Form I-485, officially called the **Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjust Status**, is the main form you use to apply for a green card from inside the United States. I-485 instructions (PDF) Adjustment of status overview.

It's part of a process called "adjustment of status," which lets eligible people become permanent residents without leaving the U.S.

This tutorial-style guide explains what Form I-485 is, who qualifies, the documents you need, how the process works from start to finish, typical processing times and fees, and common mistakes to avoid. It's written for individuals and families, but also useful if you're advising clients or preparing to speak with an immigration attorney.

> *Note: This article is for general educational purposes only and is not legal advice. Always check the latest information on official government websites and speak with an experienced immigration attorney about your specific case.*

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What Form I-485 Does (and How It Fits Into the Green Card Process)

Form I-485 is used by people already **physically present in the United States** to ask U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to grant them lawful permanent residence (a green card). USCIS I-485 instructions, Citizen Path guide Unlike consular processing, which is handled at a U.S. embassy or consulate abroad, adjustment of status takes place entirely inside the U.S.

In most family and employment cases, I-485 comes **after** you have an approved or concurrently filed immigrant petition, such as:

- **Form I-130** – Petition for Alien Relative (family-based green cards) Boundless I-485 explainer
- **Form I-140** – Immigrant Petition for Alien Worker (employment-based) University adjustment instructions
- Other petitions, such as I-730, I-360, or category-specific forms for refugees, asylees, VAWA self-petitioners, religious workers, and more. AILA instruction booklet

USCIS uses your I-485 to decide if you:

- Are you eligible for the immigrant category you claim
- Have a visa number available (if required)

- Are **admissible** to the U.S. (no disqualifying grounds such as certain crimes, fraud, or security concerns). Admissibility guidance within instructions

Who Can File Form I-485? Basic Eligibility

You generally must meet all of the following to adjust status with Form I-485: I-485 instruction criteria Adjustment eligibility

- Be **physically present in the United States** when you file
- Have a qualifying **immigrant category** (family, employment, humanitarian, or special program)
- Have an **approved or pending immigrant petition**, or be filing one concurrently (for eligible categories)
- Have an **immigrant visa number available** (not always required for immediate relatives)
- Be **admissible** to the U.S. or qualify for a waiver of inadmissibility

Common I-485 Categories

The official USCIS instructions organize I-485 eligibility into several broad groups: AILA instructions

- **Family-based**: Spouses, children, parents, and certain other relatives of U.S. citizens or permanent residents. Family I-485 overview

- **Employment-based**: Workers with approved I-140 petitions in various preference categories. Employment adjustment article
- **Refugees and asylees**: Individuals admitted as refugees or granted asylum who are now eligible to adjust after the required waiting period. Instruction booklet
- **Humanitarian**: T and U visa holders, VAWA self-petitioners, SIJ (special immigrant juveniles), and others. More on humanitarian categories
- **Special programs**: Diversity Visa lottery winners, certain Cuban nationals, registry applicants, and multiple categories based on specific public laws. USCIS instructions

Because each category has its own requirements and exceptions, it's wise to review the USCIS I-485 instructions carefully and consult with an immigration attorney if there is any doubt about your eligibility. Detailed adjustment analysis



Visa Numbers, Priority Dates, and the Visa Bulletin

For many I-485 applicants, a green card cannot be approved until a visa number is "current" for their category and country of chargeability. USCIS and the U.S. Department of State manage this through **priority dates** and the **Visa Bulletin**. Adjustment process explanation, Priority date discussion

Your priority date usually comes from the date USCIS received your underlying immigrant petition (for example, Form I-130 or I-140). Each month, the State Department's Visa Bulletin lists cut-off dates by category and country. If your priority date is earlier than the cut-off date, you typically have a visa number available. Boundless: Visa Bulletin

Certain categories, like **immediate relatives of U.S. citizens** (spouses, minor unmarried children, and parents), are not subject to numerical limits, so a visa number is considered immediately available, and they can often file I-130 and I-485 together ("concurrent filing"). I-485 explained Concurrent filing guide

Concurrent Filing: I-130 and I-485 Together

Concurrent filing is when you submit a family petition (Form I-130) and adjustment application (Form I-485) in the same package. Concurrent filing explainer
This is commonly available for immediate relatives of U.S. citizens and some employment-based applicants when a visa is

immediately available.

