

8 U.S. Code § 1153 - Allocation of immigrant visas

U.S. Code Notes

(a) PREFERENCE ALLOCATION FOR FAMILY-SPONSORED IMMIGRANTS

Aliens subject to the worldwide level specified in section 1151(c) of this title for family-sponsored immigrants shall be allotted visas as follows:

(1) UNMARRIED SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF CITIZENS

Qualified immigrants who are the unmarried sons or daughters of citizens of the United States shall be allocated visas in a number not to exceed 23,400, plus any visas not required for the class specified in paragraph (4).

(2) SPOUSES AND UNMARRIED SONS AND UNMARRIED DAUGHTERS OF PERMANENT RESIDENT ALIENS

Qualified immigrants—

(A) who are the spouses or children of an alien lawfully admitted for permanent residence, or

(B) who are the unmarried sons or unmarried daughters (but are not the children) of an alien lawfully admitted for permanent residence,

shall be allocated visas in a number not to exceed 114,200, plus the number (if any) by which such worldwide level exceeds 226,000, plus any visas not required for the class specified in paragraph (1); except that not less than 77 percent of such visa numbers shall be allocated to aliens described in subparagraph (A).

(3) MARRIED SONS AND MARRIED DAUGHTERS OF CITIZENS

Qualified immigrants who are the married sons or married daughters of citizens of the United States shall be allocated visas in a number not to exceed 23,400, plus any visas not required for the classes specified in paragraphs (1) and (2).

(4) BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF CITIZENS

Qualified immigrants who are the brothers or sisters of citizens of the United States, if such citizens are at least 21 years of age, shall be allocated visas in a number not to exceed 65,000, plus any visas not required for the classes specified in paragraphs (1) through (3).

(b) PREFERENCE ALLOCATION FOR EMPLOYMENT-BASED IMMIGRANTS

Aliens subject to the worldwide level specified in section 1151(d) of this title for employment-based immigrants in a fiscal year shall be allotted visas as follows:

(1) PRIORITY WORKERS

Visas shall first be made available in a number not to exceed 28.6 percent of such worldwide level, plus any visas not required for the classes specified in paragraphs (4) and (5), to qualified immigrants who are aliens described in any of the following subparagraphs (A) through (C):

(A) Aliens with extraordinary ability

An alien is described in this subparagraph if—

- (i) the alien has extraordinary ability in the sciences, arts, education, business, or athletics which has been demonstrated by sustained national or international acclaim and whose achievements have been recognized in the field through extensive documentation,
- (ii) the alien seeks to enter the United States to continue work in the area of extraordinary ability, and
- (iii) the alien's entry into the United States will substantially benefit prospectively the United States.

(B) Outstanding professors and researchers

An alien is described in this subparagraph if—

- (i) the alien is recognized internationally as outstanding in a specific academic area,
- (ii) the alien has at least 3 years of experience in teaching or research in the academic area, and
- (iii) the alien seeks to enter the United States—
 - (I) for a tenured position (or tenure-track position) within a university or institution of higher education to teach in the academic area,
 - (II) for a comparable position with a university or institution of higher education to conduct research in the area, or
 - (III) for a comparable position to conduct research in the area with a department, division, or institute of a private employer, if the department, division, or institute employs at least 3 persons full-time in research activities and has achieved documented accomplishments in an academic field.

(C) Certain multinational executives and managers

An alien is described in this subparagraph if the alien, in the 3 years preceding the time of the alien's application for classification and admission into the United States under this subparagraph, has been employed for at least 1 year by a firm or corporation or other legal entity or an affiliate or subsidiary thereof and the alien seeks to enter the United States in order to continue to render services to the same employer or to a subsidiary or affiliate thereof in a capacity that is managerial or executive.

(2) ALIENS WHO ARE MEMBERS OF THE PROFESSIONS HOLDING ADVANCED DEGREES OR ALIENS OF EXCEPTIONAL ABILITY

(A) In general

Visas shall be made available, in a number not to exceed 28.6 percent of such worldwide level, plus any visas not required for the classes specified in paragraph (1), to qualified immigrants who are members of the professions holding advanced degrees or their equivalent or who because of their exceptional ability in the sciences, arts, or business, will substantially benefit prospectively the national economy, cultural or educational interests, or welfare of

the United States, and whose services in the sciences, arts, professions, or business are sought by an employer in the United States.

(B) Waiver of job offer

(i) National interest waiver

Subject to clause (ii), the Attorney General may, when the Attorney General deems it to be in the national interest, waive the requirements of subparagraph (A) that an alien's services in the sciences, arts, professions, or business be sought by an employer in the United States.

