



## DEFINING THE TERM 'QUALIFIED NON-CITIZEN'

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 defined certain immigrants as 'qualified aliens.' Eligibility for certain federal needs-based benefit programs, such as SSI, SNAP benefits, TANF, Medicaid, Public Housing, are predicated on whether an immigrant is classified as a 'qualified non-citizen.' This document will use the term 'qualified non-citizen'.

### NOTE

In addition to 'qualified non-citizen' criteria, some federal benefit programs have additional criteria that a 'qualified non-citizen' must meet to qualify for the benefit.

#### 1. Lawful Permanent Residents (LPR)

A lawful permanent resident (LPR) is a foreign national who has been accorded the privilege of permanently residing in the U.S. Such individuals are granted a Permanent Resident Card, often referred to as a 'green card.' Immigrants may obtain LPR status through family based immigration, employment based immigration, diversity immigrant visa program, as an asylee or refugee, among other ways. LPR is the only immigration status from which an immigrant can apply for U.S. citizenship.

#### 2. Refugees

A refugee is a foreign national who flees his/her country due to a well-founded fear of persecution. Persecution must be based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a social group. Refugees generally apply for admission to the U.S. in refugee camps or designated processing sites outside their home country. However, in some instances refugees may apply for refugee status within their home country, for example, Cuba and Vietnam.

#### 3. Conditional Entrants

Before "refugee" status was established in U.S. law by the Refugee Act of 1980, nationals of communist countries or of certain countries in the Middle East were admitted as "conditional entrants," which is a status similar to refugee status. This classification has not been used since 1980.

#### 4. Asylees

An asylee is a foreign national who flees his/her country due to a well-founded fear of persecution. As with refugees, persecution must be based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a social group. The difference between refugees and asylees is that asylees apply for protected status after they have entered the U.S. Under the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 the asylum seeker must file an asylum application within one year of arriving in the U.S.

#### 5. Persons Granted Withholding of Deportation/Removal

A person granted withholding of deportation/removal is a foreign national who is in deportation or removal proceedings who demonstrates that s/he faces a "clear probability of persecution" in his/her home country. The clear probability standard is significantly stricter than the well-founded fear of persecution required for asylum eligibility.



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Because of withholding's stricter statutory standard, an immigration judge would consider the application for withholding only after reaching a negative determination on an asylum application. Immigration judges can deny asylum applications based on discretionary factors, such as fraudulently entering the U.S. In addition, automatic denial for asylum would result if the applicant committed certain statutory crimes.

## 6. Cuban/Haitian Entrants

A Cuban or Haitian national is a "Cuban or Haitian entrant" if s/he meets the definition contained in the Refugee Education Assistance Act of 1980. Cuban/Haitian entrants are treated as refugees for purposes of public benefit eligibility. Section 501(e) of the Refugee Education Assistance Act, to which PRWORA refers, defines a Cuban/Haitian Entrant as:

- Category 1: Any individual granted parole status as a Cuban/Haitian Entrant (Status Pending) or granted any other special status subsequently established under the immigration laws for national of Cuba or Haiti, regardless of the status of the individual at the time assistance or services are provided; or
- Category 2: Any other national of Cuba or Haitian who was paroled into the United States and has not acquired any other status under the Immigration and Nationality Act, and any other national of Cuba or Haiti who was paroled into the U.S. and has not acquired any other status under the INA and who is the subject of removal proceedings under the Immigration and Nationality Act; or has an application for asylum pending with the USCIS; and with respect to whom a final, non-appealable, and legally enforceable order of removal has not been entered.

## 7. Amerasians

An Amerasian is a child of a Vietnamese parent and U.S. citizen parent born during the years of U.S. conflict in that region, after December 31, 1950 and before October 22, 1982. Amerasians are treated as refugees for purposes of public benefit eligibility.

## 8. Persons Paroled into the U.S.

Individuals who are outside of the United States may be able to request parole into the United States based on urgent humanitarian or significant public benefit reasons. The United States Citizenship Immigration Services (USCIS) has discretionary authority to permit certain foreign nationals or groups to enter the U.S. "for emergent reasons or reasons deemed strictly in the public interest" and to grant such individuals parolee status. Parolee status may be granted for humanitarian, legal, or medical reasons. Only parolees admitted for at least one year are considered 'qualified immigrants.'

## 9. Certain Battered Spouses and Children

Certain spouses and children of U.S. citizens or LPRs who have been battered or subjected to extreme cruelty in the U.S. and otherwise satisfy the requirements of 8 USC 1641(c) are considered 'qualified immigrants' for public benefits purposes. Such individuals can apply for LPR status through an I-360 self-petition. Self-petitioning allows a battered spouse or child without documentation, married or a child of a U.S. citizen or LPR to apply for legal status on behalf of himself/herself without the sponsorship of the abusing spouse or parent.

