

# Permanent Residence Cards (Green Cards)

## What are green cards?

**Green cards, formally known as permanent residence cards (Form I-551)**, are photo-identification documents given to lawful permanent residents as proof of legal status in the United States.

**Most green cards are valid for ten (10) years.** Not all green cards have an expiration date. This can vary depending on when and at what age someone received a green card.

**A valid, unexpired green card** can be used as proof of a person's:

- Right to work in the United States
- Identity
- Legal immigration status
- Right to obtain a valid Social Security number and card
- Permission to travel internationally and re-enter the United States after trips of less than one (1) year.\*

\* **When traveling internationally, lawful permanent residents will need a valid passport to enter the country they are visiting. If an individual obtained their permanent resident status as a refugee or asylee, he or she can apply for and travel on a refugee travel document instead of a passport from his or her home country.**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION** about travel documents, visit [uscis.gov/i-131](https://uscis.gov/i-131).

## Caution!

Lawful permanent residents who stay out of the United States for more than one (1) year at a time may have trouble re-entering the United States even if their green card is still valid, and may endanger their lawful permanent resident status.

## Do green cards have to be renewed?

**Yes.** Green cards with an expiration date must be renewed. The law requires noncitizens to have valid documentation with them at all times.

## When should a green card be renewed?

**The green card renewal application may be filed six (6) months** prior to the card's expiration date. The expiration date will appear on the card.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**, visit [uscis.gov/i-90](https://uscis.gov/i-90).

## What if a green card does not have an expiration date?

**Green cards issued between January 1977 and August 1989** do not have expiration dates. Currently, there is no law requiring a green card to be renewed if it does not have an expiration date.

**However**, holders of these cards may want to consider renewing to avoid problems with travel or government benefits, especially if it is difficult to recognize them from the photo, for example, they were a child when it was taken.

## Do two-year green cards have to be renewed?

**Yes.** This is a different process than for a 10-year green card.

**Permanent residents who qualify for a green card through a marriage** that has lasted less than two (2) years receive a green card with two-year validity. During this time, they are conditional permanent residents. In order to become lawful permanent residents and receive a 10-year green card, they must file Form I-751 within 90 days before the end of those two (2) years. If they do not file this form in a timely manner, they can be placed in removal proceedings.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**, visit [uscis.gov/i-751](https://uscis.gov/i-751).

## Can someone who has been convicted of a crime or has pending criminal proceedings still renew or replace his or her green card?

**Yes, but not without first consulting with an immigration attorney** or accredited representative.\* Certain crimes can place a person's lawful status in jeopardy.

\*Accredited representatives are non-lawyers working at nonprofit organizations that have been authorized to practice immigration law by the Board of Immigration Appeals.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**, visit [justice.gov/eoir/recognition-and-accreditation-program](https://www.justice.gov/eoir/recognition-and-accreditation-program).

**When a lawful permanent resident files an application to renew his or her green card**, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) will check the individual's criminal history and learn about any crimes he or she has committed. Depending on the crime, the person may be referred to deportation proceedings and risk losing his or her lawful permanent residence status. For that reason, people in this situation should seek legal advice before filing an application.

## What can a person do if his or her green card has incorrect information on it?

**A lawful permanent resident can correct mistakes** or change certain information on a green card by filing Form I-90 found at [uscis.gov/i-90](https://uscis.gov/i-90).

**It is important for applicants to read the instructions to Form I-90 before filing** the application and to make sure that they are mailing it with the correct fee and to the correct address.

**If the incorrect information on the card was due to USCIS error**, applicants may not have to pay a fee to correct the mistake. However, it is up to the applicant to demonstrate that the error was made by USCIS.

## What happens to a green card when a lawful permanent resident becomes a U.S. citizen?

**Lawful permanent residents turn in their green cards** to USCIS at their naturalization oath ceremony, where they will receive a Certificate of Naturalization. They can use that certificate to apply for a U.S. passport.

**Naturalized citizens enjoy all the benefits of citizenship.** They will be able to vote in all elections and travel abroad without any restrictions. As citizens, they do not need to renew their green cards or any other immigration documents. In addition, citizens cannot be deported from the United States.

**Lawful permanent residents may want to consult with an attorney** or accredited representative to see if they are eligible to naturalize.

## Be careful!

**Lawful permanent residents cannot allow others to use their green cards** or any other identification documents or numbers issued to them. It is against the law.