(ii) Physicians working in shortage areas or veterans facilities

(I) In general

The Attorney General shall grant a national interest waiver pursuant to clause (i) on behalf of any alien physician with respect to whom a petition for preference classification has been filed under subparagraph (A) if—

(aa) the alien physician agrees to work full time as a physician in an area or areas designated by the Secretary of Health and Human Services as having a shortage of health care professionals or at a health care facility under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs; and

(bb) a Federal agency or a department of public health in any State has previously determined that the alien physician's work in such an area or at such facility was in the public interest.

(II) Prohibition

No permanent resident visa may be issued to an alien physician described in subclause (I) by the Secretary of State under section 1154(b) of this title, and the Attorney General may not adjust the status of such an alien physician from that of a nonimmigrant alien to that of a permanent resident alien under section 1255 of this title, until such time as the alien has worked full time as a physician for an aggregate of 5 years (not including the time served in the status of an alien described in section 1101(a)(15)(J) of this title), in an area or

areas designated by the Secretary of Health and Human Services as having a shortage of health care professionals or at a health care facility under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

(III) Statutory construction

Nothing in this subparagraph may be construed to prevent the filing of a petition with the Attorney General for classification under section 1154(a) of this title, or the filing of an application for adjustment of status under section 1255 of this title, by an alien physician described in subclause (I) prior to the date by which such alien physician has completed the service described in subclause (II).

(IV) Effective date

The requirements of this subsection do not affect waivers on behalf of alien physicians approved under subsection (b)(2) (B) before the enactment date of this subsection. In the case of a physician for whom an application for a waiver was filed under subsection (b)(2)(B) prior to November 1, 1998, the Attorney General shall grant a national interest waiver pursuant to subsection (b)(2)(B) except that the alien is required to have worked full time as a physician for an aggregate of 3 years (not including time served in the status of an alien described in section 1101(a)(15)(J) of this title) before a visa can be issued to the alien under section 1154(b) of this title or the status of the alien is adjusted to permanent resident under section 1255 of this title.

(C) Determination of exceptional ability

In determining under subparagraph (A) whether an immigrant has exceptional ability, the possession of a degree, diploma, certificate, or similar award from a college, university, school, or other institution of learning or a license to practice or certification for a particular profession or occupation shall not by itself be considered sufficient evidence of such exceptional ability.

(3) SKILLED WORKERS, PROFESSIONALS, AND OTHER WORKERS

(A) In general

Visas shall be made available, in a number not to exceed 28.6 percent of such worldwide level, plus any visas not required for the classes specified in paragraphs (1) and (2), to the following classes of aliens who are not described in paragraph (2):

(i) Skilled workers

Qualified immigrants who are capable, at the time of petitioning for classification under this paragraph, of performing skilled labor (requiring at least 2 years training or experience), not of a temporary or seasonal nature, for which qualified workers are not available in the United States.

(ii) Professionals

Qualified immigrants who hold baccalaureate degrees and who are members of the professions.

(iii) Other workers

Other qualified immigrants who are capable, at the time of petitioning for classification under this paragraph, of performing unskilled labor, not of a temporary or seasonal nature, for which qualified workers are not available in the United States.

(B) Limitation on other workers

Not more than 10,000 of the visas made available under this paragraph in any fiscal year may be available for qualified immigrants described in subparagraph (A)(iii).

(C) Labor certification required

An immigrant visa may not be issued to an immigrant under subparagraph (A) until the consular officer is in receipt of a determination made by the Secretary of Labor pursuant to the provisions of section 1182(a)(5)(A) of this title.

(4) CERTAIN SPECIAL IMMIGRANTS

Visas shall be made available, in a number not to exceed 7.1 percent of such worldwide level, to qualified special immigrants described in section 1101(a)(27) of this title (other than those described in subparagraph (A) or (B) thereof), of which not more than 5,000 may be made available in any fiscal year to special immigrants described in subclause (II) or (III) of section 1101(a)(27)(C)(ii) of this title, and not

more than 100 may be made available in any fiscal year to special immigrants, excluding spouses and children, who are described in section 1101(a)(27)(M) of this title.