Concurrent filing can streamline the process and may allow you to request a work permit (Form I-765) and an advance parole travel document (Form I-131) at the same time as your I-485, so you can work and travel while your case is pending. Benefits of concurrent filing Work and travel during AOS

Current Form I-485 Fees and Related Costs (2026 update)

Form / Package	What It Covers	Fee Effective April 1, 2024 (USD)	Notes
Form I-485 (adult, standalone)	Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjust Status (age 14+)	**$1,440**	Base adjustment of status filing fee; biometrics are included. Does *not* include work or travel documents after the 2024 fee rule. Fee table example CLINIC fee explainer
Form I-485 (certain minors)	Adjustment of status for children under 14 in specific qualifying situations	**$950**	Reduced filing fee where a qualifying parent is also filing; still excludes I-765 / I-131 fees. Minor fee line

Form / Package	What It Covers	Fee Effective April 1, 2024 (USD)	Notes
Form I-765 (filed with I-485)	Application for Employment Authorization (EAD) while I-485 is pending	**$260**	Previously bundled into the I-485 fee; now a separate, additional cost when filed with I-485. I-765 new fee Separate fee overview
Form I-131 (filed with I-485)	Application for Travel Document (Advance Parole) while I-485 is pending	**$630**	Also formerly bundled with I-485; now charged separately for most new adjustment applicants. I-131 new fee Travel fee details
"Full package" (adult)	I-485 + I-765 + I-131, all filed together for one adult applicant	**$2,330**	Illustrative total for applicants who want adjustment, work authorization, and advance parole: $1,440 (I-485) + $260 (I-765) + $630 (I-131) = $2,330 in government filing fees alone. Total cost breakdown Fee increase context

These figures reflect the general USCIS fee structure after April 1, 2024, and do not include attorney fees or other costs (such as medical exams, translations, or courier services). Always confirm the latest amounts on the official USCIS fee schedule before you file, since fees and rules can change. Updated fee guidance

USCIS significantly changed many filing fees effective **April 1, 2024**. Fee rule summary CLINIC fee explainer

For most adult applicants, the I-485 filing fee is now approximately **$1,440** (with biometrics included), though you should always confirm exact amounts on the current USCIS fee schedule.

Under the current rule, Form I-765 (work permit) and Form I-131 (advance parole) are no longer free add-ons when filed with I-485. Typical separate filing fees include about **$260** for Form I-765 (when filed with I-485) and about **$630** for Form I-131, subject to change by USCIS regulation. Detailed fee breakdown

Some applicants receive fee waivers or reduced fees, especially in certain humanitarian or low-income situations, but eligibility is limited and requires additional documentation. Legal aid overview

How Long Does Form I-485 Take?

Processing times vary by category, location, and case complexity, but recent estimates suggest: ImmigrationDirect timing CitizenPath timing

- **Overall:** About 8–14 months for many family-based I-485 cases nationwide.
- **Some field offices (including offices handling Atlanta cases):** Averages around 12.5 months for certain family-based adjustment applications.

- **Some asylum- or T/U-visa–based I-485 cases:** 22–42 months or more, depending on category and workload.

USCIS case stages typically include receipt of a notice (Form I-797C), biometrics appointment, potential work/travel documents, an interview, and a decision with green card mailing.
You can check your case status online using your receipt number and track general I-485 processing times for your field office through official USCIS tools and reputable guides. Adjustment process guide

Step-by-Step: Completing the I-485 Process (Form I-485 Download)

Step 1: Confirm Eligibility and Choose the Right Path

Before starting Form I-485, verify that adjustment of status is the correct process for you and that you meet prerequisites such as physical presence in the U.S., a qualifying immigrant petition, visa availability, and admissibility (or eligibility for a waiver). USCIS instructions, Adjustment basics

If you do not qualify for adjustment, your only option may be consular processing abroad. Comparison of AOS and consular processing

Step 2: Gather Required Documents

A strong I-485 package is built on complete, well-organized documentation.
While requirements vary by category, USCIS and multiple practice guides identify several core document types. I-485 checklist Family I-485 checklist

- **Forms:** I-485, I-765 (optional), I-131 (optional), I-864 (family-based), and any category-specific supplements. University AoS instructions
- **Identity documents:** Passport, birth certificate with translation if needed, and passport-style photos. I-485 document checklist
- **Immigration history:** I-94 record, prior visas, approval notices, and EADs. Family AoS checklist
- **Relationship evidence (family-based):** Marriage certificate, proof of bona fide relationship, children's birth certificates, and any prior divorce decrees. Marriage case checklist
- **Financial evidence & public charge:** Form I-864, tax returns, W-2s, proof of current income, and evidence of assets or joint sponsors where needed. Affidavit of support info
- **Medical exam:** Form I-693 completed by a USCIS-approved civil surgeon and submitted in a sealed envelope. Medical exam section
- **Police/court records:** Certified records for any arrest or conviction, plus evidence of completed sentences or waivers where applicable. Criminal history documentation

Step 3: Fill Out Form I-485 Carefully

Official I-485 instructions emphasize using the current form edition, answering every question, using “N/A” or “None” when appropriate, and signing and dating the form.
Unsigned or incomplete forms are commonly rejected. USCIS form instructions

