

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 April 2020 Visa Bulletin.

Family-Sponsored	All Chargeability Areas Except Those Listed	CHINA-mainland born	INDIA	MEXICO	PHILIPPINES
F1	01JAN14	01JAN14	01JAN14	22SEP97	01MAR10
F2A	C	C	C	C	C
F2B	01NOV14	01NOV14	01NOV14	01DEC98	01FEB10
F3	01FEB08	01FEB08	01FEB08	08MAY96	15MAY00
F4	01JUL06	01JUL06	22DEC04	15MAR98	01MAY00

There are 8 categories of employment-based immigration tracking priority dates- EB1, EB2, EB3, other workers, EB4, certain religious workers, EB5 non-regional center, and EB5 regional center. The chart shown below is for the April 2020 Visa Bulletin.

Employment-based	All Chargeability Areas Except Those Listed	CHINA-mainland born	EL SALVADOR GUATEMALA HONDURAS	INDIA	MEXICO	PHILIPPINES	VIETNAM
1st	01JUN19	08JUN17	01JUN19	01MAY15	01JUN19	01JUN19	01JUN19
2nd	C	01SEP15	C	25MAY09	C	C	C
3rd	01JAN17	15APR16	01JAN17	22JAN09	01JAN17	01JAN17	01JAN17
Other Workers	01JAN17	01JUL08	01JAN17	22JAN09	01JAN17	01JAN17	01JAN17
4th	C	C	15JUL16	C	22JAN18	C	C
Certain Religious Workers	C	C	15JUL16	C	22JAN18	C	C
5th Non-Regional Center (C5 and T5)	C	15MAY15	C	01JAN19	C	C	08FEB17
5th Regional Center (I5 and R5)	C	15MAY15	C	01JAN19	C	C	08FEB17

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 March 2020, the Visa Bulletin in the F4 category for India indicated a December 8, 2004 priority date. In April 2020, that date moved to December 22, 2004, just 14 days. To compare to the F4 category for all other countries, the date remained unmoved from July 1, 2006 from March 2020 to April 2020. 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 April 1, 2020 would receive a priority date of the same. It looks like it would take approximately 16 years for that priority date to become current. Compare that to someone from the UK who has a sibling petition him or her on April 1, 2020. It would take about 14 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 14 or 16 year wait today could in reality take 16 years or more. Sometimes, the visa bulletin has large leaps forward, like the F1 category that jumped from October 8, 2013 in March 2020 all the way to January 1, 2014 in April 2020.

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.