(5) EMPLOYMENT CREATION

(A) In general

Visas shall be made available, in a number not to exceed 7.1 percent of such worldwide level, to qualified immigrants seeking to enter the United States for the purpose of engaging in a new commercial enterprise (including a limited partnership)—

(i) in which such alien has invested (after November 29, 1990) or, is actively in the process of investing, capital in an amount not less than the amount specified in subparagraph (C), and

(ii) which will benefit the United States economy and create full-time employment for not fewer than 10 United States citizens or aliens lawfully admitted for permanent residence or other immigrants lawfully authorized to be employed in the United States (other than the immigrant and the immigrant's spouse, sons, or daughters).

(B) Set-aside for targeted employment areas

(i) In general

Not less than 3,000 of the visas made available under this paragraph in each fiscal year shall be reserved for qualified immigrants who invest in a new commercial enterprise described in subparagraph (A) which will create employment in a targeted employment area.

(ii) "Targeted employment area" defined

In this paragraph, the term "targeted employment area" means, at the time of the investment, a rural area or an area which has experienced high unemployment (of at least 150 percent of the national average rate).

(iii) "Rural area" defined

In this paragraph, the term "rural area" means any area other than an area within a metropolitan statistical area or within the outer boundary of any city or town having a population of 20,000

or more (based on the most recent decennial census of the United States).

(C) Amount of capital required

(i) In general

Except as otherwise provided in this subparagraph, the amount of capital required under subparagraph (A) shall be \$1,000,000. The Attorney General, in consultation with the Secretary of Labor and the Secretary of State, may from time to time prescribe regulations increasing the dollar amount specified under the previous sentence.

(ii) Adjustment for targeted employment areas

The Attorney General may, in the case of investment made in a targeted employment area, specify an amount of capital required under subparagraph (A) that is less than (but not less than ½ of) the amount specified in clause (i).

(iii) Adjustment for high employment areas

In the case of an investment made in a part of a metropolitan statistical area that at the time of the investment—

(I) is not a targeted employment area, and

(II) is an area with an unemployment rate significantly below the national average unemployment rate,

the Attorney General may specify an amount of capital required under subparagraph (A) that is greater than (but not greater than 3 times) the amount specified in clause (i).

(D) Full-time employment defined

In this paragraph, the term "full-time employment" means employment in a position that requires at least 35 hours of service per week at any time, regardless of who fills the position.

(6) SPECIAL RULES FOR "K" SPECIAL IMMIGRANTS

(A) Not counted against numerical limitation in year involved

Subject to subparagraph (B), the number of immigrant visas made available to special immigrants under section 1101(a)(27)(K) of this title in a fiscal year shall not be subject to the numerical limitations of this subsection or of section 1152(a) of this title.

(B) Counted against numerical limitations in following year

(i) Reduction in employment-based immigrant classifications

The number of visas made available in any fiscal year under paragraphs (1), (2), and (3) shall each be reduced by $\frac{1}{3}$ of the number of visas made available in the previous fiscal year to special immigrants described in section 1101(a)(27)(K) of this title.

(ii) Reduction in per country level

The number of visas made available in each fiscal year to natives of a foreign state under section 1152(a) of this title shall be reduced by the number of visas made available in the previous fiscal year to special immigrants described in section 1101(a)(27)(K) of this title who are natives of the foreign state.

(iii) Reduction in employment-based immigrant classifications within per country ceiling

In the case of a foreign state subject to section 1152(e) of this title in a fiscal year (and in the previous fiscal year), the number of visas made available and allocated to each of paragraphs (1) through (3) of this subsection in the fiscal year shall be reduced by $\frac{1}{3}$ of the number of visas made available in the previous fiscal year to special immigrants described in section 1101(a)(27)(K) of this title who are natives of the foreign state.

(c) DIVERSITY IMMIGRANTS

(1) IN GENERAL

Except as provided in paragraph (2), aliens subject to the worldwide level specified in section 1151(e) of this title for diversity immigrants shall be allotted visas each fiscal year as follows:

(A) Determination of preference immigration

The Attorney General shall determine for the most recent previous 5-fiscal-year period for which data are available, the total number of aliens who are natives of each foreign state and who (i) were admitted or otherwise provided lawful permanent resident status (other than under this subsection) and (ii) were subject to the numerical limitations of section 1151(a) of this title (other than paragraph (3) thereof) or who were admitted or otherwise provided lawful permanent resident status as an immediate relative or other alien described in section 1151(b)(2) of this title.

