

For many immigrants to the United States, their lives are ruled by the Visa Bulletin, the important Department of State document that will dictate when they are able to finally apply for permanent residency, many after years of waiting. ***This post will explain what exactly the Visa Bulletin is, who is subject to it, and how it works.***

What is the Visa Bulletin?

The Visa Bulletin is a document issued by the Department of State every month that tracks visa numbers and quota availabilities by priority dates to determine when someone in a particular visa category can immigrate to the United States by either filing an adjustment of status application (if they are in the US) or pursuing an immigrant visa by consular processing (if they are outside of the US).

You can find the link to the monthly Visa Bulletin on the Department of State website [here](#).

What is a priority date?

A priority date is the date assigned to an immigrant beneficiary that will help him or her track her case. Simply put, it is the date that the I-130 or I-140 petition is received by USCIS (or, in certain cases, the date the PERM labor certification is filed), regardless of when that petition is later adjudicated or approved.

There are 5 categories of family-based immigration tracking priority dates- F1, F2A, F2B, F3, and F4/. F1 is adult unmarried children of US citizens, F2A is spouses and minor children (under 21 and unmarried) of lawful permanent residents or green card holders. F2B is adult unmarried children of permanent residents (21 and older), F3 is married children of US citizens, and F4 is siblings of US citizens. The chart shown below is for the August 2023 Visa Bulletin.

Family-Sponsored	All Chargeability Areas Except Those Listed	CHINA-mainland born	INDIA	MEXICO	PHILIPPINES
F1	01JAN15	01JAN15	01JAN15	22APR01	01MAR12
F2A	08OCT17	08OCT17	08OCT17	01SEP16	08OCT17
F2B	22SEP15	22SEP15	22SEP15	01AUG01	22OCT11
F3	08JAN09	08JAN09	08JAN09	15JAN98	08JUN02
F4	22APR07	22APR07	15SEP05	01AUG00	22AUG02

There are 10 categories of employment-based immigration tracking priority dates- EB1, EB2, EB3, other workers, EB4, certain religious workers, and the EB-5 categories. The chart shown below is for the August 2023 Visa Bulletin.

Employment-based	All Chargeability Areas Except Those Listed	CHINA-mainland born	INDIA	MEXICO	PHILIPPINES
1st	01AUG23	01FEB22	01JAN12	01AUG23	01AUG23
2nd	01APR22	08JUL19	01JAN11	01APR22	01APR22
3rd	01MAY20	01JUN19	01JAN09	01MAY20	01MAY20
Other Workers	01MAY20	01SEP15	01JAN09	01MAY20	01MAY20
4th	01SEP18	01SEP18	01SEP18	01SEP18	01SEP18
Certain Religious Workers	01SEP18	01SEP18	01SEP18	01SEP18	01SEP18
5th Unreserved (including C5, T5, I5, R5)	C	08SEP15	01APR17	C	C
5th Set Aside: Rural (20%)	C	C	C	C	C
5th Set Aside: High Unemployment (10%)	C	C	C	C	C
5th Set Aside: Infrastructure (2%)	C	C	C	C	C

A “C” on either chart indicates that the category is current, meaning there is no wait time and that a beneficiary of an approved petition in that category can immediately pursue residency. Otherwise, where a date is shown, that date for each category and country indicates that is the priority date the government is currently processing applications for. If your date is BEFORE the date shown, you can go ahead and



pursue an adjustment of status of visa processing. If your date is AFTER the date shown, you must wait until your date is current.

How does the Visa Bulletin work?

Pursuant to the visa category quotas as established by Congress, the Department of State keeps track of how many of the visas are used in any given month, so that they can adjust the priority dates accordingly and move the dates appropriately. These dates do not move month-to-month. It is common in certain categories for a date to not move across a period of months, or just move a few days or a week at a time across a month.

For example, in July 2023, the Visa Bulletin in the F4 category for India indicated a September 15, 2005 priority date. In August 2023, that date didn't move at all. To compare to the F4 category for all other countries, the date remained unmoved from April 22, 2007 from July 2023 to August 2023. This indicates there was no movement forward.

For most of the visa categories, it is nearly impossible to predict exactly how long it will take to be able to immigrate to the US when subject to the visa bulletin. Using the same example above, an Indian national whose sibling petitions him or her on August 1, 2023 would receive a priority date of the same. It looks like it would take approximately 18 years for that priority date to become current. Compare that to someone from the UK who has a sibling petitioning him or her on August 1, 2023. It would take about 16 years. However, as seen above, sometimes these dates don't move at all across a month, or they only move up a few days. What looks like a 16 or 18 year wait today could in reality take 20 years or more. Sometimes, the visa bulletin has large leaps forward or large leaps backwards. For example, EB-1 India was February 1, 2022 in July 2023, whereas in the August 2023 bulletin it jumped backwards to January 11, 2012. That's a difference of almost 10 years!

Regardless of its unpredictability, a basic understanding of the Visa Bulletin goes a long way to stay informed and be aware of when your date is coming close to being current, so that you can start moving forward on your adjustment of status or immigrant visa processing