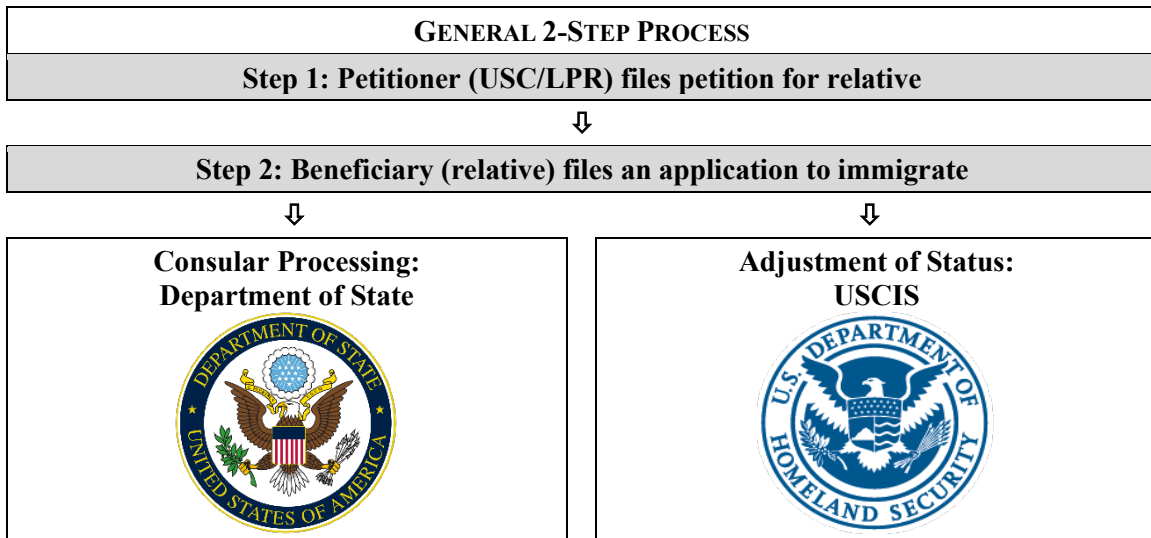


CHAPTER 1
QUALIFYING FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND ELIGIBILITY FOR FAMILY
PETITIONS

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§ 1.1 Overview of the Family Immigration Process: A Two-Step Process



United States citizens and lawful permanent residents can help certain family members immigrate to the United States. Please note that throughout this manual we may refer to U.S. citizens as “USCs” and lawful permanent residents as “LPRs,” “permanent residents,” or “green card holders.” Additionally, when we use the term “immigrate,” we are referring to the process by which a person becomes a lawful permanent resident of the United States, whether the person is already in the United States or is applying from abroad. See the distinction between “adjustment of status” (applying from within the United States) and “consular processing” (applying from abroad) below.

Immigrating through family is a two-step process. The first step is the family visa petition, filed by the U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident family member on behalf of the person who will be immigrating. The second step is the permanent resident application, filed by the person who will be immigrating. Each step involves different legal and factual issues.

A. Step one: Family visa petition

QUALIFYING FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS: IMMEDIATE RELATIVES AND THE PREFERENCE CATEGORIES	
Immediate Relatives (IR) INA § 201(b)(2)(A)(i)	Preference Categories INA § 203(a)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Children of USCs ✓ Spouses of USCs ✓ Parents of USCs <p><i>No waiting list: visas immediately available.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Married and unmarried sons and daughters of USCs ✓ Brothers and sisters of USCs ✓ Spouses, children and unmarried sons and daughters of LPRs <p><i>Subject to numerical cap: must wait in line.</i></p>

In order for a person to immigrate to the United States through a U.S. citizen (USC) or lawful permanent resident (LPR) family member, the USC or LPR first has to prove to the U.S. government that their foreign national relative fits within one of the family relationship categories recognized by the immigration laws. In other words, the USC or LPR must formally request, or *petition*, the U.S. government to allow the foreign national to apply for an immigration *benefit* (lawful permanent residency, or a “green card”). Therefore, the USC or LPR relative is called the “**petitioner**” and the foreign national relative is called the “**beneficiary**.”

The form that starts the immigration process for a family member is called the “Petition for Alien Relative,” **Form I-130**, often referred to as the “**visa petition**.” Only a U.S. citizen or permanent resident can file a visa petition on behalf of a family member.

Two facts must be established in support of a visa petition:

1. The petitioner and the beneficiary have a **qualifying family relationship** (for example, parent and child), and
2. The petitioner has the **immigration status** required for the petition—either U.S. citizenship or lawful permanent residence.

If the petitioner is able to prove these two elements, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) must approve the visa petition; it is not discretionary. Once the I-130 is approved, the first step in a family-based immigration case is complete.

In some cases, people can prove these two elements relatively easily, with minimal documentation. For instance, a U.S. citizen daughter applying for her mother could submit a copy of her birth certificate to prove both elements—her U.S. birth certificate is one way to prove she is a U.S. citizen, and it also lists her mother’s name as proof she is her mother’s biological daughter. Other cases may require more documentation. A married couple, for example, must show not only that they are legally married but also that the marriage is **bona fide** (legitimate) and not a fraud or sham undertaken solely for immigration purposes. Additionally, if either spouse has been married before, they must submit their divorce decree or the death certificate of their prior spouse to show that their current marriage is legally valid (i.e., they are not married to two people at once). Some children may have to submit extra documents to show that they qualify as the **child** of the parent under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA or “the Act”). These include stepchildren, adopted children, orphans, and children born out of wedlock. Also, an adopted child cannot petition for their biological birth parents or birth siblings. See **Chapter 2** for a detailed discussion of supporting documents submitted with the visa petition.

NOTE: While the I-130 process may appear relatively straightforward, there are a few important considerations before submitting an I-130, including, among other factors, whether the prospective beneficiary has a prior removal or deportation order or was convicted of a “specified offense” against a minor. If either of these instances apply, it may be risky to submit an I-130.

If the prospective beneficiary has a prior removal or deportation, by submitting an I-130, they could alert the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to their whereabouts by providing their current address on the Form I-130. With this information, DHS could take enforcement action against the prospective beneficiary. Some clients are uncertain about their immigration history but may recall contact with immigration authorities at the border. It is important to gather

information through background checks so all the facts are known, and the client can make an informed decision. See **Chapter 2** for more information about how to request immigration records.

If the prospective petitioner was convicted of a specified offense against a minor, the I-130 may be denied even though the beneficiary otherwise meets all the requirements and is otherwise eligible.

The **Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act** prohibits someone from filing a visa petition for a fiancé(e), spouse, or minor child if the petitioner was convicted of a “specified offense” against a minor, listed in the statute, unless USCIS determines that the petitioner poses no risk to the beneficiary. The “minor” must have been under eighteen years old and the convictions specified are broadly defined, involving primarily sexual or related offenses.¹ Practitioners are accustomed to inquiring about the intending immigrant’s criminal history, but it is important to also ask the petitioner about their criminal record.

When the visa petition is filed, using Form I-130 along with the necessary supporting documents, the beneficiary is categorized according to the particular family relationship that qualifies them for an immigrant visa and also based on the immigration status of the petitioner. For example, relatives who fit the definition of a “child” or “spouse” of a lawful permanent resident fall under the family-based category 2A. These categories are discussed in more detail in the sections that follow, but generally speaking they each represent a queue or waiting list of foreign nationals on behalf of whom their U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident relatives have filed visa petitions. The reason for these waiting lists is that the number of people who can immigrate each year in the various categories is limited by the law. Therefore, after the visa petition is approved, the beneficiary may have to wait in the queue until an immigrant visa becomes available to them. We will talk in later sections about how to know when a visa is available, and what kind of notification the beneficiary will receive when they can move on to the next step.

B. Step two: Application to immigrate

How soon the beneficiary can apply to immigrate depends on which queue or waiting list they are in. In other words, it depends on which category of relatives eligible for family visas they belong to. For example, a person who qualifies as an “**immediate relative**” of a U.S. citizen can immigrate right away.² If this beneficiary is physically present in the United States and eligible for adjustment of status, they can apply for permanent resident status at the same time as filing the visa petition or as soon as the visa petition is approved. This is because immediate relatives always have immigrant visas available to them, so there is no waiting in line.

However, because other relatives of U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents have a limited number of visas available to them, they must wait for such availability, which may take several years. These relatives are organized into groups referred to as “preference categories” and they

¹ See Michael Aytes, USCIS Associate Director of Domestic Operations, *Interoffice Memorandum: Guidance for Adjudication of Family-Based Petitions and I-129F Petition for Alien Fiancé(e) Under the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006* (Feb. 8, 2007), http://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Laws/Memoranda/Static_Files_Memoranda/adamwalshact020807.pdf.

² See § 1.2.

are categorized according to the relationship that qualifies them for an immigrant visa. Further, the wait times for the same preference categories vary depending on the beneficiary's "country of chargeability," usually their country of birth.³ Under this "**preference system**," beneficiaries who are not immediate relatives may have to wait many years after the visa petition is approved before they can actually proceed with the second step and immigrate.⁴

The end goal is referred to as: **becoming a lawful permanent resident, obtaining an immigrant visa, or obtaining a green card**. These terms are often used interchangeably, and basically all mean the same thing: the person becomes a lawful permanent resident of the United States and gains the right to live and work in the United States permanently. People often mistakenly assume that if someone immigrates to the United States that means the person has become a U.S. citizen. However, becoming a U.S. citizen is another, separate process that can only be undertaken *after* someone becomes a permanent resident,⁵ if they so choose and meet all the eligibility requirements.

C. Adjustment of status versus consular processing

While everyone seeking a family-based green card files the I-130 as their first step, people's paths diverge at step two. Family members can immigrate in one of two ways: one, by applying for an **immigrant visa** at a U.S. consulate in a foreign country, referred to as "**consular processing**," or two, by applying at a U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) office in the United States, referred to as "**adjustment of status**." Both ultimately can result in permanent resident status/green card. But for many people who are abroad and consular process, they are first issued an immigrant visa that allows them to travel to the United States as a permanent resident. For many, the actual green card comes by mail soon thereafter. People who adjust status also receive their green cards by mail, but there is no intermediary immigrant visa in their cases, as they are already in the United States.

When applying to immigrate, whether through adjustment of status or consular processing, the applicant must prove that they are **admissible**. An applicant is admissible if no **ground of inadmissibility** applies.⁶ The grounds of inadmissibility include criminal conduct, fraud, and immigration violations, among other issues. An applicant who is inadmissible may be able to immigrate if there is a waiver available for the ground(s) of inadmissibility and USCIS grants it.⁷ Otherwise, they cannot immigrate. See **Chapters 7 & 8** for more on the grounds of inadmissibility and **Chapter 9** for waivers.

³ For more on country of chargeability, *see* § 1.8.

⁴ *See* §§ 1.4–1.6.

⁵ There is an exception for some members of the U.S. military, who may be able to skip this step and apply directly for U.S. citizenship.

⁶ The inadmissibility grounds are listed at INA § 212(a).

⁷ *See* Chapter 9.

Thus, three facts must be established at step two:

1. The applicant is not inadmissible, or if they fall into a category of inadmissibility, they can obtain a waiver of the inadmissibility ground;
2. The visa petition is still valid (the petitioner-beneficiary relationship still exists, and the petitioner still has the required immigration status); and
3. The applicant is eligible to immigrate now, without having to wait (i.e., a visa is available).

Special rules apply to married couples. Some who immigrate through their marriage must go through a third step to immigrate. Under the Immigration Marriage Fraud Amendments, applicants through marriage who have not been married two years when they immigrate obtain **conditional permanent residency**. The married couple must submit an additional petition to USCIS after receiving the “green card” but before two years have passed, in order to have the *condition*, or limitation, on their permanent resident status removed. See **Chapter 5** for a detailed discussion of conditional permanent residency.

While step one, the visa petition, can be relatively straightforward, an approved visa petition does not necessarily mean the relative will be able to proceed with step two, either now or in the future. They may not be able to proceed with step two right away, because they have a long wait under their preference category and country of chargeability. Or, without a change in the immigration laws, they may *never* be able to proceed to step two if they have certain inadmissibility issues that cannot be waived. Further, it may be risky for some individuals to even submit an I-130 petition. For all these reasons, these issues should be explored and discussed with the client in advance so that a long-term strategy is mapped out, and to manage expectations about the process.

§ 1.2 The Immediate Relative Category & Definition of “Child” and “Spouse”

Certain people can immigrate as the **immediate relative** of a U.S. citizen. A person qualifies as an immediate relative if they are the:

1. Spouse of a U.S. citizen,
2. “Child” of a U.S. citizen, or
3. Parent of a U.S. citizen, if the citizen is at least twenty-one years old.⁸

Examples: Alfredo is married to a U.S. citizen. Laura has a U.S. citizen son who is thirty years old. Kwan is twelve years old, and his father is a U.S. citizen. Alfredo, Laura, and Kwan are all immediate relatives.

Immediate relatives can immigrate very quickly without having to wait for a visa to be available, because visas are always available for immediate relatives. They can proceed to the second step as soon as their visa petition is approved, or if they are applying for adjustment of status, they can even submit their permanent resident application at the same time as the visa petition (see “One-

⁸ INA § 201(b)(2)(A)(i).

Step” Adjustment Applications below). Visa availability never delays immigration for immediate relatives, but the application process itself may take several months.

“One-Step” Adjustment Applications: Immediate relatives who qualify for adjustment of status under INA § 245(a) or § 245(i) can often submit the I-130 visa petition along with the adjustment application. See **Chapter 3** for an in-depth discussion of adjustment of status.

A separate visa petition must be filed for each immediate relative, and immediate relatives cannot include “derivative beneficiaries” (persons who follow-to-join or accompany the person being petitioned for) in their visa petitions. This means that if a U.S. citizen is petitioning their spouse and the spouse has a child, a separate immediate relative petition must be filed for the child. However, this is only the case for immediate relative spouses—immediate relative children or parents do not have the option of having their children independently petitioned for by the U.S. citizen petitioner. This is one reason why it is important to understand the rules about which relative qualifies under which category, such as who is considered a child and who is considered a spouse, and whether they are classified as “immediate relatives,” in order to understand how to properly include everyone who wants to, and is able to, immigrate along with the primary beneficiary.

NOTE: The following sections defining “child” and “spouse” apply to any reference to “child” or “spouse” in the INA and the regulations, including the sections regarding preference categories as well as immediate relatives.

WHO IS A “CHILD”?

In all immigration work, remember that “**child**” is a term with a special legal meaning.⁹ Learn to associate the word “child” with the technical legal definition. When referring to adult children (kids who have grown up), the INA uses the term “son or daughter.” See § 1.4 below for a discussion of “sons and daughters.” To be a “child” a person must meet two important criteria as discussed below.

A. Unmarried and under twenty-one years of age

A “child” for immigration purposes is someone who is unmarried and less than twenty-one years old. A person who is divorced or widowed at the time of petitioning is considered unmarried and may therefore qualify as a “child” if they also meet the age requirement, even though they were married in the past.¹⁰

Examples: A daughter who is twenty-one years old when her U.S. citizen parent’s petition is filed is not a “child” under the INA and cannot be petitioned for as an immediate relative. (She may, however, be able to immigrate as a “daughter” through a preference petition. See § 1.4 below). A married nineteen-year-old daughter is also not a “child.” But a nineteen-year-old divorced daughter is a “child” under the Act.

However, note that if USCIS or the immigration court finds that the divorce was sought purely for purposes of obtaining an immigration benefit (to restore someone to being an unmarried

⁹ See INA § 101(b)(1).

¹⁰ INA § 101(a)(39).

“child”), they may deem the petition and corresponding application fraudulent and consequently deny the applications.¹¹

NOTE: The **Child Status Protection Act (CSPA)** allows children of U.S. citizens who turn twenty-one while a parent’s visa petition is pending to immigrate as if they were still children, even though they no longer meet the definition of a “child” under the Act because they are over twenty-one years of age when the I-130 petition is finally approved. For example, in the case of a lawful permanent resident (LPR) petitioner who naturalizes, the age of the child locks in on the date of the parent’s naturalization if the LPR parent had already filed a petition for that child. If the child is under twenty-one on that date, the petition will convert into an immediate relative petition and remain as such until the child immigrates. The CSPA rules are complicated, especially for the children of lawful permanent residents. See § 1.10 for a detailed explanation of the CSPA. In addition, the National Defense Authorization Act¹² allows some children to maintain immediate relative status after turning twenty-one if they are children of deceased U.S. citizen or permanent resident members of the armed forces who died “as a result of an injury or disease incurred in or aggravated by combat.” The child must have been under twenty-one and unmarried at the time the parent died and must self-petition within two years of the parent’s death.