A self-petitioning battered spouse may include her/his non-citizen child (unmarried child under the age of 21) in the petition, even if the child is not battered and/or is not the child of the abusing spouse.

Go to <http://otda.ny.gov/policy/directives/2006/INF/06-INF-14.pdf> for NYS' Administrative Directive on *Battered Aliens Eligibility for Public Benefits*.



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For assistance with assisting battered immigrants with a self-petition, contact Sanctuary for Families' Center for Battered Women at (212) 349-6009 x 246.

## 10. Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000

Congress created the "T" and "U" non-immigrant classifications with the passage of the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000. Victims of trafficking are permitted to apply for permanent residence after 3 years.

### T" Visas – A Qualified Immigrant

Immigrants certified by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to be a 'victim of a severe form of trafficking of persons in accordance with Section 107 of the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act' or who have been granted a 'T visa' or who have a grant of 'continuous residence.' Children, parents and siblings of trafficking victims are also eligible for a 'T visa' under certain circumstances.

Although not listed as a 'qualified immigrant' under PRWORA, individuals granted a 'T visa' are eligible for benefits to the same extent as immigrants admitted to the U.S. as refugees for the purposes of public benefit eligibility.

For victims of trafficking who have not yet received their 'T visa' or have not been granted continuous residence, the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) is the sole authority that can certify them as trafficking victims and can provide them with a certification letter, which the individual must submit to the local agency administering the public benefits when making an application.

For more information about ORR services call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) at 1-888-373-7888, or go to: <https://polarisproject.org/national-human-trafficking-hotline>.

### "U" Visas – Not a Qualified Immigrant

"U" visas are designed to assist law enforcement to investigate and prosecute cases of domestic violence, sexual assault and other crimes. While U visa holders are not considered 'qualified immigrants,' they are considered 'permanently residing under color.'

## 11. Iraqi and Afghan Special Immigrants

Iraqi and Afghan nationals granted special immigrant visa (SIV) are generally interpreters and/or translators who performed work for the U.S. Armed Forces under section 101 (a) (27) of the Immigration and Nationality Act.

Under the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009,

- Afghan SIV holders evacuating Afghanistan are being admitted to the U.S. by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) as **special immigrant (SI) lawful permanent residents (LPRs)**.
- In addition, due to the recent evacuation of Afghan nationals from Afghanistan, DHS began admitting Afghan SIV holders to the U.S. as **SI conditional permanent residents (CPRs)**.
- Afghan nationals evacuating Afghanistan, who qualify for SIVs but due to the extenuating circumstances surrounding the evacuation were not able to complete the SIV process prior to their evacuation from Afghanistan DHS created the special immigrant SQ/SI parole, SQ4 or SQ5.

Afghan SIV holders, including SI LPRs and SI CPRs, or special immigrant SQ/SI parolees are eligible for Family Assistance (FA), Safety Net Assistance (SNA), HEAP, and SNAP, if otherwise eligible.

Additional details can be found at <https://otda.ny.gov/policy/gis/2021/21DC071.pdf>.



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## 12. Afghanistan Humanitarian Parolees – Limited Time

Individuals arriving from Afghanistan may be granted humanitarian parole under INA Section 212(d)(5)(A).

Effective September 30, 2021, the federal government is providing evacuees from Afghanistan who enter the U.S. on humanitarian parole, access to federal benefits and services through the [Afghanistan Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2022](#). In most cases, parole is being granted for two years for the Afghan evacuees.

The Consolidated Continuing Appropriations Act, 2023 extended the period of parole under which certain individuals from Afghanistan may be eligible for certain benefits to September 30, 2023.

Citizens or nationals of Afghanistan, or individuals with no nationality who last resided in Afghanistan, may be eligible for benefits if they have completed DHS's background checks, their parole has not been terminated by DHS, and if they were:

- Paroled into the U.S. between July 31, 2021, and September 30, 2023, or
- Paroled into the U.S. after September 30, 2023, and are:
  - the spouse or child of an evacuee from Afghanistan paroled between July 31, 2021, and September 30, 2023, or
  - the parent or legal guardian of an unaccompanied child paroled between July 31, 2021, and September 30, 2023.

The Act allows these individuals to receive benefits for a **limited period of time, either through March 31, 2023, or until the end of their parole term, whichever is later.**

Additional details can be found at <https://otda.ny.gov/policy/gis/2023/23DC006.pdf>.