(B) Identification of high-admission and low-admission regions and high-admission and low-admission states

The Attorney General—

(i) shall identify—

(I) each region (each in this paragraph referred to as a “high-admission region”) for which the total of the numbers determined under subparagraph (A) for states in the region is greater than $\frac{1}{2}$ of the total of all such numbers, and

(II) each other region (each in this paragraph referred to as a “low-admission region”); and

(ii) shall identify—

(I) each foreign state for which the number determined under subparagraph (A) is greater than 50,000 (each such state in this paragraph referred to as a “high-admission state”), and

(II) each other foreign state (each such state in this paragraph referred to as a “low-admission state”).

(C) Determination of percentage of worldwide immigration attributable to high-admission regions

The Attorney General shall determine the percentage of the total of the numbers determined under subparagraph (A) that are numbers for foreign states in high-admission regions.

(D) Determination of regional populations excluding high-admission states and ratios of populations of regions within low-admission regions and high-admission regions

The Attorney General shall determine—

- (i) based on available estimates for each region, the total population of each region not including the population of any high-admission state;
- (ii) for each low-admission region, the ratio of the population of the region determined under clause (i) to the total of the populations determined under such clause for all the low-admission regions; and
- (iii) for each high-admission region, the ratio of the population of the region determined under clause (i) to the total of the populations determined under such clause for all the high-admission regions.

(E) Distribution of visas

(i) No visas for natives of high-admission states

The percentage of visas made available under this paragraph to natives of a high-admission state is 0.

(ii) For low-admission states in low-admission regions

Subject to clauses (iv) and (v), the percentage of visas made available under this paragraph to natives (other than natives of a high-admission state) in a low-admission region is the product of—

- (I) the percentage determined under subparagraph (C), and
- (II) the population ratio for that region determined under subparagraph (D)(ii).

(iii) For low-admission states in high-admission regions

Subject to clauses (iv) and (v), the percentage of visas made available under this paragraph to natives (other than natives of a high-admission state) in a high-admission region is the product of—

- (I) 100 percent minus the percentage determined under subparagraph (C), and
- (II) the population ratio for that region determined under subparagraph (D)(iii).

(iv) Redistribution of unused visa numbers

If the Secretary of State estimates that the number of immigrant visas to be issued to natives in any region for a fiscal year under this paragraph is less than the number of immigrant visas made available to such natives under this paragraph for the fiscal year, subject to clause (v), the excess visa numbers shall be made available to natives (other than natives of a high-admission state) of the other regions in proportion to the percentages otherwise specified in clauses (ii) and (iii).

(v) Limitation on visas for natives of a single foreign state

The percentage of visas made available under this paragraph to natives of any single foreign state for any fiscal year shall not exceed 7 percent.

(F) "Region" defined

Only for purposes of administering the diversity program under this subsection, Northern Ireland shall be treated as a separate foreign state, each colony or other component or dependent area of a foreign state overseas from the foreign state shall be treated as part of the foreign state, and the areas described in each of the following clauses shall be considered to be a separate region:

(i) Africa.

(ii) Asia.

(iii) Europe.

(iv) North America (other than Mexico).

(v) Oceania.

(vi) South America, Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean.

(2) REQUIREMENT OF EDUCATION OR WORK EXPERIENCE

An alien is not eligible for a visa under this subsection unless the alien—

(A) has at least a high school education or its equivalent, or

(B) has, within 5 years of the date of application for a visa under this subsection, at least 2 years of work experience in an occupation which requires at least 2 years of training or experience.

(3) MAINTENANCE OF INFORMATION

The Secretary of State shall maintain information on the age, occupation, education level, and other relevant characteristics of immigrants issued visas under this subsection.

(d) TREATMENT OF FAMILY MEMBERS

A spouse or child as defined in subparagraph (A), (B), (C), (D), or (E) of section 1101(b)(1) of this title shall, if not otherwise entitled to an immigrant status and the immediate issuance of a visa under subsection (a), (b), or (c), be entitled to the same status, and the same order of consideration provided in the respective subsection, if accompanying or following to join, the spouse or parent.

(e) ORDER OF CONSIDERATION

(1) Immigrant visas made available under subsection (a) or (b) shall be issued to eligible immigrants in the order in which a petition in behalf of each such immigrant is filed with the Attorney General (or in the case of special immigrants under section 1101(a)(27)(D) of this title, with the Secretary of State) as provided in section 1154(a) of this title.

(2) Immigrant visa numbers made available under subsection (c) (relating to diversity immigrants) shall be issued to eligible qualified immigrants strictly in a random order established by the Secretary of State for the fiscal year involved.

(3) Waiting lists of applicants for visas under this section shall be maintained in accordance with regulations prescribed by the Secretary of State.