B. Child-parent relationship that USCIS recognizes

Biological children who were born in wedlock are considered children under the immigration laws. Other children, such as stepchildren, adopted children, adopted orphans, and children born out of wedlock, may also qualify. These other children must meet specific additional requirements. Here is an overview of the other categories of “children”:

Stepchildren. A common situation involves stepchildren. This rule is simple. A stepchild is a child for immigration purposes if the marriage that creates the stepparent-stepchild relationship takes place before the child turns eighteen.¹³

Example: Olga, a lawful permanent resident, marries Sandra. Sandra has a ten-year-old daughter, Teresa. Can Olga petition Teresa as her child?

Yes. Since Olga and Sandra married before Teresa reached the age of 18, Teresa is Olga’s “child” for immigration purposes. Teresa became Olga’s stepchild as of the date of Olga and Sandra’s marriage.

If the marriage creating the stepparent-stepchild relationship has been terminated by death, divorce, or legal separation, the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) has ruled that the petitioner must prove that the step-familial relationship between petitioner and beneficiary (stepparent and stepchild or stepsiblings) continues to exist as a matter of fact.¹⁴

¹¹ See *Matter of Aldecoaotalora*, 18 I. & N. Dec. 430 (BIA 1983).

¹² See INA § 329A.

¹³ See INA § 101(b)(1)(B); 8 CFR § 204.2(d)(2)(iv).

¹⁴ See *Matter of Breier*, 8 Immig. Rptr. B1-57 (BIA 1997); *Matter of Mowrer*, 17 I. & N. Dec. 613 (BIA 1981); *Matter of Mourillon*, 18 I. & N. Dec. 122 (BIA 1981).

NOTE: Some children born outside the United States can derive U.S. citizenship through a parent's citizenship. However, a stepchild born outside the United States cannot derive U.S. citizenship by virtue of their relationship to a stepparent, unless that stepparent also legally adopts the child.¹⁵ Therefore, if Olga in the example above were a U.S. citizen, she would still need to file a separate I-130 petition on behalf of Teresa, who could then become a lawful permanent resident.

Adopted children generally. Children who are adopted while under the age of sixteen and who have been residing with and in the legal custody of the adoptive parents for at least two years may qualify as children under the INA.¹⁶ The two years of residing together and two years of legal custody requirements do *not* need to be fulfilled at the same time. In addition, the burden is placed on the parent to establish primary parental control during the two-year period of joint residence.¹⁷

There are two exceptions to these requirements. First, if the same adoptive parents adopt the biological sibling of a child they have already adopted, the parents must meet the same requirements for the second child except that they have until the second child's eighteenth birthday, rather than the child's sixteenth birthday, to complete the adoption. Second, the Violence Against Women Act of 2005, § 805(d) removed the two-year custody and residency requirements for abused adopted children by allowing adopted children to obtain permanent residency even if they have not been in the legal custody of, and have not resided with, the adoptive parent for at least two years, if the child has been battered or subject to extreme cruelty by the adoptive parent or by a family member of the adoptive parent.

Adopted orphans. Orphans either adopted abroad or coming to the United States to be adopted who are under the age of sixteen may qualify as children under the INA.¹⁸ One of the adopting parents must be a U.S. citizen. "Orphan" under the INA has a different meaning from common usage and does not necessarily require that the child's birth parents be deceased. In order for a child to meet the definition of "orphan," the child must be residing outside the United States when the petition is filed. In addition, the adopting parent must obtain a valid home study, which usually entails interviews with the prospective adoptive parents, background checks, and a home visit to make sure it is a safe environment before adopting, and must also meet many other requirements.¹⁹ If the same adoptive parents adopt a sibling of an orphan, the second child must meet the same requirements but can be considered an orphan as long as the orphan petition is filed while they are under the age of eighteen.

Children adopted abroad/Hague adoptions. The Hague Adoption Convention is an agreement between the United States and many other countries that governs international adoptions. The

¹⁵ See *Matter of Guzman-Gomez*, 24 I. & N. Dec. 824 (BIA 2009).

¹⁶ INA § 101(b)(1)(E); 8 CFR § 204.2(d)(2)(vii).

¹⁷ See *Matter of Marquez*, 20 I. & N. Dec. 160 (BIA 1990). This is particularly important if the adopted child is a relative of the adoptive parents. USCIS will closely examine whether the biological parent has truly given up "parental control" to the adoptive parents, or whether the adoption is a "sham" for immigration purposes.

¹⁸ INA § 101(b)(1)(F); 8 CFR § 1101(b)(1)(F).

¹⁹ See 8 CFR § 204.3.

Hague Convention establishes the rules under which U.S. citizens can adopt children from the other countries that are signatories to the Convention. Special rules apply to children who are habitual residents of Hague Convention countries.²⁰ U.S. citizens who wish to adopt a child from one of these countries must be careful to comply with the rules of the Convention or their adoption will not be recognized by USCIS.²¹

A child adopted from a Hague Convention country by a U.S. citizen who habitually resides in the United States qualifies for a visa as an immediate relative.²² If a child is adopted from a non-Convention country, this adoption is classified as an “Orphan Adoption” and different rules apply (see “Adopted Orphans” above). Note that if your client is adopting a child from a Convention country, the client must make sure that they are in compliance with the Hague Convention as well as the adoption laws of the country in which the adopted child resides.

Children born out of wedlock. The immigration laws historically have referred to certain children as “illegitimate” if their parents were not married at the time of the children’s birth. Partly in response to criticisms that this language was insensitive, Congress changed the INA’s definition of “child” by replacing the words “illegitimate child” with “child born out of wedlock,” and “legitimate child” with “child born in wedlock.”²³ The legacy INS sent instructions to the field on this change in the definition of “child” and “father.”²⁴ While advocates should use this language in visa work, the change does not appear to affect substantive law—with the possible exception of some impact on the definition of an orphan. Whether a child who was born out of wedlock is later “legitimated” remains relevant under the law.

If a child’s parents are not married at the time of birth, they are considered a “child born out of wedlock.” Such a child can immigrate through their mother without any problems. But if the child tries to immigrate through the father, there are additional requirements.²⁵ The father must either prove a bona fide parental relationship with the child before the child reaches the age of twenty-one, or prove the father has “legitimated” the child under the law of the child’s or father’s residence or domicile.

To prove a “bona fide parental relationship,” the father must have shown “an actual concern for the child’s support, instruction and general welfare.”²⁶ The family also must prove that the father is the biological father.

Example: Geraldo has a daughter, Eliza. He and Eliza’s mother never married. Geraldo lived and worked in the United States for years, but he always sent money to Eliza’s mother for her upbringing in Mexico. He visited Eliza every year when he returned to Mexico, and they sometimes wrote letters to each other. Everyone in the village knows

²⁰ 22 CFR § 42.24.

²¹ The current list of Hague Convention member countries can be found on the U.S. Department of State’s website at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/Intercountry-Adoption/Adoption-Process/understanding-the-hague-convention/convention-countries.html>.

²² INA § 101(b)(1)(G).

²³ See INA §§ 101(b)(1)(A), 101(b)(1)(D), and 101(b)(2).

²⁴ See INS Cable HQ 204.21-P, 204.22-P, reprinted in 73 *Interpreter Releases* 13 (Jan. 2, 1996).

²⁵ INA §§ 101(b)(1)(C)–(D).

²⁶ 8 CFR § 204.2(d)(2)(iii); see also *Matter of Pineda*, 20 I. & N. Dec. 70 (BIA 1989).

that Geraldo is Eliza's father. Geraldo's mother in Mexico is a devoted grandmother to Eliza and often cares for her.

Geraldo has become a permanent resident and wants to petition for Eliza, who is sixteen. To prove that they have had a bona fide relationship he will submit copies of receipts for money orders he sent to her mother to assist with Eliza's financial support, copies of letters he and Eliza exchanged, and affidavits of friends, neighbors and others who can attest to the fact that he and Eliza had a father-child relationship. To prove that he is Eliza's biological father, Geraldo will submit her birth certificate listing him as her father, or some other proof such as DNA tests proving he is her father.

In other cases, the family may prove that the child has been "legitimated" under the law or that the child should not have been considered illegitimate in the first place because the laws of the particular country where the child was born do not distinguish between children born in or out of wedlock.²⁷ Note, however, that some countries have passed laws to eliminate discrimination against children born out of wedlock but still require a marriage of the parents for the child to be considered legally "legitimated."²⁸ If relying on a foreign country's "legitimation" laws, it is critically important to research the current law of that country or consult with an expert in that country's laws.

PRACTICE TIP: Always ask clients to tell you about *all* children they may have, inside or outside of marriage. Some people are not aware that children born out of wedlock are also "children" for immigration purposes, or sometimes the existence of these children may be a sensitive issue, and so the parents fail to list them on their immigration petitions and applications. They should be told that if they fail to include any such children on petitions filed with USCIS, it will be more difficult later to help these children immigrate through that petition or at a later date.

WHO IS A "SPOUSE"?

People who are legally married and have a bona fide marriage relationship are spouses under the INA. See **Chapter 2**.

Same-sex spouses. The INA does not define the word "spouse" in terms of the sex of the parties. Because immigration law is federal law, USCIS follows the federal definition of "spouse." Previously, the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) defined "spouse" as a person of the opposite sex. This prohibited same-sex couples from filing immigrant visa petitions based on marriage. In 2013, the Supreme Court in *U.S. v. Windsor* struck down DOMA, declaring it unconstitutional. Two years later, *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. ___, 135 S. Ct. 2584, 2607, 192 L. Ed. 2d 609 (2015), held that "same-sex couples may exercise the fundamental right to marry in all States." Because of these decisions, United States citizens (USCs) and lawful permanent residents (LPRs) can help their same-sex spouses immigrate to the United States.

Transgender spouses. Before the *Windsor* decision, in the case of *Matter of Lovo-Lara*, 23 I. & N. Dec. 746 (BIA 2005), the BIA held that a marriage is valid for immigration purposes so long as it is considered a valid heterosexual marriage between two people of the opposite sex

²⁷ See, e.g., *Matter of Patrick*, 19 I. & N. Dec. 726 (BIA 1988).

²⁸ See *Matter of Hines*, 24 I. & N. Dec. 544 (BIA 2008).

according to the law of the state where the marriage was celebrated. The petitioner in *Lovo-Lara* had undergone sex reassignment surgery and legally changed her sex under the law of the State of North Carolina. USCIS had initially stated it would approve I-130 petitions only where the transgender spouse had undergone sex reassignment surgery and the surgery had resulted in a legal change of sex under the law of the place of marriage. Therefore, previously a heterosexual married couple involving a transgender individual needed to prove not only the validity of the marriage for a marriage-based petition, but also that the marriage was a *heterosexual* one. These policies led to absurd and discriminatory results and many LGBTQ marriages were unrecognized by USCIS.

Fortunately, the analysis of *Matter of Lovo-Lara* is no longer relevant after *U.S. v. Windsor*. Therefore, the issues that matter are the same in any marriage-based immigration case: simply, was the marriage legally valid and was it bona fide at inception? Neither the gender identity nor the sex designated at birth of either of the spouses should matter for determining the legal validity of their marriage. Additionally, USCIS clarified in 2012 that surgical treatment is not required to recognize a legal change of gender identity, as long as the person's gender identity is recognized under relevant state law.²⁹

Widow and widower spouses. The Immigration Act of 1990 added a new definition of “spouse” to allow widows and widowers who had been married to a U.S. citizen for at least two years to remain immediate relatives. However, as of October 28, 2009, the INA has been amended to eliminate the two-year requirement. Therefore, the widow or widower of a U.S. citizen, who was not legally separated from the U.S. citizen at the time of their death, will continue to be considered an immediate relative for two years after the U.S. citizen's death, or until the time they remarry, whichever comes first.³⁰ Persons widowed before October 28, 2009 and who did not have a pending I-130 petition but otherwise met the above stated criteria could file a self-petition via Form I-360; however, such a petition *must have* been filed by October 28, 2011.³¹

Note that the widow or widower will need to file a Form I-360 as a self-petitioner rather than filing Form I-130.³²

Example: Jacqueline married a U.S. citizen in June of 2008. Her husband died on February 1, 2010. Jacqueline may immigrate as an immediate relative until January 31, 2012, or until she remarries, whichever comes first. The fact that she was only married to her U.S. citizen husband for less than two years is not a barrier.

²⁹ USCIS, *Policy Memorandum: Adjudication of Immigration Benefits for Transgender Individuals* (Apr. 13, 2012), https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Laws/Memoranda/2012/Transgender_FINAL.pdf (partially superseded by the USCIS Policy Manual).

³⁰ INA § 201(b)(2)(A)(i).

³¹ DHS Appropriations Act of 2010, Pub. L. No. 111-83, § 568(c)(2)(B), 123 Stat. 2142, 2186 (2009).

³² See *id.*; INA § 204(a)(1)(A)(iii); see also USCIS, *Policy Memorandum: Approval of Petitions and Applications after the Death of the Qualifying Relative under New Section 204(l) of the Immigration and Nationality Act* (Dec. 16, 2010) (partially superseded by the USCIS Policy Manual), <https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/memos/Death-of-Qualifying-Relative.pdf> [hereinafter “USCIS Memo on INA § 204(l)”], included in this manual as Appendix 1-A. See § 1.12 below for information regarding beneficiaries who became widows or widowers after the I-130 petition had already been filed.

§ 1.3 “K” Visas for Fiancé(e)s, Spouses, and Children of U.S. Citizens

A. Fiancé(e) petition (K-1 visa)

U.S. citizens (but not permanent residents) may bring their fiancé(e)s to the United States using a “K-1” visa *before* getting married, to then marry in the United States. This is not an immediate relative visa petition, although there are quasi-immigrant visa requirements which the beneficiary must meet before the U.S. consulate will issue the visa. A K-1 is in fact a non-immigrant visa petition (Form I-129F), that allows the fiancé(e) to enter the United States for a limited time and purpose: to marry their U.S. citizen fiancé(e) within ninety days of arrival. To qualify for this visa, the couple must show that they met at least once in person within the past two years, that they intend to marry, and that they are legally able to marry.³³ Under certain circumstances, USCIS will waive the requirement that the couple has met in person within the past two years.³⁴ For example, if the marriage is arranged, and arranged marriages are customary within that culture, then USCIS may waive the “having met in person” requirement, if the petitioner demonstrates that complying with this requirement would cause extreme hardship or would “violate strict and long established customs of the beneficiary’s foreign culture or social practice.”³⁵ A request for a waiver will be examined on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the totality of the petitioner’s circumstances. Generally, circumstances that are not within the power of the petitioner to control and are likely to last for a considerable duration are considered persuasive, although financial hardship alone is usually insufficient.³⁶

If the couple does not get married within ninety days, the fiancé(e) may be required to leave the United States, and if the fiancé(e) does not leave the United States, they will be removed. The only exception is if the couple gets married after the ninety days and the same petitioner then submits an I-130 petition, the fiancé(e) may then adjust using an approved I-130 instead of the fiancé(e) petition.³⁷ The K-1 fiancé(e) cannot change status or ever adjust through a different visa petition filed by a different petitioner.

A U.S. citizen petitioner files a K-1 visa petition on Form I-129F, at the USCIS Service Center with jurisdiction over the petitioner’s residence in the United States. If both the petitioner and fiancé(e) live outside the United States, the I-129F must be submitted to the USCIS Service Center with jurisdiction over the petitioner’s last place of residence in the United States.

The K-1 fiancé(e)’s unmarried children under the age of twenty-one can be included in the petition and enter the United States with the fiancé(e) parent. Children of K-1 fiancé(e)s are designated as “K-2” visa holders. Generally, K-2 visa holders can adjust status and become permanent residents as long as they still qualify for the K-2 visa. This means that they must be

³³ See INA § 214(d).

³⁴ See 8 CFR § 214.2(k)(2).

³⁵ *Id.*

³⁶ *Matter of _*, (AAO Jan. 2, 2009) (unemployment insufficient because “financial constraints are a common concern for those filing the Form I-129F petition”), [https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/err/D6%20-%20Fiancees%20and%20Fiances%20of%20U.S.%20Citizen%20\(K-1\)/Decisions_Issued_in_2009/Jan022009_06D6101.pdf](https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/err/D6%20-%20Fiancees%20and%20Fiances%20of%20U.S.%20Citizen%20(K-1)/Decisions_Issued_in_2009/Jan022009_06D6101.pdf).

³⁷ See Chapter 3 on adjustment of status.

unmarried, and they must have been admitted to the United States on their K-2 nonimmigrant visa while still under twenty-one years old.³⁸

NOTE: A fiancé(e) petition can be helpful in particular instances:

First, a child under twenty-one but over the age of eighteen would be too old to qualify as a stepchild. But the child can still immigrate through a fiancé(e) petition.

Second, where same-sex marriage is not legal in the noncitizen's country of origin, and therefore the couple is unable to avail themselves of the marriage-based immigration process because they cannot legally marry while the noncitizen remains in their home country, the fiancé(e) visa is a way to bring the intended spouse to the United States so that the couple can legally marry and the U.S. citizen petitioner can confer immigration benefits on their spouse.

