

PRIMARY AVENUES FOR LAWFUL ENTRY INTO THE U.S. FAMILY-BASED IMMIGRATION



The information provided below is a summarized version of the American Immigration Council's fact sheet titled: "How the United States Immigration System Works." Published: June 24, 2024

The U.S. Government has several channels for foreign nationals to obtain lawful status in the United States, but most are lengthy. The family-based immigration system allows U.S. citizens and LPRs to enable certain family members to gain LPR status. U.S. citizens and LPRs can petition for an immediate family member already in the U.S.

The goal of family-based immigration is to reunite families.

Important Immigration Terms

Lawful Permanent Resident (LPR)

Also known as a "green card" holder or a non-citizen who is granted the right to live permanently in the U.S.

Visa

Document allowing foreign nationals to enter, stay, or work in the United States.

Family Petition

Form establishing a relationship between a U.S. citizen or LPR and a foreign relative who wants to immigrate to the U.S.

Visa Bulletin

Monthly publication from the U.S. Department of State that shares availability of immigrant visas.

4 Principles of U.S. Immigration Laws



Reunification of
Families



Bringing Skills to
U.S. Economy



Humanitarian
Protections



Promoting
Diversity

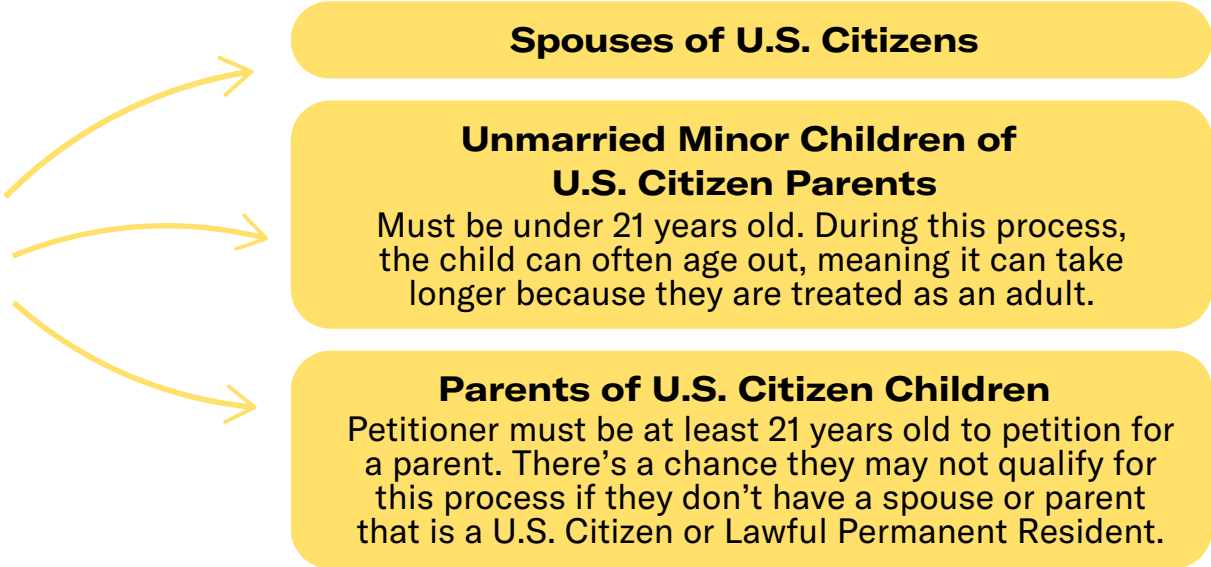
Family-Based Immigration

Immediate Relatives



The process for Immediate Relatives takes **6-8 years**
There are 3 main steps: **Family Petition** → **Waiver** → **National Visa Center**
Note: The process takes 1-2 years if no waiver is needed

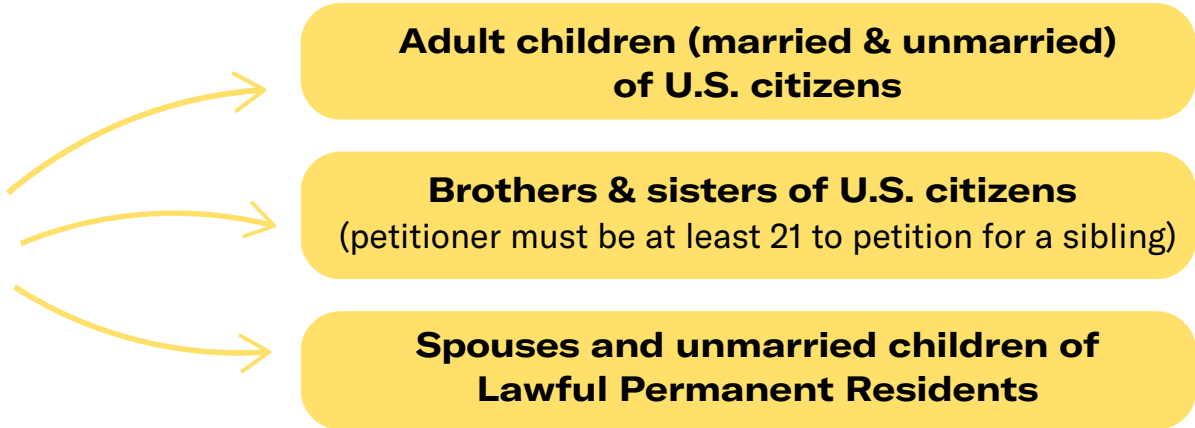
IMMEDIATE RELATIVES



Non-Immediate Relatives

A limited number of visas are available every year for non-immediate family members. While immediate family members can start the process right away, non-immediate family members must wait for a visa to become available after filing the family petition.

NON-IMMEDIATE RELATIVES



Processing timeline for non-immediate relatives as of January 2025

Adult Children	21 years (unmarried children) & 25 years (married children) plus 6-8 years
Brothers & Sisters	24 years plus 6-8 years
Spouses & Unmarried Children	4 years plus 6-8 years

Note: This timeline is specific to immigrants from Mexico