(f) AUTHORIZATION FOR ISSUANCE

In the case of any alien claiming in his application for an immigrant visa to be described in section 1151(b)(2) of this title or in subsection (a), (b), or (c) of this section, the consular officer shall not grant such status until he has been authorized to do so as provided by section 1154 of this title.

(g) LISTS

For purposes of carrying out the Secretary's responsibilities in the orderly administration of this section, the Secretary of State may make reasonable estimates of the anticipated numbers of visas to be issued during any quarter of any fiscal year within each of the categories under subsections (a), (b), and (c) and to rely upon such estimates in authorizing the issuance of visas. The Secretary of State shall terminate the registration of any alien who fails to apply for an immigrant visa within one year following notification to the alien of the availability of such visa, but the Secretary shall reinstate the registration of any such alien who establishes within 2 years following the date of notification of the availability of such visa that such failure to apply was due to circumstances beyond the alien's control.

(h) RULES FOR DETERMINING WHETHER CERTAIN ALIENS ARE CHILDREN

(1) IN GENERAL

For purposes of subsections (a)(2)(A) and (d), a determination of whether an alien satisfies the age requirement in the matter preceding subparagraph (A) of section 1101(b)(1) of this title shall be made using—

(A) the age of the alien on the date on which an immigrant visa number becomes available for such alien (or, in the case of subsection (d), the date on which an immigrant visa number became available for the alien's parent), but only if the alien has sought to acquire the status of an alien lawfully admitted for permanent residence within one year of such availability; reduced by

(B) the number of days in the period during which the applicable petition described in paragraph (2) was pending.

(2) PETITIONS DESCRIBED

The petition described in this paragraph is—

(A) with respect to a relationship described in subsection (a)(2)(A), a petition filed under section 1154 of this title for classification of an alien child under subsection (a)(2)(A); or

(B) with respect to an alien child who is a derivative beneficiary under subsection (d), a petition filed under section 1154 of this title for classification of the alien's parent under subsection (a), (b), or (c).

(3) RETENTION OF PRIORITY DATE

If the age of an alien is determined under paragraph (1) to be 21 years of age or older for the purposes of subsections (a)(2)(A) and (d), the alien's petition shall automatically be converted to the appropriate category and the alien shall retain the original priority date issued upon receipt of the original petition.

(4) APPLICATION TO SELF-PETITIONS

Paragraphs (1) through (3) shall apply to self-petitioners and derivatives of self-petitioners.

(June 27, 1952, ch. 477, title II, ch. 1, § 203, 66 Stat. 178; Pub. L. 85-316, § 3, Sept. 11, 1957, 71 Stat. 639; Pub. L. 86-363, §§ 1-3, Sept. 22, 1959, 73 Stat. 644; Pub. L. 89-236, § 3, Oct. 3, 1965, 79 Stat. 912; Pub. L. 94-571, § 4, Oct. 20, 1976, 90 Stat. 2705; Pub. L. 95-412, § 3, Oct. 5, 1978, 92 Stat. 907; Pub. L. 95-417, § 1, Oct. 5, 1978, 92 Stat. 917; Pub. L. 96-212, title II, § 203(c), (i), Mar. 17, 1980, 94 Stat. 107, 108; Pub. L. 101-649, title I, §§ 111, 121(a), 131, 162(a)(1), title VI, § 603(a)(3), Nov. 29, 1990, 104 Stat. 4986, 4987, 4997, 5009, 5082; Pub. L. 102-110, § 2(b), Oct. 1, 1991, 105 Stat. 555; Pub. L. 102-232, title III, § 302(b)(2), (e)(3), Dec. 12, 1991, 105 Stat. 1743, 1745; Pub. L. 103-416, title II, §§ 212(b), 219(c), Oct. 25, 1994, 108 Stat. 4314, 4316; Pub. L. 106-95, § 5, Nov. 12, 1999, 113 Stat. 1318; Pub. L. 106-113, div. B, § 1000(a)(1) [title I, § 117], Nov. 29, 1999, 113 Stat. 1535, 1501A-21; Pub. L. 106-536, § 1(b)(1), Nov. 22, 2000, 114 Stat. 2560; Pub. L. 107-208, § 3, Aug. 6, 2002, 116 Stat. 928; Pub. L. 107-273, div. C, title I, §§ 11035, 11036(a), Nov. 2, 2002, 116 Stat. 1846; Pub. L. 109-162, title VIII, § 805(b)(2), Jan. 5, 2006, 119 Stat. 3056.)

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