Example: Christine is a U.S. citizen. Her girlfriend, Althea, lives in the Philippines. They met online two years ago and Christine has traveled multiple times to visit Althea in the Philippines. They plan to marry and live together in the United States. However, same-sex marriage is not legal in the Philippines. In this situation, Christine can file a K-1 fiancé(e) visa petition to bring Althea to the United States, where they will then be able to marry and complete the adjustment of status process so that Althea can obtain permanent residence.

Two other laws affect U.S. citizen petitioners directly. The **International Marriage Broker Regulation Act (IMBRA)** provides that noncitizen fiancé(e)s and spouses coming to the United States with K visas must be informed about other K petitions previously filed by the petitioner and when filing the I-129F, petitioners must provide information regarding certain criminal convictions, which will be shared with the beneficiary prior to the issuance of a K visa. The petitioner for a K-1 fiancé(e) visa must request a waiver if they have filed two or more K-1 visa petitions at any time in the past or had a prior K-1 petition approved within the last two years.³⁹ The other law, the **Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act**, prohibits a U.S. citizen petitioner from filing a K nonimmigrant visa petition for a fiancé(e), spouse, or minor children if the petitioner was convicted of a "specified offense" against a minor, listed in the statute, unless USCIS determines that the petitioner poses no risk to the beneficiary. The Adam Walsh Act also applies to other family-based petitioners, not just petitioners filing K nonimmigrant visa petitions.

After the marriage, the immigrant spouse must apply for adjustment of status to permanent residency at a USCIS office in the United States. The couple does not need to file an I-130, however.⁴⁰ If the marriage is less than two years old at the time of the adjustment interview, as is usually the case with people who enter on fiancé(e) visas, USCIS will grant the immigrant spouse **conditional resident** status for two years. The couple will subsequently have to apply to remove the condition during the ninety-day window immediately before the date the conditional residence

³⁸ *Matter of Le*, 25 I. & N. Dec. 541 (BIA 2011).

³⁹ See INA § 214(d)(2)(A)–(B).

⁴⁰ See INA §§ 101(a)(15)(K), 214(d), and 8 CFR § 214.2(k).

expires, so that the immigrant spouse can remain in the United States.⁴¹ K-2 children will also be granted conditional residence status.

If the U.S. citizen spouse dies before the K-1 visa holder adjusts their status, the immigrant spouse may file the adjustment application just as they would have done if the U.S. citizen petitioner had not died. It is, therefore, not necessary for such a K-1 visa holder to file Form I-360 as a self-petitioning widow or widower. The adjustment application will be approved pursuant to INA § 204(l) and the surviving spouse will be granted unconditional lawful permanent resident status.⁴²

B. Petitions for spouses and children of U.S. citizens (K-3 and K-4 visas)

On December 21, 2000, the Legal Immigration and Family Equity Act (LIFE) became law. Among other provisions, LIFE created two new nonimmigrant visa categories, one for the spouses and minor children of lawful permanent residents,⁴³ and one for spouses and minor children of U.S. citizens residing abroad. Spouses and children (unmarried and under twenty-one) of U.S. citizens are able to request K-3 (spouse) and K-4 (children of the K-3 spouse) visas in much the same way that K-1 fiancé(e) petitions are currently processed, using the same type of petition (Form I-129F).

Example: Vijay, who is a U.S. citizen, recently traveled to India to get married. He just returned to the United States to file immigration papers for his new bride. While waiting for an I-130 approval notice and the usual consular processing, he can file a “K” visa petition for his new wife to allow her to come to the United States sooner. Instead of filing for an immigrant visa through consular processing, she will be able to file for her green card once she arrives from within the United States.

In order to obtain a K-3 visa, the U.S. citizen spouse must have submitted an I-130 petition for the K-3 spouse (but not for her children) and received the Notice of Action (Form I-797) from the USCIS indicating that the Service has received the petition. The U.S. citizen spouse can then file a Form I-129F Petition for Alien Fiancé(e).⁴⁴ Follow the instructions at <https://www.uscis.gov/i-129f> for where to file the K-3 petition from within the United States. For petitions filed from abroad, contact the U.S. embassy or consulate nearest the beneficiary’s residence for current filing instructions.

In addition to allowing spouses of U.S. citizens to enter the United States to apply for adjustment of status, Congress created a K-4 visa to allow persons under the age of twenty-one and unmarried children of K-3 eligible applicants to enter the United States as well.

Example: Vijay’s new wife has a twelve-year-old daughter. Vijay can request a K-4 visa to bring his wife’s daughter (i.e., Vijay’s new stepdaughter) into the United States.

⁴¹ INA § 245(d).

⁴² See USCIS Memo on INA § 204(l), cited above at Footnote 33 and included as Appendix 1-A. INA § 204(l) concerns the surviving beneficiaries of qualifying relatives on certain petitions and applications and was added by the DHS Appropriations Act of 2010, Pub. L. No. 111-83, § 568(d)(1), 123 Stat. 2142, 2187 (2009).

⁴³ The “V” Visa—see § 1.11 for more information.

⁴⁴ Even though Form I-129F is titled “Petition for Alien Fiancé(e),” it is also used for K-3 spouses.

PRACTICE TIP: Before filing a K-3 visa petition, check processing times for the I-129F K-3 category and compare to the processing times for immediate relative spouse I-130s (you can do this by going to <https://www.uscis.gov> and plugging in “case processing times”). It has often been the case in the past that the K-3 does not in fact result in faster adjudication allowing the immigrant spouse of a U.S. citizen to travel to the United States more quickly than through an I-130 petition. Additionally, some consulates hold the K-3 petition until the I-130 is approved, at which point the K-3 becomes moot, defeating the purpose of filing the K-3.

Another point to consider when deciding whether to attempt a K-3 petition to bring the spouse of a U.S. citizen to the United States more quickly (which as noted above may be hit or miss), or to proceed with immigrant visa consular processing, is whether it is important that the noncitizen spouse have employment authorization as soon as they set foot in the United States. Someone who enters on a K-3 will not have employment authorization until after they have a pending adjustment of status application, several months later, whereas someone who does immigrant visa consular processing will have employment authorization, as a lawful permanent resident, as soon as they arrive in the United States.

Additionally, K-3 and K-4 visa holders cannot change status to another nonimmigrant status such as a student or temporary worker.⁴⁵ They also cannot adjust status except through an I-130 filed by the USC who was the petitioner for the K-3 visa on Form I-129F. Termination of K-3/K-4 occurs thirty days after the denial or revocation of the I-130 or the adjustment of status. A K-3 visa also terminates upon the K-3’s divorce from the USC. A K-4’s visa terminates upon termination of the K-3 visa, or the K-4’s marriage.⁴⁶

In the case that the U.S. citizen petitioner dies before the K-3 or K-4 has adjusted their status, the I-130 petition filed for the K-3 spouse is automatically converted into an I-360 self-petition. The K-4 becomes a derivative beneficiary on the I-360 who will be “following-to-join” the K-3 spouse.

§ 1.4 Petitions Under the Preference System: Definition of Siblings and Sons and Daughters

Family members who do not qualify as immediate relatives may be able to immigrate through the **preference system**. Unlike an immediate relative, the beneficiary of a preference petition may have to wait for some period of time between approval of the visa petition and immigrating. The waiting period is discussed in §§ 1.8–1.9.

Before discussing preference petitions, we must define two new categories of family members: “sons and daughters” and “siblings” (brothers and sisters).

⁴⁵ 8 CFR § 248.2(a)(2).

⁴⁶ See 8 CFR § 214.2(k)(10).

A. Who is a son or daughter?

A son or daughter is a person who once qualified as a child but is now over twenty-one and/or married.⁴⁷

Example: Gina, an LPR, marries Juan who has a five-year-old daughter, Soledad. Soledad qualifies as a child under the stepchild rule discussed above. Years later, when Soledad is twenty-five years old, she wants to immigrate through Gina. She is no longer considered a child because she is over twenty-one. Can she qualify as Gina's "daughter"?

Yes. Since Soledad once qualified as Gina's child, she now can qualify as her daughter.

B. Who is a sibling (brother or sister)?

Siblings are persons who were once "children" with at least one parent in common either by adoption or blood relation.⁴⁸ However, an adopted child under immigration law cannot file a visa petition for either their biological siblings or parents. After an adoption, the biological siblings or parents can immigrate through the adopted child only if the child did not receive any immigration benefits through the adoption, the adoption has been legally terminated, and the original parent-child relationship has been lawfully reestablished.

Example: Suppose that when Soledad from the example above was thirty years old, Gina and Juan divorced and Gina had another child, Fidel, with another man. Years pass. Now Fidel is thirty years old and Soledad is sixty. Are Fidel and Soledad siblings under the INA?

Yes. It does not matter that they were not considered children at the same time, or that Soledad was a stepchild or that Fidel a child born out of wedlock. At one time, they both qualified as Gina's "children" under the INA.

Example: A U.S. citizen couple adopts Lim, born in China. They petition for her as their child and she immigrates, later becoming a naturalized U.S. citizen. When Lim grows up, she travels to China and meets her birth parents and biological siblings. Lim wants to petition for her biological sister. Can she?

No. Although Lim and her sister have the same biological parents, Lim's adoption canceled her ability to file visa petitions for her birth parents and her biological siblings.⁴⁹ If Lim had not immigrated through her adopted parents but had immigrated another way, and her adoption was ultimately terminated, she might have been able to petition for her biological parents and siblings.

⁴⁷ 22 CFR § 40.1(s).

⁴⁸ See *Matter of Lin Lee*, 19 I. & N. Dec 435 (BIA 1987).

⁴⁹ See INA § 101(b)(1)(E); *Matter of Xiu Hong Li*, 21 I. & N. Dec. 13 (BIA 1995); *Matter of Li*, 20 I. & N. Dec. 700 (BIA 1993); *Matter of Kong*, 17 I. & N. Dec. 151 (BIA 1979).

§ 1.5 The Preference Categories

People who are not immediate relatives immigrate through a preference visa petition which fall into one of four categories.

The preference categories are:⁵⁰

Category	Beneficiaries Covered by This Category
First Preference (F1) ⁵¹	Unmarried sons and daughters, twenty-one years of age or older, of U.S. citizens.
Second A Preference (2A)	Spouse or child of a lawful permanent resident.
Second B Preference (2B)	Unmarried sons and daughters, twenty-one years of age or older, of lawful permanent residents. *If an unmarried son or daughter of a lawful permanent resident marries, they lose eligibility to immigrate as the son or daughter of an LPR.
Third Preference (F3)	Married sons and daughters, of any age, of a U.S. citizen.
Fourth Preference (F4)	Brothers and sisters of U.S. citizens. The petitioner must be at least twenty-one years old. Both siblings must at some time have been the children of one common parent.

The date that the preference visa petition is filed with USCIS is called the **priority date**. Because the preference visa categories are subject to a quota system, there is a limited number of visas available each year for each of these categories. Due to these limitations, there are often more people who file petitions than there are visas available, resulting in long waiting periods for prospective immigrants—for some, twenty years or more. The priority date determines when the prospective immigrant can immigrate. Its function is equivalent to a number on a waitlist. Earlier priority dates are further up on the waitlist for an immigrant visa or green card. When a prospective immigrant finally gets to the top of the list, their priority date is “current.”⁵²

A. Conversion of the petition to a new category

In instances where a child ages out (turns twenty-one), there is a change in the beneficiary’s marital status, or the petitioner naturalizes, the petition may shift to a new category with a new waitlist. In most circumstances, the beneficiary retains their priority date.⁵³ The basic rule is: *If the new petitioner-beneficiary relationship will support a family petition, the beneficiary retains*

⁵⁰ These categories are set forth at INA § 203(a). Note that the preference categories were renumbered, in part, by the Immigration Act of 1990, Pub. L. 101-649, 104 Stat. 4978. Previously, 2A and 2B were collapsed into the same second preference category, third preference married sons and daughters were designated as fourth preference and siblings were designated as fifth preference. Employment preference categories, which are now completely separate from the family categories, filled in the other preference numbers (third and sixth).

⁵¹ Many practitioners prefer to refer to family-based preference categories as “Family-based first preference,” or “Second Preference, 2B,” etc. to avoid confusion with nonimmigrant visa categories such as the “F-1” student visa.

⁵² See §§ 1.7 and 1.8 below, which describe how the preference visa system works.

⁵³ 8 CFR § 204.2(i)(1); see also § 1.8 below for a further explanation of priority dates.

the petition and priority date. Remember that “immediate relatives” (spouses, parents and minor unmarried children of U.S. citizens) are *not* subject to the preference system or priority dates *unless, potentially, their family status changes* (the Child Status Protection Act, discussed later in this section and in greater depth in § 1.10, prevents an immediate relative minor child of a U.S. citizen from converting to the third preference category when the child turns twenty-one).

First preference to third preference (and vice versa): The single daughter or son of a U.S. citizen marries while waiting for their first preference priority date to become current. Because a U.S. citizen can also petition a married daughter or son in the third preference visa category, the first preference petition converts to a third preference petition. The conversion happens automatically, but it is usually a good idea to update the National Visa Center with updated documents to support the conversion from one preference category to another to make sure that the change is registered in the system as well. If the beneficiary then divorces during the long wait for a current date, they again convert—this time back to the first preference.

- Unmarried son or daughter of a USC marries (a)
- Married son or daughter of a USC divorces (b)

Immediate Relative	Spouses, Unmarried Children, & Parents of USC
First (F1)	Unmarried Sons/Daughters of USC
Second (2A)	Spouses & Children of LPR
Second (2B)	Unmarried Sons/Daughters of LPR
Third (F3)	Married Sons/Daughters of USC
Fourth (F4)	Brothers & Sisters of USC's

Second preference, 2A to 2B: The child of an LPR (2A preference) reaches the age of twenty-one while they await a current priority date. Their petition converts to 2B preference and they

retain the priority date. There are some exceptions to this rule under the Child Status Protection Act.⁵⁴ For more information on the Child Status Protection Act (CSPA), see § 1.10.

• Child of an LPR turns 21

Immediate Relative	Spouses, Unmarried Children, & Parents of USC
First (F1)	Unmarried Sons/Daughters of USC
Second (2A)	Spouses & Children of LPR
Second (2B)	Unmarried Sons/Daughters of LPR
Third (F3)	Married Sons/Daughters of USC
Fourth (F4)	Brothers & Sisters of USC's

Immediate relative to third preference: The minor (under twenty-one) child of a U.S. citizen (an immediate relative) marries (thus becoming a third preference beneficiary). They retain the original petition and priority date that was set based on the date USCIS originally received the petition.

• Unmarried child of a USC marries.

Immediate Relative	Spouses, Unmarried Children, & Parents of USC
First (F1)	Unmarried Sons/Daughters of USC
Second (2A)	Spouses & Children of LPR
Second (2B)	Unmarried Sons/Daughters of LPR
Third (F3)	Married Sons/Daughters of USC
Fourth (F4)	Brothers & Sisters of USC's


Second preference 2B to first preference: An LPR petitions their unmarried son or daughter and then naturalizes so that the beneficiary is now the son or daughter of a U.S. citizen. A beneficiary could move from 2B to first preference and then to third preference upon getting married. Also

⁵⁴ See § 1.10 below.

see discussion under § 1.10 below regarding a situation where, under the CSPA, a beneficiary might opt to retain their 2B classification.

- LPR parent of unmarried son or daughter naturalizes.


Immediate Relative	Spouses, Unmarried Children, & Parents of USC
First (F1)	Unmarried Sons/Daughters of USC
Second (2A)	Spouses & Children of LPR
Second (2B)	Unmarried Sons/Daughters of LPR
Third (F3)	Married Sons/Daughters of USC
Fourth (F4)	Brothers & Sisters of USC's



Second preference 2A to immediate relative: When an LPR petitioner naturalizes and becomes a U.S. citizen, the 2A spouses and unmarried children under twenty-one become immediate relatives. The naturalization would have to take place before the child turns twenty-one. This allows them to escape the preference category quotas and potentially immediately process their applications for green cards. In addition, for certain beneficiaries, it may allow them to adjust status—an option they may not have had as 2A beneficiaries. See discussion of adjustment of status in **Chapter 3**.

- LPR parent of unmarried son or daughter naturalizes.

Immediate Relative	Spouses, Unmarried Children, & Parents of USC
First (F1)	Unmarried Sons/Daughters of USC
Second (2A)	Spouses & Children of LPR
Second (2B)	Unmarried Sons/Daughters of LPR
Third (F3)	Married Sons/Daughters of USC
Fourth (F4)	Brothers & Sisters of USC's



Note: Previously, an immediate relative child who turned twenty-one would automatically convert to first preference. However, under the Child Status Protection Act (CSPA), the visa petition beneficiary remains an immediate relative even after turning twenty-one, unless they opt

to convert to first preference.⁵⁵ Converting to a preference category results in a wait but also allows for the inclusion of derivatives. See § 1.6.

