adequately.  
We may grant TPS to eligible nationals of certain countries (or parts of countries), who are already in the United States. Eligible individuals without nationality who last lived in the designated country may also be granted TPS. The secretary may designate a country for TPS due to the following temporary conditions in the country: ongoing armed conflict (such as civil war); an environmental disaster (such as an earthquake or hurricane); or other extraordinary and temporary conditions. Grants of TPS are initially made for periods of 6 to 18 months and may be extended.

[Temporary resident](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=t#)This is an alien who seeks temporary entry to the United States for a specific purpose. They must have a permanent residence abroad (for most classes of admission) and qualify for the nonimmigrant classification they are seeking.  
See [Nonimmigrant](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=t#).

[Temporary worker](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=t#)This is an alien coming to the United States to work for a temporary period of time. The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 and the Immigration Act of 1990, as well as other legislation, revised existing classes and created new classes of nonimmigrant admission. For more information, see our [Temporary Worker](https://www.uscis.gov/working-united-states/temporary-nonimmigrant-workers) webpage.

[U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=u#) (USCIS)  
A federal agency in the Department of Homeland Security that oversees lawful immigration to the United States. Its functions include:

Granting employment authorization to eligible foreign nationals;

Issuing documentation of foreign national employment authorization;

Maintaining Forms I-9; and

Administering the E-Verify employment eligibility verification program.

[U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=u#)An agency of the Department of Homeland Security that is responsible for securing the homeland by preventing the illegal entry of people and goods while facilitating legitimate travel and trade.

[U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=u#) (ICE)  
The principal investigative arm of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, ICE’s primary mission is to promote homeland security and public safety through the criminal and civil enforcement of federal laws governing border control, customs, trade and immigration.

[Visa](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=v#)A U.S. visa allows the bearer to apply for entry to the U.S. in a certain classification, such as student (F), visitor (B) or temporary worker (H). A visa does not grant the bearer the right to enter the United States. The Department of State is responsible for visa adjudication at U.S. Embassies and Consulates outside of the U.S.  
U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) immigration inspectors determine admission, length of stay and conditions of stay at a port of entry. The information on a nonimmigrant visa only relates to when an individual may apply for entry into the U.S. DHS immigration inspectors will record the terms of your admission on your Arrival/Departure Record (I-94 white or I-94W green) and in your passport.

[Visa Waiver Program](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=v#)This program allows citizens of certain selected countries who are traveling temporarily to the United States under the nonimmigrant admission classes of visitors for pleasure and visitors for business to enter the United States without obtaining nonimmigrant visas.

[Voluntary departure](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=v#)This is when an alien leaves the United States without an order of removal. Their departure may come after a hearing with an immigration judge. If the alien voluntarily departs, they will not have a bar to seek admission at a port of entry at any time. If they do not depart within the specified time, they will receive a fine and a 10-year bar to several forms of relief from deportation.

[Withdrawal](https://www.uscis.gov/tools/glossary?topic_id=w#)This is an arriving alien’s voluntary retraction of an application for admission to the United States in lieu of a removal hearing before an immigration judge or an expedited removal.