Changes in preference categories such as those described here imply a switch from one waitlist to another. With that switch comes a corresponding change in waiting times, such that going from one preference category to another may mean a longer or shorter wait to apply for an immigrant visa.⁵⁶

If, however, the newly created petitioner-beneficiary relationship will not support a family petition, in other words because there is no corresponding category for such a relationship, then the beneficiary loses the petition and the priority date.⁵⁷ Most significantly, this applies to children of LPRs who marry while waiting for their priority date to become current (see explanation below).

Child or daughter/son of a lawful permanent resident (preference 2A or 2B) marries: If the child or daughter/son of an LPR marries, they have nowhere to go in the preference system because there is no visa category for *married* sons and daughters of lawful permanent residents. This means the visa petition is automatically revoked and the beneficiary loses their *priority* date. When and if their parent naturalizes, the newly naturalized parent can file a new petition and the wait begins again.

• The child or son/daughter of an LPR marries.

Immediate Relative	Spouses, Unmarried Children, & Parents of USC
First (F1)	Unmarried Sons/Daughters of USC
Second (2A)	Spouses & Children of LPR
Second (2B)	Unmarried Sons/Daughters of LPR
Third (F3)	Married Sons/Daughters of USC
Fourth (F4)	Brothers & Sisters of USC's

Note: If the parent *naturalized first*, before the child or daughter/son married, then the parent’s naturalization would first result in the change in category—from preference 2B to first preference in the case of an unmarried son/daughter. The subsequent marriage of the son/daughter would then change the petition to a new category—from first preference to third preference. Throughout all the changes, the beneficiary would retain the petition validity and the priority date, which would determine her place in each new waitlist.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ See § 1.10 below.

⁵⁶ See §§ 1.7 & 1.8 below.

⁵⁷ See § 1.13 below on automatic revocation of visa petitions.

⁵⁸ Note that if the son or daughter of the naturalized USC parent in this example qualifies as a “child,” they may have become an immediate relative when their parent naturalized, and now qualify to apply for a green

PRACTICE TIP: Sequence matters! If your client is married and has a preference petition that a parent filed for them, always make sure to check 1) *when* your client married and 2) if their petitioning parent is now a U.S. citizen. Depending on the timing of their marriage and their parent’s naturalization, they may have lost that petition. If the naturalization date comes first, the petition is alive. If the child or daughter/son married first, the petition and priority date are lost.

Example: See the chart below for examples as to whether the specified relative can have a family visa petition filed on their behalf, as well the appropriate immigration category.

Relative	Category
Carmen is an LPR who wants to petition for her husband.	F2A
Joaquin would like to immigrate through his son, an LPR.	Cannot immigrate. LPRs cannot petition their parents.
Martin, who is 35 and a USC, wants to petition for his brother.	F4
Martin also wants to petition for his uncle and cousins.	Cannot immigrate. Aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents are not recognized relationships under immigration law.
John, who is single and 20 years old, would like to immigrate through his USC mother. He has delayed getting his birth certificate to you. Will his next birthday have any effect on the petition?	Yes, John can immigrate as an immediate relative child, so long as his mother files the visa petition before he turns twenty-one. This way, his age will be “locked-in” under the CSPA, which would allow him to remain an immediate relative indefinitely.
Michelle is an LPR who wants to petition her twenty-five-year-old son Jacques, who is unmarried.	F2B
Jacques hopes to someday marry his girlfriend, Renee. Would that affect the visa petition Michelle wants to file?	If Jacques marries, he cannot immigrate through his LPR mother. A permanent resident cannot petition for a married son or daughter.
Michelle becomes a USC. What kind of petition could she file for Jacques now? What if he marries Renee?	Michelle could file a F1 petition for her unmarried son. If Jacques marries after Michelle naturalizes, the petition will convert to a F3 petition for her married son. Renee could be a derivative beneficiary of that petition.
Zoila is a lawful permanent resident who wants to petition for her married daughter. Zoila is about to apply for U.S. citizenship.	Yes, once she becomes a U.S. citizen, she will be able to immigrate her married daughter as a third preference. As long as she remains an LPR,

card immediately. In addition, once the child becomes an LPR, they may automatically become a U.S. citizen by derivation, depending on the facts.

Will Zoila's becoming a U.S. citizen help her daughter immigrate?	however, she cannot petition for her married daughter.
Sofia is a U.S. citizen who is eighteen years old. Her mother would like to immigrate.	Sofia cannot petition for her mother until she turns twenty-one.

§ 1.6 Derivative Beneficiaries

People who immigrate under the preference system have an important right: their spouses and children can immigrate along with them on the same petition so the family will be processed together.⁵⁹ The **principal beneficiary** is the person immigrating under the preference system. The spouse and children who immigrate with them are the **derivative beneficiaries**.

There is a very easy way to see if someone can immigrate as a derivative beneficiary. Simply ask two questions:

1. Will the principal beneficiary immigrate through a preference visa petition?
2. Does that person have a spouse or child?

If the answer to both questions is yes, the spouse and/or child qualify as derivative beneficiaries.

Example: Ramona, a U.S. citizen, files a visa petition on behalf of Rafael, her son. Rafael is married and has eighteen- and twenty-five-year-old sons. When the time comes for Rafael to apply for lawful permanent resident status, who can apply along with him?

First ask: Will Rafael (the principal beneficiary) immigrate on a preference visa petition? Yes, he will immigrate as a third preference immigrant because he is the married son of a U.S. citizen.

Then ask: Does Rafael have a spouse or children? Yes, Rafael has a wife and an eighteen-year-old child. They can immigrate as derivatives. His 25-year-old son is not a "child" under the INA because he is over twenty-one.⁶⁰ Therefore, the elder son cannot immigrate as a derivative beneficiary, unless the petition was filed before he was twenty-one and he is protected by the Child Status Protection Act (CSPA) (see § 1.10 below).

Derivative beneficiaries depend on the status of the principal beneficiary. The I-130 petition is not filed on behalf of the derivative, but rather on behalf of the principal beneficiary. This is often the only way for a derivative to immigrate through a family petition, because derivatives do not often qualify on their own as principal beneficiaries. For example, there is no category for "nephews or nieces" of U.S. citizens, so they must immigrate as derivative children of the sibling of a U.S. citizen, who is the principal beneficiary in the F4 category.

A major exception is where a principal beneficiary in the F2A category has a child who could also be the principal beneficiary in a separate F2A petition filed by the petitioner, as the petitioner's own child, independent of the principal beneficiary parent. It is often a good idea for petitioners to file separate F2A petitions for their spouse and their children, especially where the

⁵⁹ INA § 203(d).

⁶⁰ See § 1.2.

petitioner is likely to naturalize soon.⁶¹ Each family member must file their own separate application for an immigrant visa or adjustment of status at the second and final step in the immigration process. They also must prove their family relationship to the principal beneficiary.

Example: Rafael’s U.S. citizen mother filed just one I-130 visa petition, for third preference classification for Rafael. When Rafael immigrates, he, his wife and his younger child each must each submit a separate application for lawful permanent residence.⁶² Plus, his wife must submit a marriage certificate and his child a birth certificate to prove that they are Rafael’s relatives—just as they would do if Rafael had filed a separate visa petition for each of them.

If an F2A derivative beneficiary (child) turns twenty-one before immigrating (meaning, before completing consular processing and being inspected and admitted at the border or port of entry to the United States or going through the process of adjustment of status and receiving final approval to become a permanent resident), the person might “age-out” and no longer qualify as a derivative beneficiary at the time their parent immigrates (unless the Child Status Protection Act (CSPA) prevents that).⁶³ If the CSPA does not prevent the person from aging out, the petitioner should file a separate I-130 on behalf of that son or daughter, under preference category 2B. The beneficiary in the F2B classification will retain the priority date of the principal beneficiary parent from the F2A petition (referred to as **recapturing a priority date**) to avoid being placed at the end of the waiting list.⁶⁴

There are no derivative beneficiaries of **immediate relative** visa petitions.⁶⁵ Anyone who immigrates as an immediate relative must qualify in their own right and the petitioner must file separate visa petitions for each person.

Example: Mario is a U.S. citizen who files an immediate relative petition for his husband, Luke. Luke’s six-year-old daughter, Lisa, cannot immigrate as a derivative beneficiary of the petition. Mario must file a separate immediate relative visa petition for Lisa as his stepchild.

PRACTICE TIP: Submitting a separate family petition, even if the relative would qualify for derivative status, may be advisable. An LPR, especially one who is planning to naturalize, should submit separate family petitions for a spouse and children. Once the petitioner has naturalized, a beneficiary spouse becomes an immediate relative, and any children who were derivatives of the spouse’s application are no longer eligible as derivatives.

Example: Examples of when the accompanying family members can immigrate as principal and derivative beneficiaries based on the two-step analysis.

⁶¹ See the Practice Tip, below.

⁶² Also called an application for an “immigrant visa.”

⁶³ See § 1.10.

⁶⁴ See § 1.8 for an explanation of priority dates.

⁶⁵ See § 1.2.

1. *Roberto is the brother of a U.S. citizen. He has a wife and six-year-old son.*
 - a. Can Roberto immigrate through a preference visa petition?
Yes. Roberto is a fourth preference (F4) because he is the brother of a U.S. citizen.
 - b. Does Roberto have a spouse or child?
Yes. His wife and six-year-old son qualify as spouse and child, so they can be derivative beneficiaries.
2. *Marta is the daughter of a U.S. citizen. She has a husband, a married nineteen-year-old son, and an unmarried twenty-one-year-old son.*
 - a. Will Marta immigrate through a preference visa petition?
Yes. Marta is a third preference relative.
 - b. Does she have a spouse or child (as defined in the INA)?
Only Marta's husband can qualify as a derivative beneficiary, unless the CSPA helps the 21-year-old unmarried son.
3. *Li is the wife of a lawful permanent resident. She has a three-year-old daughter from a previous marriage. (Note: Is there another way Li's daughter could immigrate?)*
 - a. Will Li immigrate through a preference petition?
Yes. Li is a second preference relative.
 - b. Does she have a child who can immigrate with her?
Yes. Li has a child who qualifies as a derivative beneficiary. Her child could also immigrate through a separate petition as her spouse's "stepchild."
4. *Susanna is the unmarried twenty-year-old daughter of a U.S. citizen. She has a baby girl.*
 - a. Will Susanna immigrate through a preference petition?
No. Susanna is an immediate relative, and therefore will immigrate through an immediate relative petition.
 - b. Can her child immigrate with her?
No. Her child cannot be a derivative beneficiary because Susanna is not a preference petition beneficiary. If Susanna waits to immigrate until she is over twenty-one, her petition will convert to first preference, and her child could then immigrate with her as her derivative. However, converting to the first preference category would also mean that an immigrant visa would no longer be immediately available for Susanna, and she may have to wait several years on the first preference waitlist in order to apply for permanent residence. Therefore, an alternative option could be for Susanna to immigrate now as an immediate relative of her USC parent and once she becomes an LPR, she can file an I-130 petition for her child under the second preference category, 2A.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ See §§ 1.8 & 1.9 for a further explanation of how to evaluate a person's options in light of the various waitlists.

5. *Soheyla has just become a U.S. citizen. She wants to petition for her parents, but her mother is concerned about leaving Soheyla's sixteen-year-old twin sisters behind.*

Soheyla can petition for her parents as immediate relatives, but there are no derivatives of immediate relatives so the twins cannot immigrate with Soheyla's parents. Soheyla can file fourth preference petitions for her twin sisters, but the wait to immigrate would be very long. However, once the parents have immigrated as immediate relatives, they can file I-130 petitions for their sixteen-year-old daughters under the 2A preference category. Sometimes, one parent immigrates first so that the second parent can stay in the home country with the minor children while the first parent's petition for the children is being processed.

§ 1.7 How the Preference System Works

The first question most clients with a family-based case will ask is how long it will take for the beneficiary to immigrate. As discussed above, immigration through a family petition is a two-step process. The first step is submitting a visa petition and the second step is applying for the immigrant visa and permanent resident status. As soon as the petition is approved, an immediate relative beneficiary may proceed to step two and apply to immigrate. A preference petition beneficiary, however, must wait until a visa is available under the preference system before going on to step two (in some circumstances they can proceed to step two if the visa will soon be available—see discussion of “Dates for Filing” chart below).

The preference system. When we discuss family visas in the preference system, we are talking about people who immigrate through the first, second, third, and fourth family-based preference categories.⁶⁷

USCIS can approve an unlimited number of preference visa *petitions* each year. But not everyone with an approved petition will be able to immigrate.

Only a certain number of people can immigrate to the United States each year under the family preference system. Each time someone immigrates to the United States under the preference system, one visa is **charged to** (subtracted from) the numbers of visas set aside for the country where the person was born. If more people per year want to immigrate than there are visas, that country develops a waiting list or “visa backlog.”

In sum, the more people who want to immigrate from a country each year over its visa allotment, the longer the waiting list for that country will be.

Additionally, only a certain number of people can immigrate to the United States from any one country each year. The “country of chargeability” is, in almost all circumstances, determined by a person's country of birth, so even if a person gains citizenship in a second country, their country of chargeability remains the country where they were born.⁶⁸ For example, each year many more people from Mexico apply to immigrate to the United States than the maximum allotted visas per country. For this reason, some Mexican nationals face a wait of several years to immigrate

⁶⁷ See § 1.14 for a discussion of persons immigrating through the Diversity Program, or Employment Visas.

⁶⁸ In some circumstances, a person might be able to claim the country where their spouse was born, in what is called “cross-chargeability.” See § 1.8, below, for more information on this topic.

through the preference system. Each year, a far smaller number of people apply to immigrate to the United States from France or Uruguay. For this reason, someone from France or Uruguay may be able to immigrate much faster than someone in the same preference category from Mexico.

The Immigration Act of 1990 set up this complicated system for how many visas are allotted to each preference category. However, one of the most important changes in the INA was to allow extra visas for the second preference category, and especially for the spouses and “children” (unmarried and under twenty-one) of permanent residents, category 2A. In the past, this category had a wait of ten to twelve years for some countries. Under the current system there is presently no backlog, even for countries with the biggest preference backlog, such as Mexico and the Philippines. However, for unmarried sons and daughters of permanent residents, who are also in the second preference, but in category 2B, the backlog as of this writing is approximately six to twenty-one years, depending on the country.

§ 1.8 Using the State Department Visa Bulletin to Estimate When Your Client Can Immigrate

Each month the U.S. State Department issues a visa bulletin.⁶⁹ You can consult the State Department Visa Bulletin to see if your client is eligible to immigrate. For example, below is the visa bulletin for April 2021. As you can see, it lists the preference categories on the far-left column and then shows the priority dates that are current for each category. Note the four countries that are assigned their own queues of chargeability, listed along the top. Everyone else goes into the queue for all other chargeability areas. See more information below.

VISA BULLETIN FOR APRIL 2021					
Family-Sponsored	All Chargeability Areas Except Those Listed	China, Mainland-Born	India	Mexico	Philippines
F1	08OCT14	08OCT14	08OCT14	22FEB98	22JAN12
F2A	C	C	C	C	C
F2B	08AUG15	08AUG15	08AUG15	08JUL99	01SEP11
F3	15AUG08	15AUG08	05AUG08	01OCT96	01APR02
F4	01NOV06	01NOV06	08APR05	22JUL98	08APR02

In late 2015 the Department of State (State Department) changed the organization of the Visa Bulletin, to not only show which priority dates are current, but also to show which are getting close to being current. Previously, the Visa Bulletin only showed “current” priority dates. One chart is titled “Final Action Dates for Family-Sponsored Preference Cases,” and the other is titled “Dates for Filing Family-Sponsored Visa Applications.” The Visa Bulletin also has these same

⁶⁹ The Visa Bulletin can be accessed through the State Department’s website at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/legal/visa-law0/visa-bulletin.html>.

two charts for employment-based cases. “Final Action Dates” shows priority dates that are “current.” The other chart, “Dates for Filing,” serves two purposes. One, it can be helpful to see what the State Department views as priority dates that are getting “close” to being current, and two, in some months USCIS may allow people who will be filing applications for adjustment of status to file early, based on the “Dates for Filing” chart, even though their priority dates are not yet current. Soon after the upcoming month’s Visa Bulletin is posted, USCIS will announce whether it will allow use of the second chart. Visit <http://www.uscis.gov/visabulletininfo> to find out whether USCIS has stated that the “Dates for Filing” chart may be used for a particular month. The benefit of being able to apply for adjustment of status early is that applicants can get employment authorization more quickly, once they have a pending adjustment application, while they continue to wait for their priority date to become current and for their interview with USCIS.

When a backlog exists, predicting exactly when the client will be able to immigrate is impossible. But the Visa Bulletin may be used to make a *very rough estimate* of when the client might be able to immigrate in the future. To do this you need to know the following information about the intending immigrant:

1. The priority date of the visa petition
2. The country of chargeability
3. The preference category
4. How fast the preference category has been advancing in the last two to three years

A. Priority date

The date that the I-130 visa petition is *filed* with USCIS—the date USCIS received the petition and accepted the fee—becomes the beneficiary’s “priority date” in the preference system, not the date the petition was approved.⁷⁰ That date establishes the person’s place in line to wait for a visa and to determine when the person can immigrate. This is only fair, because in some cases the petition might not be approved for several months or even years after filing it.

Example: Ana filed a petition for her sister Elsa on May 2, 2002. The petition was approved on July 9, 2002. Elsa’s priority date is May 2, 2002.

PRACTICE TIP: Shortly after the petitioner files the I-130 at the USCIS Regional Service Center, usually a few weeks, they should receive a receipt notice on Form I-797. It is possible, however, that USCIS will reject the filing for an error and return the packet with a notice that describes the error. A rejected filing does not establish a priority date. Once the filing is accepted by USCIS, the receipt notice issued will indicate when USCIS received the accepted petition, and this will be the priority date.⁷¹ The approval notice will be issued once the petition is adjudicated, up to two to three years after filing in some cases, with the processing time dependent on the kind of

⁷⁰ 22 CFR § 42.53(a); 8 CFR § 204.1(b).

⁷¹ Occasionally USCIS errs in assigning priority dates, or is slow in receipting a petition or application, and sometimes that makes a difference for the beneficiary or applicant. Also, sometimes whole petitions and applications have been lost or mistakenly shredded by USCIS. Visa petitions (and everything else filed with USCIS) should always be sent by certified or express mail or courier and proof maintained of delivery, along with a copy of what was filed.

petition. The priority date should be listed on the approval notice but separately from the date of approval.

1. “Recapturing” old priority dates

In a limited number of situations, immigrants can take advantage of earlier priority dates:

1. **Western Hemisphere nationals who established a priority date prior to January 1, 1977** may use that date in any other visa petitions. Before 1977, people who had U.S. citizen children could register and obtain a priority date. Some of these people may carry so-called “*Silva* letters” as beneficiaries of the lawsuit *Silva v. Bell*, 605 F.2d 978 (7th Cir. 1979). Other people may have had a parent or spouse immigrate before 1977 and, as a result, may qualify for an earlier priority date. Still others may have had a petition filed on behalf of a parent or spouse prior to 1977 (registration), and though they themselves were born after 1977, they may still qualify to use the pre-1977 priority date. Old Western Hemisphere priority dates show up increasingly rarely. When they do, however, the pre-1977 priority date can be used in any family preference category.

Example: Eduardo had a U.S. citizen child and registered with a U.S. consulate on June 1, 1976. He never immigrated. Now his brother is a U.S. citizen and has filed a fourth preference petition for him. Eduardo can use his old priority date of June 1, 1976.

Example: Berta’s grandmother filed a petition for Berta’s mother in 1975, who was at that time married to Berta’s father. Berta was born in 1991, and her mother is presently an LPR. Berta’s mother is just now filing a petition for Berta, who is over twenty-one. Berta can use the priority date established by her grandmother on behalf of her mother, from 1975, to immigrate now without waiting in the 2B preference line.

2. **Children who were 2A derivative beneficiaries (discussed in § 1.6) but now have turned twenty-one and are not protected by the CSPA (discussed in § 1.10)** may nevertheless be able to use the priority date of their parent’s I-130, where the parent was the principal beneficiary, upon the filing of a new I-130 under preference category 2B, in which they—the children—are now the principal beneficiary.

Example: Gina is an LPR who files an I-130 petition for her husband Juan under the 2A preference category. Since their child, Soledad, is a child, Juan and Gina believe that Soledad will be able to immigrate as a derivative with her father before her twenty-first birthday, hence they do not want to spend the money to submit a separate I-130 for her. Juan’s priority date is May 1, 2000.

However, visas advance slowly and in 2006 Soledad turned twenty-one before she can complete consular processing and immigrate. On June 1, 2011, Gina submits a new I-130 for Soledad. Fortunately, because Soledad was a derivative beneficiary of a 2A petition filed by Gina, she can retain the filing date of the petition for the principal beneficiary (her father). So, she can “recapture” or “retain” the priority date of May 1, 2000—not the date of filing for the I-130 her mother submits on her behalf, June 1, 2011.⁷²

⁷² See 8 CFR § 205.1(a)(3)(ii)(E). Note that Soledad might still qualify as a “child” under the Child Status Protection Act (CSPA). See § 1.10, which describes how the CSPA works.

In 2014, the U.S. Supreme Court held that INA § 203(h)(3) allows derivative beneficiaries of I-130 petitions filed under preference category F2A to *automatically* convert into the F2B category without having to file another visa petition, but that the CSPA only allowed “conversion” (recapturing) of priority dates for F2B preference beneficiaries that had aged out of F2A eligibility as derivatives, such as in the scenario described in the paragraph above. In other words, individuals who were derivative beneficiaries in I-130 petitions filed under any other preference category may not recapture the priority date from those petitions upon the filing of a new petition where they are now the principal beneficiary. See § 1.10 for more information on CSPA.⁷³

To “recapture” an earlier priority date, the visa petition must not have been revoked.⁷⁴ If the petition has not been revoked, USCIS deems the approval of the new petition to be a reaffirmation of the initial petition and reinstates the priority date from the original.⁷⁵

PRACTICE TIP: To request the acquisition of an old priority date, send a letter requesting the earlier date with an explanation of the reason you believe the beneficiary is entitled to that date. You can send the request as a cover letter with the I-130 or, if necessary, later while the petition is pending or to the National Visa Center after the petition has been approved by USCIS and forwarded to the NVC.

B. Country of chargeability

Sometimes a question comes up about the country to which the person’s visa will be charged. This can make a tremendous difference, since the visa backlog from one country may be a few months, while the wait may be several years from another.

As a general rule, a person’s place of birth is the country or territory to which a visa will be charged. This is true even if the person has become a citizen of another country.

Example: Enrique was born in Mexico but has acquired citizenship in Guatemala. His country of chargeability is Mexico.

In some situations, an exception may apply and immigrant applicants can “cross-charge” to a different country. Spouses who are immigrating together, but were born in different countries, can pick the most beneficial country of chargeability and children can cross-charge to the country of chargeability of the parent with whom they are immigrating or following to join.⁷⁶ Finally, if a person is born in a country where neither parent had citizenship or permanent residence, the person’s country of chargeability can be either their mother’s or their father’s country of birth.

C. Preference category

This is the category of the visa petition, for example “second preference 2A” for the immigrating spouse of a lawful permanent resident.

⁷³ *Scialabba v. Cuella de Osorio*, 573 U.S. 41 (2014).

⁷⁴ See § 1.13, below, on revocation.

⁷⁵ See 8 CFR § 204.2(h)(2).

⁷⁶ See INA § 202(b); 22 CFR § 42.12.

HOW TO READ THE VISA BULLETIN

Look at the final action date chart in the Visa Bulletin for family sponsored immigrants below.

FINAL ACTION DATES FOR FAMILY-SPONSORED PREFERENCE CASES

VISA BULLETIN FOR APRIL 2021					
Family-Sponsored	All Chargeability Areas Except Those Listed	China, Mainland-Born	India	Mexico	Philippines
F1	08OCT14	08OCT14	08OCT14	22FEB98	22JAN12
F2A	C	C	C	C	C
F2B	08AUG15	08AUG15	08AUG15	08JUL99	01SEP11
F3	15AUG08	15AUG08	05AUG08	01OCT96	01APR02
F4	01NOV06	01NOV06	08APR05	22JUL98	08APR02

First, notice the date at the top. This shows the month to which this visa bulletin is pertinent. The State Department issues a new visa bulletin each month, posting the upcoming month’s visa bulletin about two weeks in advance. Most of the information in the bulletin changes from month to month, so checking it each month is important.

Along the left side of the bulletin chart are all the categories of preference visas. Across the top is a list of countries called the “areas of chargeability.” The first category says, “All Chargeability Areas Except Those Listed.” Known as the “worldwide” category, it includes all countries besides the ones that are listed separately (China, India, Mexico, and the Philippines). For example, Argentina does not have a separate listing in the bulletin. Therefore, a person from Argentina should use the numbers listed in the “All Chargeability” column. The countries that fall into this category usually have the smallest backlogs and thus the shortest waiting periods.

If the person is from a country that has its own separate listing, such as China, India, Mexico or the Philippines, they must consult that country’s column of information.

As discussed above, you will note there are two separate charts for family preference categories on the State Department website. One is titled the “Final Action Dates for Family-Sponsored Preference Cases” and the other is titled “Dates for Filing Family-Sponsored Visa Applications.” You read both the charts the same way, drawing a line from the relevant preference category across to the corresponding country of chargeability to where you will find a date. Remember, the difference is that the date in the “Final Action Date” chart is the priority date of persons from that country, and in that preference category, for whom immigrant visas are available now, or “current.” The date in the “Dates for Filing” chart is the priority date of persons from that country, and in that preference category, for whom the State Department has determined immigrant visas will soon be available. Most of the time the “Final Action Dates” chart will govern, but occasionally USCIS may announce in a given month that people who are applying for adjustment of status can use the “Dates for Filing” chart to file early, even though according to

the “Final Action Dates” chart their priority date is still not current. For consular processing cases, the “Final Action Dates” chart will be the exclusive chart relevant to these cases, and there is no need to consult the “Dates for Filing” chart, which only pertains to adjustment of status cases in months where USCIS has stated it will accept these early filings.

The rule to reading the Visa Bulletin is:

In the “Final Action Dates” chart, if your client’s priority date falls *before the date listed*, a visa is now available, and they can immediately apply for lawful permanent resident status. If your client’s priority date falls *on or after the date listed*, no visa is available to them that month and they must wait longer.

Example: Look at the Visa Bulletin above. Sarwan, who is single, was born in India in 1981. On October 5, 2010, his permanent resident mother filed a second preference visa petition for him. Remember that although the petition was approved in 2012, his priority date is October 5, 2010. The priority date for second preference 2B visa petitions from India on the Final Action Dates chart is August 8, 2015. Sarwan’s priority date, October 5, 2010, is before the priority date listed in the Visa Bulletin as the Final Action date. Therefore, Sarwan is eligible to immigrate now.

Example: Again look at the Visa Bulletin above. Louise was born in Haiti. On September 20, 2007, her U.S. citizen sister filed a visa petition for her. Louise is in Haiti and will be consular processing. The priority date for fourth preference petitions worldwide is November 6, 2006. Louise is not eligible to immigrate now, because her priority date falls after the Final Action date in the Visa Bulletin.

Example: Assume instead that Louise from the example above is already in the United States and eligible for adjustment of status, in which case the “Dates for Filing” chart might pertain to her. In a month where USCIS has stated it will allow usage of this chart, if Louise’s priority date falls *before the date listed* she can submit her application for permanent residence even though she will still have to wait until her priority date is current according to the “Final Action Dates” chart to be approved and granted permanent residence.

Therefore, if USCIS were accepting filings based on the Dates for Filing chart in the Visa Bulletin above, Louise could file her adjustment application even though her priority date is not yet current because her priority date, September 20, 2007, falls before the date in the Dates for Filing chart on the Visa Bulletin, November 06, 2006.

Sometimes, categories show the letters “C” or “U” instead of a date. The letter “C” means that the category is current and there is no waiting for a visa, no matter when the petitioner filed the petition. The letter “U” means that the category is unavailable. All the visas in that category and country have been used up for the current year. Some visas may become available at the end of the fiscal year or the beginning of the next year’s accounting in October (USCIS operates on a fiscal year basis, which begins every October 1). Until then, the person cannot immigrate no matter when their visa petition was filed.

To Order the State Department Visa Bulletin: You can receive the monthly State Department Visa Bulletin by e-mail. There is no charge. To be placed on the Department of State’s e-mail

subscription list for the Visa Bulletin, send an e-mail to the following address: listserv@calist.state.gov and in the message body type: “Subscribe Visa-Bulletin.” To be removed from the Department of State’s e-mail subscription list for the Visa Bulletin, send an e-mail message to the same address, listserv@calist.state.gov, but in the message body type: “Signoff Visa-Bulletin.”⁷⁷

§ 1.9 Advising Your Client About When a Visa May Become Available

Predicting exactly when a visa will become available for a person waiting to immigrate under the preference system is impossible. The priority dates in the Visa Bulletin do not advance consistently because the number of people who apply in a particular preference category can vary from month to month, the number of people who are on the waiting list who still want to immigrate is unknown, and the number of derivative beneficiaries is unpredictable. Some beneficiaries may have died, changed preference categories, or changed their minds. Some may have had children, adding to the number of derivative beneficiaries ahead of you. The dates in one category may jump ahead several months from one month to the next; they may freeze for several months, or they may even go backwards (“retrogress”).

Review past Visa Bulletins and read the comments in the State Department mailing to get an idea of where a preference category may be moving, and how quickly. For example, over the course of one month, from March 1, 2021 to April 1, 2021 (comparing March 2021 and April 2021 Visa Bulletins), second preference 2B final action dates for India advanced just a few weeks, from July 22, 2015 to August 8, 2015. Some months, for some countries and categories, final action dates may advance only one or two days, or not at all. Others may jump more quickly or retrogress. However, no one can guarantee exactly what will happen. You can only make rough estimates as to when a client will be able to immigrate when there is a backlog. You must explain this uncertainty to clients. With experience, rough estimates can be made, but changing worldwide visa demands or changes in the law can create drastic changes.

PRACTICE TIP: Your client may have more than one family member who can file a petition for them. In general, when the wait between the time of filing and the time the priority date becomes current is long, consider advising your client to ask more than one family member (and perhaps all who can) to file a petition. Long waits coupled with life’s uncertainties can result in loss of the ability to immigrate after many years of waiting, for example due to death of or divorce from the petitioner. Filing two or more petitions is a relatively inexpensive insurance policy against future loss of a petition and priority date. In addition, if the petitions are in different categories, the beneficiary can also hedge their bets about which category will advance more quickly.

§ 1.10 The Child Status Protection Act (CSPA)

Recall from § 1.2 that a “child” is someone who is unmarried and under twenty-one years old. For immigration purposes, what happens when a “child” grows up and turns twenty-one while

⁷⁷ The Visa Bulletin can also be accessed through the State Department’s website at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/legal/visa-law0/visa-bulletin.html>. Additionally, a recorded message with visa final action dates can be accessed at: (202) 485-7699. The recording is normally updated by the middle of each month with information on final action dates for the following month.

still waiting to immigrate? For some, it could mean they no longer qualify to immigrate. The Child Status Protection Act (CSPA), which went into effect on August 6, 2002, was created to help with the problem of children “aging out” of their eligibility to immigrate when they turn twenty-one. This section describes how CSPA works.

A. Children of U.S. citizens

Children of U.S. citizens benefit the most from CSPA. If their parents file I-130 visa petitions for them before they turn twenty-one, they will never age out.⁷⁸ They will remain immediate relatives, even if they are no longer children as defined in the INA. Before the CSPA was enacted, their petitions would have converted automatically into first preference petitions when they turned twenty-one. By remaining immediate relatives, these beneficiaries will be able to immigrate more quickly because they do not have to wait for a priority date to become current. While these beneficiaries must remain unmarried, there is no time limitation regarding when they must actually apply for adjustment or an immigrant visa.

Such a beneficiary might prefer to convert to first preference if they have a child of her own. As discussed previously, this is because an immediate relative petition does not include derivative beneficiaries, meaning that if the parent immigrates as an immediate relative, their child cannot immigrate with them. Instead, the child would have to wait until the parent becomes a lawful permanent resident so that the parent can then petition for the child. This could take years. However, all preference petitions can have derivative beneficiaries, so if the parent immigrates through their own U.S. citizen parent, as a first preference immigrant, their child can immigrate with them.

Fortunately, the CSPA allows the immediate relative beneficiary to opt out of remaining an immediate relative upon turning twenty-one. Therefore, if the beneficiary wants, they can convert to first preference, so that when they immigrate their child will be able to immigrate with them as a derivative beneficiary.⁷⁹

The BIA has held that the CSPA also allows former immediate relatives who aged out before the CSPA became effective on August 6, 2002 to file an application for an immigrant visa or adjustment of status, if they have not already done so, no matter how long ago the visa petition was filed and approved.⁸⁰

Example: Paula, a U.S. citizen, filed an I-130 for her daughter, Isabel, on June 7, 1997. The petition was approved on December 2, 1997. Isabel did not file for adjustment of status and then turned twenty-one on January 5, 1998. The petition was at that time converted to first preference. The BIA has recognized that visa petition beneficiaries such as Isabel can qualify for CSPA. So, Isabel filed an adjustment of status application on

⁷⁸ INA § 201(f)(1).

⁷⁹ See item 30, Department of State, *Revised Cable: Child Status Protection Act: ALDAC #2*, AILA Doc. No. 03020550 (Jan. 17, 2003), <https://www.aila.org/infonet/dos-revised-cable-on-cspa>.

⁸⁰ See *In re Avila-Perez*, 24 I&N Dec. 78 (BIA 2007). See also Donald Neufeld, USCIS Acting Associate Director of Domestic Operations, *Memorandum: Revised Guidance for the Child Status Protection Act (CSPA)* (Apr. 30, 2008), https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/memos/cspa_30apr08.pdf [hereinafter “Neufeld memorandum”], included as Appendix 1-B.

August 1, 2008, although she is now thirty years old. Isabel is considered an immediate relative and is allowed to adjust her status now.

B. Children of LPR parents who naturalize while the petition is pending

If an LPR parent petitions for a child, and then naturalizes before that child turns twenty-one, the child becomes an immediate relative. Under the CSPA, the child will remain an immediate relative even if they turn twenty-one before they can immigrate.⁸¹

Sometimes an LPR petitioner will file only one I-130 for their spouse and assume that their children will immigrate in derivative status. Keep in mind that when these parents naturalize, they will need to file a separate I-130 petition for each child, since the children will lose their derivative status. What happens to those children when they turn twenty-one?

Under the CSPA, derivative children under twenty-one at the time the lawful permanent resident parent naturalizes are protected. Their age freezes on the date the parent naturalizes. They would be considered immediate relatives, even if the parent did not file new petitions for them until after they turned twenty-one; the relevant petition should be the original petition filed by the LPR parent for the spouse, with the children included as derivatives. However, the CSPA is not clear on what happens to children in this situation. The Second and Ninth circuits have held that it is the CSPA's adjusted age and not the biological age at the time their parents naturalize that governs.⁸² Unfortunately, it remains unclear in other circuits. To be on the safe side, you should make sure that once the lawful permanent resident parent naturalizes, the new petitions for the children are filed before they turn twenty-one. That way, they will be sure to retain their status as immediate relatives after they turn twenty-one.

Like other children of U.S. citizens, if the petitioner's child has a child of their own, they might not want to remain an immediate relative after turning twenty-one, because they would not be able to bring the child as a derivative beneficiary. Again, CSPA allows the beneficiary to opt out of classification as an immediate relative if they want to.⁸³

C. Married children of U.S. citizens (third preference category)

Married children benefit from the CSPA if they divorce while still under twenty-one.⁸⁴ They become immediate relatives, instead of just converting to first preference (unmarried son/daughter of a U.S. citizen). If they are over twenty-one when they divorce, then they convert to first preference.

It is not clear under the CSPA whether married children who are under twenty-one years old and are the children of U.S. citizens are eligible to opt out of converting to immediate relatives if they divorce. Obviously, if they have dependent children, they may prefer to move into the first

⁸¹ INA § 201(f)(2).

⁸² *Cuthill v. Blinken*, No. 19-3138, 2021 WL 865297, at *1 (2d Cir. Mar. 9, 2021).
Tovar v. Sessions, 882 F.3d 895 (9th Cir. 2018).

⁸³ See item 30, Department of State, *Revised Cable: Child Status Protection Act: ALDAC #2*, AILA Doc. No. 03020550 (Jan. 17, 2003), available at <https://www.aila.org/infonet/dos-revised-cable-on-cspa>.

⁸⁴ INA § 201(f)(3).

preference category upon turning twenty-one so that their children can derive status and immigrate with them.

D. Children of LPRs and of derivative beneficiaries

Before CSPA, the children of LPRs who turned twenty-one would convert from the 2A to the 2B preference category. Derivative beneficiaries, such as the children of fourth preference (brother/sister of USC) beneficiaries, would age out and lose their ability to immigrate before CSPA.

The CSPA changes this, but it is much less generous, and much more complicated, for the children of lawful permanent residents and other derivative beneficiaries than it is for the children of U.S. citizens.

You have to look at the biological age of the derivative beneficiary at the time the visa becomes available. If the beneficiary is over twenty-one, they still might qualify, depending how long the I-130 was pending.⁸⁵

Following the formula outlined below, you must deduct the amount of time the petition was pending from the beneficiary's actual age on the date a visa became available. The number you come up with is the CSPA age, or "calculated age."⁸⁶

The formula is as follows:

1. First, calculate the time the petition was *pending*: the amount of time that elapsed between the **petition's filing date** and the **approval date**

APPROVAL DATE *minus* FILING DATE = TIME PENDING (go to step 2)

Example: Satvir was born on May 23, 1989 in India. He was a derivative beneficiary on his father's fourth preference visa petition. The visa petition was filed February 11, 2002. It was approved on July 28, 2005.

The petition was pending three years, five months, and seventeen days (or 1,263 days).

2. Second, deduct the **amount of time the petition was pending** (the number you came up with at step 1) from the **beneficiary's actual age on the date the visa becomes available***

* The *date the visa becomes available* is either:

(a) the first day of the visa bulletin month on which the priority date becomes current, or

(b) the petition approval date, *whichever occurs later*.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ INA § 203(h)(1)(A)-(B).

⁸⁶ It is worth noting that some people may benefit from an extra 45 days towards their CSPA age, based on the Patriot Act. If someone is the beneficiary of a petition filed before September 11, 2001, they remain eligible for an extra 45 days after turning 21. An even smaller number of people may be eligible for a 90-day extension. For more information, see Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001 (USA PATRIOT Act), Pub. L. No. 107-56, 115 Stat. 272 (2001).

⁸⁷ See Neufeld memorandum mentioned above in Footnote 83 and included here as Appendix 1-B.

BENEFICIARY'S ACTUAL AGE *minus* TIME PETITION PENDING = CSPA AGE

Example: Satvir, from the example above, turned twenty-one on May 23, 2010. The visa petition priority date went current on December 1, 2014. At that time, he was twenty-five years old. Through CSPA, he can subtract three years, five months, and seventeen days, so that his CSPA age will be twenty-two years (plus some months and days). Unfortunately, he will not be able to qualify as a “child” because his CSPA age is over twenty-one.

The age you get from this formula is the CSPA age; if it is under twenty-one, the beneficiary may continue to qualify as a “child” under the INA. There are online calculators that can help you calculate the number of days elapsed between calendar dates.

1. *Caveat: The one-year requirement*

The CSPA “calculated” age has an expiration date and is not valid indefinitely. In order to be protected by the CSPA age, *an individual must “seek to acquire” lawful permanent resident status within one year of the visa availability date (the date when the priority date became current)*. In other words, if a 2A beneficiary has already turned twenty-one and their priority date becomes current on October 1, 2017, you then calculate their CSPA age and see if it comes out to under twenty-one. However, if for example a beneficiary’s CSPA age is eighteen, this beneficiary does not have another three years of protection under the CSPA, as their CSPA age would suggest. Instead, they must comply with the one-year requirement and must seek to acquire status as a lawful permanent resident before October 1, 2018.

In limited situations, USCIS officers may exercise discretion to consider whether someone failed to “seek to acquire” within one year of visa availability if due to extraordinary circumstances. The criteria for “extraordinary circumstances” are based on asylum law in the context of the general requirement that asylum applicants must file within one year of their arrival in the United States. Examples of extraordinary circumstances are serious illness or disability, legal disability, ineffective assistance of counsel if certain requirements are met, or death or serious illness of the immigrant’s attorney or immediate family member during the one-year period.⁸⁸

For those who are going to adjust their status, the clearest and safest way to comply with the “sought to acquire” provision is to file the I-485 adjustment application within one year of the date the visa becomes available. For those who are going to immigrate through consular processing, this means that the beneficiary should either submit a completed Form DS-230 or DS-260 to the NVC (see **Chapter 6**), or for derivative beneficiaries of a principal beneficiary who has immigrated, submit a Form I-824 to the Service Center that processed the I-130 within one year of the date the visa becomes available (see **Chapter 2**).

PRACTICE TIP: If a person is a derivative beneficiary, the important date to take action and seek to acquire residency is within one year from when the visa became available. Remember that the date the visa becomes available is defined as either the date the priority date (for the principal beneficiary and original visa category) becomes current or the date the visa petition is approved, whichever is later. The derivative beneficiary should therefore NOT wait to take action to apply to immigrate until after the principal parent beneficiary immigrates, which may occur more than

⁸⁸ See 7 USCIS-PM 7 G(3).

one year after the priority date becomes current. If the beneficiary is then over twenty-one and has not “sought to acquire” residency within the one-year period, it will likely then be too late. Although the derivative cannot actually precede the principal to the United States as an immigrant or adjust status first, the derivative can still take the steps necessary to comply with the “seek to acquire” residency requirement.

If the beneficiary did not file the I-485 or consular processing documents within one year, it is possible that other actions may be sufficient to meet the “has sought to acquire” residency requirement, such as seeking legal counsel.⁸⁹

Example: Pedro, who is an LPR, filed an I-130 for his son Samuel on October 8, 2018. It was approved exactly one year later, on October 8, 2019. It is now November 1, 2020, the priority date became current, and Samuel is now twenty-one. Samuel is in the United States and intends to apply for adjustment of status (see **Chapter 3**). Since USCIS took one year to approve the petition, you can deduct one year from his current age. For purposes of immigrating, therefore, he is only twenty, and he can still immigrate as a 2A beneficiary, even though he is really over twenty-one. However, if he does not file his adjustment application before November 1, 2021, he will lose the right to immigrate in the 2A preference category and will automatically become a 2B beneficiary. Since the priority date for 2B is not current, he will have to continue to wait to immigrate.

The same rule applies to derivative beneficiaries in other preference categories.

Example: Jane, a U.S. citizen, filed a third preference petition for her married son Mark on August 1, 2013. It was approved three years later, in August of 2017. Mark’s wife Wanda and minor daughter Diana were derivatives. On November 1, 2020, Diana became twenty-two, and the priority date is current. Under the CSPA, if you deduct the three years that the petition was pending from Diana’s true age, twenty-two, the number you get is nineteen. Therefore, Diana can remain included in Mark’s petition *as long as she files for adjustment or consular processing before November 1, 2021*. If she fails to file before November 1, 2021, Diana will lose her derivative status, and the only way she will be able to immigrate is through a separate petition filed by her father or mother after they have immigrated and obtained status.

E. Recapturing a priority date when the CSPA fails to protect a derivative beneficiary

Section 203(h)(3) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) provides that if a derivative beneficiary is not protected by the CSPA (for example, because they failed to comply with the one-year requirement to “seek to acquire” status), the beneficiary’s I-130 petition shall automatically be converted to the appropriate category and the beneficiary shall retain the original priority date issued upon receipt of the original petition.

However, in the case of *Matter of Wang*, 25 I. & N. Dec 28 (BIA 2009), the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) agreed with the USCIS’ interpretation of the law, stating that the retention of a priority date is limited to when the **same petitioner** files a new I-130 for the **same beneficiary** in the **same preference category**. In other words, the retention of the priority date only applies to F-2A derivatives who were first included as derivative beneficiaries in an I-130

⁸⁹ See Ji Young Kim, A77 828 503 (BIA Dec. 20, 2004).

petition filed by their lawful permanent resident parent on behalf of their other parent, who was the principal beneficiary. When that derivative beneficiary child ages out, the petitioning LPR parent can file a new I-130 on their behalf; and the now adult son or daughter of an LPR may “recapture” or “retain” the priority date of the initial I-130.

The BIA held that this protection does not apply to derivatives in other preference categories, such as children of the sons and daughters of U.S. citizens in the third preference category or children of the siblings of U.S. citizens in the fourth preference category. In late 2014 the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the BIA’s interpretation, in *Scialabba v. Cuellar de Osorio*.⁹⁰

Example: In 1994, Abdoulaye, a U.S. citizen, filed an I-130 for his sister, Fanta, in which she included her child, Bintou as a derivative beneficiary. However, Bintou aged out and was not otherwise protected by the CSPA. Unfortunately, Bintou will not be able to recapture or “retain” the priority date of the I-130 petition her uncle filed on behalf of her mother in 1994.

F. Opt out provisions under CSPA

For complicated reasons, the first preference category is currently more backlogged than the second preference 2B category for beneficiaries from Mexico, although generally one would assume that the wait would get shorter rather than longer when an LPR parent naturalizes and a son or daughter over twenty-one moves from 2B to first preference. Previously, the first preference backlog was much worse, and primarily affected beneficiaries from the Philippines. Because when their parents naturalized these sons and daughters actually extended the time they needed to wait for their visas to become current, the CSPA allows beneficiaries in this situation to elect whether they want to automatically convert to the first preference or opt out and stay in the 2B category.⁹¹

USCIS advises that persons seeking to opt out file a request in writing with the USCIS office that has jurisdiction over the beneficiary’s residence. This request must be submitted by the beneficiary themselves, not the petitioner. The Officer in Charge of the USCIS Office will provide written notification of a decision to both the beneficiary and the Department of State’s visa issuance unit. Once the beneficiary’s request is approved, the beneficiary’s eligibility for family-based immigration will be determined as if the beneficiary’s parent never naturalized. If the beneficiary is filing an adjustment of status application, this request can be submitted with that application. The age of the child on the date of the parent’s naturalization remains their age for CSPA purposes.⁹²

Of course, if the children were under twenty-one at the time the parent naturalized, then they would become immediate relatives upon their parents’ naturalization and would be able to immigrate immediately. Although this part of the CSPA was originally designed to remedy a

⁹⁰ *Scialabba v. Cuella de Osorio*, 573 U.S. 41 (2014).

⁹¹ CSPA § 6, amending and adding INA § 204(k); see Appendix 1-B.

⁹² See Joe Cuddihy, USCIS Director of International Affairs, *Interoffice Memorandum: Section 6 of the Child Status Protection Act* (Mar. 23, 2004), https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/memos/cspa_sec6_32304.pdf (included as Appendix 1-C).

dilemma faced by people from the Philippines, who used to be far more backlogged in first preference than 2B category, in reality it is not limited to nationals of the Philippines.

G. Children of asylees and refugees

The spouse and unmarried children of refugees and asylees may enter the United States as derivatives. Before, if the child turned twenty-one before the parent was granted asylum or refugee status, the child could not be a derivative beneficiary of the parent. In certain situations, the CSPA allows such children to be derivative beneficiaries. There are several groups of children whose status could be affected by the CSPA. These groups are:

1. ***Unmarried Child in the United States and Under Twenty-One When the Parent's Asylum Application Is Filed, and Included in That Application:*** If an unmarried child was included on their parent's asylum application at time of filing or added later, and that application was filed at any time, but no decision on the application was final until on or after the CSPA effective date of August 6, 2002, if the child is living in the United States at the time of adjudication of the parent's asylum application, the child will be able to derive asylee status and later adjust their status to that of a lawful permanent resident, even if they later turn twenty-one. It does not matter when the child was included or added to their parent's application, as long as they were added before the application was adjudicated and were living in the United States at the time of adjudication. It also does not matter whether they turn twenty-one before or after the approval of the asylum application, or before or after they apply for adjustment of status.
2. ***Unmarried Child in the United States and Under Twenty-One When the Parent's Asylum Application Is Filed, but Not Included in That Application:*** If an unmarried child who is living in the United States was not included on their parents' asylum application, the principal must file an asylee relative petition (Form I-730) within two years of the date the asylum application is granted in order for the child to derive asylum status from the parent. For those asylum applications filed on or after August 6, 2002, these children will be able to derive asylee status and later adjust status to that of a lawful permanent resident so long as the asylum application was filed before the child turned twenty-one, and the I-730 is filed within two years of the asylum grant.⁹³
3. ***Unmarried Child Outside the United States:*** If an unmarried child is not living in the United States, and a parent files an asylum application on or after August 6, 2002, the child will be able to derive asylee status and later adjust their status to that of a lawful permanent resident so long as the asylum application was filed before the child turned twenty-one and the parent filed or files the I-730 within two years of obtaining asylum status.
4. ***Asylum Applications Filed before August 6, 2002:*** If a parent's asylum petition was granted before August 6, 2002, but they had filed an I-730 relative petition that was still

⁹³ CSPA § 4; 8 CFR § 208.3(a).

pending on that date, the asylee's children will be protected under CSPA and remain eligible for derivative asylum status even after they turn twenty-one.⁹⁴

For a more detailed discussion of this topic, see the ILRC manual *Essentials of Asylum Law* (ILRC 2020).

H. Effective date of CSPA

The CSPA was signed into law on August 6, 2002. Therefore, it applies to *all* petitions filed on or after that date. It also applies to certain petitions that were filed before August 6, 2002 but that were approved on or after that date, including petitions that were denied before August 6, 2002 if an appeal or motion to reopen was granted after that date. In addition, those beneficiaries who had approved visa petitions but no adjustment of status application “pending” on August 6, 2002 who later filed applications for adjustment were initially denied or discouraged from applying. The BIA has clarified that such beneficiaries are protected by the CSPA, finding that the CSPA does not require that an adjustment application be pending on the date of enactment if a visa petition was already approved.⁹⁵ Those beneficiaries who otherwise qualified for CSPA may now file motions to reopen or reconsider their denied adjustment applications without fee, or make their initial application now, in certain cases.⁹⁶

However, current policy is that the CSPA does not apply to petitions approved before August 6, 2002 if there has been a final determination on the immigrant visa application or adjustment of status application before that date. According to the USCIS, a final determination for purposes of an adjustment of status application means approval or denial by the USCIS or EOIR. However, the Ninth Circuit has ruled that there is no final determination if an appeal is pending in federal court.⁹⁷ At this time, USCIS is only applying this rule in the Ninth Circuit.

If there has been no final determination of the immigrant visa or adjustment of status application as of August 6, 2002, the CSPA will apply to petitions approved before August 6, 2002 if the dependent aged out on or after August 6, 2002 and the visa became available on or after August 7, 2001.⁹⁸ For those who aged out before August 6, 2002, the policy is that the CSPA only applies if an application for adjustment of status or for an immigrant visa was submitted before aging out. There is some dispute about whether this USCIS/State Department interpretation is correct, but at this writing this is how the CSPA is being implemented.

§ 1.11 “V” Visas for the Spouses and Children of Lawful Permanent Residents

As part of the LIFE Act, passed in 2000, a new nonimmigrant visa category, the “V” visa, was created for the spouses and minor children of lawful permanent residents in an attempt to

⁹⁴ See Yates, William R., “The Child Status Protection Act – Children of Asylees and Refugees, Memorandum for Regional Directors, Service Center Directors, District Directors,” August 17, 2004.

⁹⁵ See *Matter of Avila-Perez*, 24 I. & N. Dec. 78 (BIA 2007).

⁹⁶ See Appendix 1-C.

⁹⁷ *Padash v. INS*, 358 F.3d 1161 (9th Cir. 2004).

⁹⁸ See Appendix 1-B and Appendix 1-C.

ameliorate the family visa backlog.⁹⁹ More than twenty years later, the V visa is now fairly rare, however it is possible you may encounter one of these cases.

Spouses and children (unmarried and under twenty-one) of lawful permanent residents *whose family-based preference 2A visa petitions were filed on or before December 21, 2000* and who had been waiting in the priority date backlog¹⁰⁰ for three years or more were eligible to apply for a V visa. The V visa allowed these second preference beneficiaries to reside and work in the United States until their priority dates became current.¹⁰¹ Priority dates for all countries of chargeability under family-based category 2A for spouses and minor children of lawful permanent residents have now passed the December 21, 2000 cutoff date. As a result, most V visa holders have had immigrant visa availability for some time. If a V visa beneficiary has not yet attained permanent residency, it will be important to investigate whether or not the I-130 petition is still viable, or whether it has been “terminated” by the National Visa Center for lack of contact or action by the visa petition beneficiary. See **Chapter 6**.

Example: Carmelo, a lawful permanent resident, petitioned for his wife Josefina in November 1999. In November 2002, Josefina was allowed to apply for a V visa thereby granting her permission to reside and work in the United States while she waited for her priority date to become current.

In order to qualify, the beneficiary has to be eligible for the V visa when they reach the three-year mark, not just as of December 21, 2000.

Example: Carmelo filed for his daughter in November 2000. Carmelo’s daughter was twenty years old at the time. In November 2003, she would have been waiting for three years for her visa petition to become current, however by that date she was over twenty-one. Therefore, she will no longer be eligible to receive the V visa.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Originally, USCIS said that children in V visa status would lose eligibility for the V visa once they turned twenty-one. The Ninth Circuit held, however, that a child who initially qualified for a V visa remains eligible for V status once they turn twenty-one.¹⁰² Although USCIS was only legally required to follow this case in the Ninth Circuit, it made the decision to follow it all over the country.¹⁰³ Therefore, thanks to this case, people who turn twenty-one while in V visa status are eligible to remain in that status until they are able to immigrate. They still must be under twenty-one when they apply for the V visa the first time.

⁹⁹ See § 1.3, for information on the “K” visa.

¹⁰⁰ See § 1.5, to understand preference categories and priority dates.

¹⁰¹ INA § 101(a)(15)(V).

¹⁰² *Akhtar v. Burzynski*, 384 F.3d 1193 (9th Cir. 2004).

¹⁰³ See Terrance M. O’Reilly, USCIS Director of Field Operations, *Interoffice Memorandum: Adjudication of Form I-539 for V-2 and V-3 extension* (Jan. 10, 2005), <https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/memos/v2v3extn011005.pdf> (“[USCIS] will apply the decision [*Akhtar*] nation-wide...”) [hereinafter “O’Reilly memorandum”]; Michael Aytes, USCIS Associate Director of Domestic Operations, *Interoffice Memorandum: Clarification of Aging Out Provisions as They Affect Preference Relatives and Immediate Family Members Under The Child Status Protection Act Section 6 And Form I-539 Adjudications for V Status* (June 14, 2006), <https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/memos/cspa6andv061406.pdf> [hereinafter “Aytes memorandum”].

Individuals who are eligible to request a V visa can do so either at the consulate in the country where they reside, or if living in the United States (with or without status) from USCIS. If processing at the consulate the applicant should request the V visa at the same consulate that would have jurisdiction over the applicant's immigrant visa. If living in the United States without status, the applicant should *not* travel abroad for processing, as that could trigger grounds of inadmissibility which might later affect eligibility to adjust status to permanent residency. See **Chapter 7**.

A. Inadmissibility and the “V” visa

By statute, the three- and ten-year unlawful presence bars of inadmissibility do not apply to V visa applicants, even though these bars will apply later when the V visa holder applies for adjustment of status or an immigrant visa. All other grounds of inadmissibility, however, still apply. The V visa is a nonimmigrant visa. If a nonimmigrant is inadmissible, they can request a waiver of inadmissibility under INA § 212(d). The nonimmigrant inadmissibility waiver can waive any ground of inadmissibility in the discretion of USCIS upon recommendation of the State Department. V visa applicants, as nonimmigrant applicants, should be able to receive waivers pursuant to § 212(d). Although this issue is not yet settled, we encourage advocates to argue that USCIS should grant a § 212(d) waiver of a ground of inadmissibility for individuals seeking nonimmigrant visas even though a waiver of that same ground of inadmissibility would not be available for individuals seeking immigrant visas.

B. Extending the “V” status or “V” visa

Customs and Border Protection (CBP) may grant persons a two-year stay if they are entering the United States with a V visa issued by the consulate.¹⁰⁴ The authorized stay is designated on form I-94, the white card that is stapled into a person's passport upon admission to the United States. However, CBP may authorize less than two years when the person's passport is valid for a shorter period. If your client was given less than two years for no apparent legitimate reason, they may be able to have the local Deferred Inspection office remedy this.

Persons who enter the United States with the V visa or who are issued the V visa status from the USCIS will need to extend their stay before their current stay expires. If they are still in status, they can file the Form I-539, up to 120 days before the expiration of their status.¹⁰⁵ They should be able to include derivatives and other co-applicant family members on the Supplement A form thus avoiding additional filing fees. Include an I-765 and filing fee if seeking renewed work authorization.

If the client already has let the authorized stay on the I-94 expire, they will still be filing the Form I-539 but will not be asking for an extension. Instead, they will be filing for a new application for the V status. They will indicate “V status” on the line asking for the new status they are requesting. They will need to submit the medical exam results and fingerprint service fee. V visa or V status will not be extended if the applicant has applied after the I-94 has expired.

¹⁰⁴ 8 CFR § 214.15(g).

¹⁰⁵ Go to the USCIS webpage for the I-539 form, at <https://www.uscis.gov/i-539>, for instructions on filling out the I-539 and Supplement A and where to send the completed form.

If the “V” status is expiring and an immigrant visa number is available, the V nonimmigrant is allowed one, six-month extension to file for the adjustment. A V nonimmigrant who has filed an application for adjustment of status (Form I-485) is still eligible for an extension of V nonimmigrant status as long as the adjustment application remains pending.

C. Age-outs

In January 2005, USCIS reversed its prior policy of not renewing visas for children who entered with V-2 visas (children of LPRs with separate I-130s filed on their behalf) or V-3 visas (derivatives) once they turned twenty-one.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, all children granted a V-2 or V-3 visa can continue to receive extensions of status as long as their application is not terminated under 8 CFR § 214.15(j) and regardless of their age. Children who had previously had a V-2 or V-3 status and whose renewals were denied based on turning twenty-one can file a new application for an extension and it will be granted starting from the date that the previous status expired.

If a child who is a derivative beneficiary of a second preference spouse turns twenty-one, a separate petition is required. In this situation, the aged-out derivative beneficiary can keep the same priority date if the same petitioner files the new petition.

For purposes of the three- and ten-year bars, children do not begin accumulating unlawful presence until they turn eighteen, nor is unlawful presence relevant for periods prior to April 1, 1997. Children who enter the United States for the first time with the V visa, therefore, do not begin to accumulate unlawful presence until their I-94 expires or they turn eighteen, whichever is later, for purposes of the three- and ten-year unlawful presence bars. However, they will begin to accrue unlawful presence after their I-94 expires for purposes of the “permanent bar” in INA § 212(a)(9)(C), which does not exempt children (see **Chapter 7**).

V visa holders who file a timely application for an extension do not accrue unlawful presence until a decision is made on the application. If they are approved for another two years, then they never acquire unlawful presence; if they are denied, unlawful presence begins on the date of the denial.

Those who file new applications for V visa status after the expiration of their original V visa status accrue unlawful presence until the new application is granted. Spouses and children between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one who were illegally here when they filed for V status in the United States may have already acquired enough unlawful presence to trigger the bars to admission. Unlawful presence accrued either before or after the V status still counts toward the bars. If they have been unlawfully present in the United States for a continuous period of more than 180 days, then they trigger the three-year bar when they leave the United States. If they have been in the United States continuously for one year or more, then they can trigger the ten-year bar when they leave the United States. Please see **Chapter 7** for more information on this topic.

One way to avoid accumulating unlawful presence is to ensure that the person does not leave the United States before obtaining permanent residency, including leaving the United States to apply for a V visa abroad, which is unnecessary. See **Chapter 3** on Adjustment of Status. There is a

¹⁰⁶ See O’Reilly memorandum.

waiver of the three- and ten-year bars available to those who have U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident spouses or parents.

D. Termination of “V” status

If the petitioner becomes a U.S. citizen while the beneficiary is in V status then the spouse and children, including derivative children, will no longer qualify for a V visa, if they then become immediate relatives. However, if the V-2 or V-3 child turned twenty-one before the parent petitioner naturalized and does not otherwise qualify as an immediate relative under the CSPA, then the child (now a “son or daughter”) can stay in V status until an immigrant visa becomes available and they are then able to apply for adjustment of status. Any V-2 or V-3 son or daughter who was denied an extension solely because of the naturalization of the petitioner may now again request an extension through a request letter or motion to reopen without sending a fee to the National Benefits Center.¹⁰⁷ For those spouses and children who do convert to immediate relatives, V status will expire when their authorized period of admission ends.

§ 1.12 Protection for the Beneficiaries of a Family Petition When a Qualifying Relative Dies

The INA was amended in October 2009 to add § 204(l), which relates to the adjudication of immediate relative or family-based immigrant visa petitions, and all related applications, upon the death of the qualifying relative—that is, upon the death of the petitioner or the principal beneficiary. According to § 204(l), both the principal and the derivative beneficiaries of a pending or approved I-130 visa petition (whether in the immediate relative category or one of the preference categories) are protected should the petitioner or the principal applicant die before the final adjustment of status application is adjudicated under certain conditions. Before § 204(l), if the petitioner or primary beneficiary died then the I-130 petition would be revoked. Now, the death of an I-130 petitioner does not revoke the underlying petition, and neither does the death of the principal applicant revoke the derivative beneficiary’s application, if certain conditions are met.¹⁰⁸

A. Residence requirement for qualifying beneficiaries¹⁰⁹

In order to qualify for this protection, the beneficiary of a pending or approved I-130 petition must have resided in the United States when the qualifying relative died and must continue to reside in the United States on the date the decision on the pending petition or application is made. This does not mean that the beneficiary must have been physically present in the United States when the qualifying relative died, but simply that the beneficiary’s actual residence was in the United States. Additionally, if any one of the beneficiaries of a petition meets this residence requirement, then all the beneficiaries meet it as well; it is not necessary for each beneficiary to meet the residence requirement on their own. Therefore, if it is the principal beneficiary who has died, the petitioner may continue to seek approval of the petition so long as at least one derivative beneficiary meets the residence requirements. However, note that this does not give derivative

¹⁰⁷ See Aytes memorandum at 6–7.

¹⁰⁸ See INA 204(l); see also Appendix 1-A.

¹⁰⁹ See Appendix 1-A.

beneficiaries any right to the petition. The petitioner continues to retain their right to withdraw the petition at any time.

If a person has obtained an adjudication of a petition under this new provision of the INA but does not qualify for adjustment of status, they may leave the United States to undergo consular processing.

B. Waivers of inadmissibility¹¹⁰

This protection when a qualifying relative dies extends not only to the underlying I-130 visa petition but also to the adjustment of status and any other related application based on that I-130 petition, such as an application for a waiver of inadmissibility. Therefore, USCIS has the discretion to approve an inadmissibility waiver application, or any other form of relief from inadmissibility, regardless of whether or not the qualifying relationship necessary to qualify for the waiver application no longer exists as a result of the relative's death. Additionally, it is not required that the waiver application was pending when the qualifying relative died. The waiver application can be filed after the petitioner's death as long as the surviving beneficiary qualifies under INA § 204(l). The death of the qualifying relative will be deemed to be the equivalent of a finding of extreme hardship.

C. The affidavit of support

The death of the qualifying relative does not relieve the beneficiary of the requirement to have a sponsor file the Form I-864 Affidavit of Support.¹¹¹ Ordinarily, the petitioner is the person who must file the Affidavit of Support, promising to financially support the beneficiary. If the sponsor on the Affidavit of Support dies, another individual who qualifies as a "substitute sponsor" must submit a Form I-864 under INA § 213A.

D. Motion to reopen and humanitarian reinstatement in case of a denial¹¹²

Section 204(l) refers to immigration applications when a qualifying relative dies applies to any petition or application adjudicated on or after October 28, 2009, even if it was filed before that date. For petitions or applications that were denied before that date due to the death of either the petitioner or the principal beneficiary, the surviving beneficiary may file an untimely motion to reopen with the proper filing fee and request that the pending petition or application be adjudicated according to INA § 204(l).¹¹³ Additionally, the USCIS has found that it would be appropriate to reinstate the approval of an immediate-relative or family-based petition that was automatically revoked upon the death of the petitioner or the principal beneficiary before October 28, 2009, if the beneficiary was residing in the United States at the time of the relative's death and continues to do so.¹¹⁴ Also, if a petition or application that should have been adjudicated in

¹¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹¹ *Id.*; see also Chapter 4, § 4.4 below for detailed information on the Affidavit of Support.

¹¹² See Appendix 1-A.

¹¹³ See 7 USCIS-PM A 9(C), <https://www.uscis.gov/policy-manual/volume-7-part-a-chapter-9> for complete guidance on this issue.

¹¹⁴ See Appendix 1-A; 8 CFR § 205.1(a)(3)(i)(C)(2); AFM § 21.2(h)(1)(C), <https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/policy-manual-afm/afm21-external.pdf>.

compliance with INA § 204(l) was denied on or after October 28, 2009, USCIS must reopen the case on its own motion for a new decision.

If the beneficiary does not meet the residence requirement of INA § 204(l), the USCIS continues to have authority to reinstate the petition.

E. Widows and widowers

Following from INA § 204(l) described above, as of October 28, 2009 the death of a petitioning spouse is no longer cause for revocation of a family-based immigrant visa petition. Instead, if the U.S. citizen petitioning spouse dies while the visa petition is pending, the Form I-130 is automatically converted to a widow(er)'s Form I-360, and the widow or widower becomes a self-petitioner.¹¹⁵ This is so even when the citizen and their noncitizen spouse had only been married less than two years when the citizen died.¹¹⁶ Furthermore, in that case, the noncitizen will be granted lawful permanent residence and not conditional residence. Therefore, they will not be required to file an I-751 Petition to Remove the Conditions on Residence.¹¹⁷ However, if the widow or widower remarries before becoming an LPR, they lose eligibility for adjustment based on the pending or approved I-360.

NOTE: Regarding previously approved I-130's. Prior to enactment of this new provision in the INA, some courts were allowing widows and widowers of U.S. citizens to immigrate based upon an I-130 petition already filed by the deceased spouse, even though the petitioner died before the couple was married for two years.¹¹⁸ In light of the new law, USCIS will honor those approvals and the subsequent adjustment applications and will not seek to rescind a grant of adjustment based on the death of the U.S. citizen petitioning spouse.¹¹⁹

§ 1.13 When Is a Visa Petition Terminated or No Longer Valid?

A. Automatic revocation of a visa petition

Approval of a family-based visa petition is automatically revoked, retroactive to the original approval date, in the following scenarios:¹²⁰

1. If the beneficiary fails to apply for an immigrant visa within one year after being notified that a visa is available and also fails to prove, within two years of the notice, that the failure to apply was due to circumstances beyond the beneficiary's control; or

¹¹⁵ See Appendix 1-A.

¹¹⁶ See § 1.3 for more information on what happens to widows and widowers with K-1 or K-3 visas, and to their dependents.

¹¹⁷ See Chapter 5 for more on I-751 and conditional permanent residency.

¹¹⁸ See *Lockhart v. Napolitano*, 561 F.3d 611 (6th Cir. 2009); see also *Freeman v. Gonzales*, 444 F.3d 1031 (9th Cir. 2006); *Neang Chea Taing v. Napolitano*, 567 F.3d 19 (1st Cir. 2009) (agreeing with the result reached by the Ninth and Sixth Circuits); *Hootkins v. Napolitano*, 645 F. Supp. 2d 856, 863 (C.D. Cal. 2009).

¹¹⁹ See Appendix 1-A.

¹²⁰ 8 CFR §§ 205.1(a)(1), (3).

2. If the petitioner files a formal notice of withdrawal with any Service officer who is authorized to approve such petitions.

Approval of the visa petition is also automatically revoked if any of the following events happen in a consular processing case before the beneficiary enters the United States or, in an adjustment of status case, before the final adjudication of the adjustment application:

3. For the beneficiary of a spousal petition, if the underlying marriage terminates by divorce or annulment;¹²¹
4. For a person granted second preference status as the unmarried son or daughter of a lawful permanent resident, if that son or daughter marries.¹²²

Example: Juan, an LPR, petitions his daughter, Patricia (family-based 2B). Patricia gets married. Because LPRs cannot immigrate married sons or daughters, the petition is terminated.

5. If a petitioner legally terminates their status as a lawful permanent resident, except when such termination occurs through the petitioner's naturalization.

Example: Carlos, a lawful permanent resident, petitions his wife, Lorena (family-based 2A preference). Carlos is convicted and deported for an aggravated felony. The petition for Lorena is terminated.

Example: Carlos, a lawful permanent resident, petitions his wife, Lorena (family-based 2A preference.) Carlos becomes a U.S. citizen. The petition is *not* terminated because Lorena becomes an immediate relative.

Exception: A self-petitioning abused spouse or child does *not* lose eligibility if the lawful permanent resident abuser loses permanent resident status due to an incident of domestic violence and the self-petition is filed within two years of the loss of status of the abuser.¹²³

For adjustment of status, the petition is automatically revoked when the circumstance that triggers revocation occurs before a final decision is made on the application. In consular processing cases, the petition is revoked if the circumstance occurs before the beneficiary or self-petitioner commences their journey to the United States.¹²⁴

Example: Carolina, an LPR, petitioned a number of years ago for her unmarried son, Austin, who lives in Mexico (preference category 2B). Austin goes to his consular appointment and his application is approved. After getting his visa but before going to the United States, he gets married to his girlfriend, Barbara. Austin's visa application is

¹²¹ Note that if the beneficiary is or was the victim of "battery or extreme cruelty" at the hands of the petitioner, they may file a Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) self-petition on Form I-360 per INA § 204(a)(1)(A)(iii) and recapture the priority date from the I-130 previously filed by the petitioner.

¹²² See 8 CFR § 205.1(a)(3)(i)(I); USCIS-AFM § 20.3(a).

¹²³ INA § 204(a)(1)(B)(ii)(II)(aa)(CC)(aaa).

¹²⁴ 8 CFR § 205.1(a)(3).

revoked because he no longer qualifies as a 2B beneficiary now that he is no longer the *unmarried* son of an LPR.¹²⁵

EFFECT OF AN ANNULMENT: Depending on the reasons for annulment and on the pertinent state law, an annulment may “relate back” to the date of marriage as if the marriage had never happened.¹²⁶ The courts apply this principle for immigration purposes where it promotes justice and the intended outcome of the law.¹²⁷ For example, in the case of a marriage between a USC or LPR and a noncitizen, a retroactively applied annulment of the marriage forming the basis of the immigrant petition may lead to the revocation of the petition and the denial of any subsequent application for adjustment or for an immigrant visa.¹²⁸ The main factor considered by the courts is whether the retroactive application of the annulment would serve the interest of justice. Therefore, where there is no evidence that a marriage was entered into for the purposes of applying for an immigration benefit, an annulment may not be applied retroactively.¹²⁹ Similarly, the annulment of a prior marriage may or may not be applied retroactively for purposes of validating the current marriage that is the basis for an immigrant petition, depending on whether or not the courts find that the annulment was sought for the purposes of gaining an immigration benefit.¹³⁰

Example: Karthik, a USC, files an I-130 for his wife, Sureikha. After Sureikha enters the United States and becomes an LPR, she and Karthik obtain an annulment. The annulment may or may not be given retroactive effect, causing the revocation of Sureikha’s LPR status, depending on whether or not it is determined that the marriage was entered into for immigration purposes.

The case is similar for the beneficiary of a second preference immigrant visa petition. The son or daughter of an LPR must be unmarried at the time the LPR parent files the immigrant petition and until the beneficiary becomes a lawful permanent resident.¹³¹ Such a visa petition may, therefore, be revoked if the beneficiary son or daughter married after the LPR filed the visa petition, even if the marriage was later annulled. Whether or not the annulment is given retroactive effect may depend on whether or not it is found to have been sought in order to grant an immigration benefit

¹²⁵ *But see Corniel-Rodriguez v. INS*, 532 F.2d 301 (2nd Cir. 1976) (holding that the visa petition was not revoked where the beneficiary was not given either oral or written notice that marriage would invalidate her second preference petition). *See also* Effect of an Annulment, below. Also, a 212(k) waiver may be effective in a case where the visa beneficiary has already entered the United States with the visa and did not have knowledge of their own ineligibility at the time they were inspected and admitted.

¹²⁶ *Sefton v. Sefton*, 45 Cal.2d 872 (1955).

¹²⁷ *See* Civ. Code, §§ 84, 85, 86.

¹²⁸ *See Matter of Samedi*, 14 I. & N. Dec. 625 (BIA 1974); *Matter of V--*, 6 I. & N. Dec. 153 (BIA 1954); *McCreath v. Holder*, 573 F.3d 38 (1st Cir. 2009); *Nakamoto v. Ashcroft*, 363 F.3d 874 (9th Cir. 2004).

¹²⁹ *See Matter of T--*, 8 I. & N. Dec. 493 (BIA 1959).

¹³⁰ *See Matter of Magana*, 17 I. & N. Dec. 111 (BIA 1979) (BIA refused to give retroactive effect to a prior marriage, finding that the beneficiary misrepresented his marital history for purposes of obtaining an immigrant visa); *see also Matter of Astorga*, 17 I. & N. Dec. 1 (BIA 1979) (BIA upheld retroactive application of annulment of previous marriage, finding that the beneficiary did not obtain immigration benefit through fraud or misrepresentation).

¹³¹ *See* USCIS-AFM § 20.3(a).

to the beneficiary. An annulment will, therefore, not be given retroactive effect in order to cure an otherwise invalid application for LPR status.¹³²

Example: Aminata, an LPR, files an I-130 petition for her unmarried daughter, Binta. Binta subsequently marries, while she waits for her priority date to become current. When an immigrant visa becomes available for her, she goes to her consular interview and enters the United States. Once in the United States, she obtains an annulment of her marriage. Her visa petition may be revoked, and she may be placed in removal proceedings.

There is no provision for appeal of an automatic revocation of a visa petition, and no requirement that USCIS give notice of revocation or take any other action to effect the revocation of a petition that is automatically revoked.

B. Revocation upon notice

In addition to automatic revocation, USCIS may revoke the approval of an immediate relative or family-sponsored visa petition on grounds other than those specified above.¹³³ In such cases, USCIS must give notice to the petitioner, and the petitioner must have the opportunity to oppose the proposed revocation. If USCIS decides to revoke the petition approval, the agency must explain the reasons for the revocation.

In the consular processing context, the action to revoke the petition may be initiated by the consular office due to information acquired during their review of the petition or during an interview with the beneficiary. In that case, the consular office returns the petition to USCIS with a memo explaining the reasons why they believe the petition should be revoked.¹³⁴ The consular officer may suspend action in the immigrant visa case and return the petition, with a report of the facts, for reconsideration by USCIS if the officer knows or has reason to believe that approval of the petition was obtained by fraud, misrepresentation, or other unlawful means, or that the beneficiary is not entitled, for some other reason, to a visa under the category for which they have been approved.¹³⁵

After the petition is returned to USCIS, USCIS may find that the petition is not revocable for the reasons stated by the consular office. If that occurs, USCIS returns the petition to the consular office with an explanation of the decision not to revoke the petition, and the consulate resumes processing the case.

If USCIS agrees with the consular officer that there is a basis to revoke the petition, the petitioner must be notified of USCIS' intent to revoke the petition. This letter, called a Notice of Intent to Revoke, or NOIR, should fully explain the reasons for the revocation and give the petitioner a reasonable period of time (usually thirty days) to submit evidence in opposition to the revocation. Additional time may be granted if the petitioner needs it to obtain documentation from abroad or other meritorious reasons. If the petitioner responds with satisfying evidence that the approval should not be revoked and USCIS agrees, the petitioner will receive notification of USCIS'

¹³² See *Matter of Wong*, 16 I. & N. Dec. 87 (BIA 1977); *Garcia v. INS*, 31 F.3d 441 (7th Cir. 1994).

¹³³ 8 CFR § 205.2.

¹³⁴ See USCIS-AFM § 20.3(b).

¹³⁵ 22 CFR § 42.43.

decision to reaffirm the petition. The petition is then returned to the consular office with copies of the NOIR, the petitioner's response, and the letter of reaffirmation. If, on the other hand, the petitioner does not overcome the basis for the revocation, or fails to timely respond, USCIS prepares a decision of revocation on Form I-292.

A petitioner may appeal the revocation to the USCIS's Administrative Appeals Unit (AAU), and the authorized period for filing the appeal is only fifteen days regardless of the type of petition.¹³⁶ Automatic revocation cannot be reviewed by an immigration judge or by the BIA.¹³⁷

In the adjustment of status context, USCIS can also issue a NOIR for the same reasons: if USCIS has reason to believe that approval of the petition was obtained by fraud, misrepresentation, or other unlawful means, or that the beneficiary is not entitled, for some other reason, to a visa under the category for which they have been approved.

C. Circumstances that do not lead to revocation

Some changes in circumstances may result in the petition moving to a different category, rather than revocation of the petition. We have touched on some of these already in this chapter, such as when a "child" beneficiary turns twenty-one, or a petitioner becomes a U.S. citizen.

1. If a child beneficiary seeking immediate relative status turns twenty-one, and has opted out of remaining an immediate relative, they will become a family-sponsored first preference immigrant (unmarried son or daughter of a U.S. citizen).
2. If a child beneficiary seeking immediate relative status marries, the petition automatically converts to a third preference petition (married son or daughter of a U.S. citizen).

Example: Maria, a U.S. citizen, petitions for her son, Jaime, who is nineteen and single (thus, an immediate relative). Before he immigrates, Jaime gets married. His petition is not terminated because he can move to third preference status as the married son of a U.S. citizen.

3. If a married son or daughter of a U.S. citizen who is under twenty-one divorces, the visa petition converts back to that of an immediate relative.
4. If a married son or daughter of a U.S. citizen who is over twenty-one divorces, the visa petition converts automatically to a first preference petition.
5. If a person granted 2A preference status as the child of a lawful permanent resident turns twenty-one years old and is not able to remain in 2A status under the CSPA, the visa petition becomes a 2B preference petition.¹³⁸

Example: Juana, an LPR, petitions her daughter Patricia who is twenty and therefore eligible for 2A preference status (child of lawful permanent resident). The petition is only pending one month before it is approved. Patricia is twenty-two by the time the priority date becomes current. Since she can only deduct one month from her biological age

¹³⁶ See 3 AAO-PM 3.7(C).

¹³⁷ *Matter of Zaidan*, 19 I. & N. Dec. 297 (BIA 1985); *Matter of Aurelio*, 19 I. & N. Dec. 458 (BIA 1987).

¹³⁸ See § 1.10 above.

under the CSPA, she is unable to remain a 2A beneficiary, and her petition automatically becomes a 2B preference petition (unmarried daughter of an LPR).

D. Revoked petitions and recapturing priority dates

If a visa petition is revoked, a new petition filed by the same petitioner for the same beneficiary will *not* acquire the old priority date. However, if the petition is not revoked and the petitioner files a new petition for the same petitioner, the petition can be given the earlier priority date.¹³⁹

Example: Santana petitions his wife, Clotilde. When the priority date becomes current, Santana is not able to immigrate his wife because they do not meet the affidavit of support requirements. The consulate denies Clotilde a visa. Santana is promoted the next month and now makes enough money to meet the affidavit of support requirements. He wants to try to immigrate Clotilde again. Santana can recapture the priority date from the first petition because he is the same petitioner of the same beneficiary under the same category and the original petition was not revoked. However, if Clotilde had waited several years to submit additional evidence and had been told that her application had been terminated, the visa petition would have been revoked. A new petition filed by Santana would be given a new priority date.

§ 1.14 Diversity Immigrants, Employment Visas, and Children in Juvenile Court Proceedings

Outside of family-based petitions, there are some common immigration benefits that are also important to understand. Under the Immigration Act of 1990, visas were set aside for new categories of immigrants, and the system for immigrating through employment was changed and expanded. This section briefly summarizes these types of visas, but a complete explanation is beyond the scope of this manual.

Diversity and diversity transition visas. Congress decided to give extra visas through these programs to people from certain countries that have had low rates of immigration in the recent past. These are called “adversely affected” countries. Countries with high immigration in recent years, for example Mexico and the Philippines, do not qualify for these extra visas.

Fifty-five thousand (55,000) “diversity” visas per year are available to people from “adversely affected” countries.¹⁴⁰ A diversity visa applicant must have a high school education or its equivalent or have two years of work experience in an occupation that requires at least two years of training or experience. Spouses and children may immigrate as derivatives in the diversity program. The application period for these diversity visas occurs once a year, for a one-month period, with only one application per person submitted. Diversity visa winners, however, are subject to the grounds of inadmissibility, including the three-year and ten-year bars.

Special Immigrant Juvenile Status. Minors who are under the jurisdiction of a juvenile court and cannot be reunified with one or both parents due to abuse, abandonment, neglect, or similar basis under state law may apply for adjustment of status as “special immigrants.” This means that these children can become permanent residents without having a U.S. citizen or permanent

¹³⁹ See 8 CFR § 204.2(h).

¹⁴⁰ INA §§ 201(e), 203(c).

resident parent who can petition for them. Visas for special immigrant juveniles fall under the *employment-based* fourth preference category, also listed monthly in the Department of State Visa Bulletin. Although up until recently there has never been a wait for special immigrant juvenile visas, there is now a slight backlog for children from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico. Consult the employment-based charts in the Visa Bulletin to determine when a visa is available for these children and when they can apply for permanent residency. A court must also rule that returning the child to their country of origin would not be in the child's best interest.¹⁴¹

Employment. Some people can immigrate through their employers. The Immigration Act of 1990 expanded this system.¹⁴² Currently 140,000 employment visas are available each year, across five preference categories, with the vast majority going to professionals or college graduates.¹⁴³ Some visas are available for “skilled” workers, as well as “unskilled” workers; however, visas for unskilled workers are currently unavailable.

¹⁴¹ INA §§ 101(a)(27)(J), 203(b)(4); *see also* *Special Immigrant Juvenile Status and Other Immigration Options for Children and Youth* (ILRC 2018).

¹⁴² *See* INA § 203(b).

¹⁴³ *See* the U.S. Department of State Visa Bulletin at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/legal/visa-law0/visa-bulletin.html>.

CHAPTER 1
QUALIFYING FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND ELIGIBILITY FOR FAMILY
PETITIONS

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- Appendix 1-B Donald Neufeld, USCIS Acting Associate Director of Domestic Operations, *Memorandum: Revised Guidance for the Child Status Protection Act (CSPA)* (Apr. 30, 2008)
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