You’ll need to provide detailed information about your identity, address and employment history, immigration history, and any arrests or convictions, even if expunged.
You must also answer inadmissibility and public charge questions fully and truthfully. Inadmissibility section

USCIS recently updated its Policy Manual and I-485 questions to clarify who is subject to the public charge ground of inadmissibility and what information is required, prompting advocacy organizations to submit detailed comments on the changes. Policy update summary ILRC comments

Step 4: Assemble and File Your Packet

Most checklists recommend organizing your I-485 package with forms first, followed by supporting evidence grouped by category, and including a clear cover letter that summarizes your eligibility and enclosed documents. Assembly checklist Family packet organization

Send your package to the correct address based on your category and state of residence, using the latest “Where to File” guidance on USCIS’s website or cross-checked with reputable practice resources. Filing location discussion

Step 5: Biometrics Appointment

After USCIS accepts your case, you’ll receive a notice for a **biometrics appointment** at an Application Support Center where fingerprints, photographs, and a signature are collected for security checks and card production. Biometrics section

Step 6: Work Permit and Advance Parole (If Requested)

If you filed Form I-765 with your I-485, you may receive an Employment Authorization Document that lets you work legally in the U.S. while your case is pending.
If you filed Form I-131, you can also receive advance parole to travel and return to the U.S. without abandoning your application, subject to important limitations. Work/travel while adjusting EAD and AP overview

Travel can be risky if you have past status issues, criminal history, or pending removal proceedings, so it is critical to discuss any travel plans with an immigration attorney before leaving the U.S. during an active I-485 case. Travel cautions

Step 7: USCIS Interview

Most I-485 applicants attend an in-person interview at a local USCIS field office.
At the interview, an officer verifies your identity, reviews your documents, and asks questions about your application and eligibility, including detailed relationship questions in marriage-based cases. Interview overview

You should bring originals of important documents (passports, birth and marriage certificates) and updated evidence, such as new joint documents for marriage cases. Interview preparation checklist

Step 8: Decision and Green Card Issuance

After the interview and background checks, USCIS may approve your application, request additional evidence, issue a Notice of Intent to Deny, or deny the case outright, usually with written reasons.
When approved, your green card is typically mailed within a few weeks, and your permanent resident status begins as of the approval date. Decision stage timing

Public Charge, Affidavit of Support, and Financial Requirements

For most family-based I-485 applicants, USCIS uses Form I-864, Affidavit of Support, to determine whether there is a

qualifying financial sponsor whose income meets or exceeds 125% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines, supported by tax returns, W-2s, and current employment evidence. Affidavit of support details

USCIS's updated Policy Manual and I-485 questions clarify how the public charge ground of inadmissibility is applied and what information applicants must provide, and advocates have carefully reviewed and commented on these changes. Public charge policy update ILRC analysis

Common Mistakes That Delay or Jeopardize I-485 Cases

Even strong cases can be delayed or denied because of avoidable errors such as using outdated forms, missing signatures, incorrect fees, incomplete answers, weak relationship evidence, or failing to disclose prior immigration violations or criminal issues. USCIS instructions, Common error checklist

Creating a customized checklist, double-checking all entries, and scanning your entire packet for your records before mailing can significantly reduce the risk of rejections or Requests for Evidence (RFEs). Filing checklist Family filing guide

When to Get Help from an Immigration Attorney

Form I-485 merges complex eligibility rules, detailed biographical disclosures, and high stakes: a denial can have serious

consequences, especially if you've been out of status, have prior violations, or are in removal proceedings. Risk overview, Legal analysis of pitfalls

You should strongly consider working with an experienced immigration attorney if you entered the U.S. without inspection, have multiple status violations, have any criminal history, have ever used false documents, or are in removal proceedings, or if you are applying in complex humanitarian categories like asylum-based I-485, VAWA, or T/U visas. Complex case guidance

For individuals in Atlanta and across Georgia, a focused immigration practice like Lunel Law can help you evaluate eligibility, choose between adjustment and consular processing, prepare your forms and evidence, and represent you at USCIS interviews or in immigration court when needed. Firm overview Asylum and refugees practice

You can learn more about Lunel Law's immigration practice on their Immigration Law page and contact the firm for a consultation via their contact form.

Final Tips Before You File I-485

- Confirm eligibility and visa availability based on your category and the State Department Visa Bulletin before filing. Visa availability overview

- Always download the current I-485 form and instructions and check fees just before you file. I-485 instructions
- Build a thorough document packet organized by category (identity, immigration history, finances, relationships, medical, etc.). Document checklist
- Consider filing I-765 and I-131 with your I-485 so you can work and, if appropriate, travel while waiting, but always confirm that travel is safe in your specific situation. Work/travel guidance
- Keep copies or scans of everything you submit and all USCIS notices.
- When in doubt—especially with complex histories or humanitarian cases—invest in a consultation with an experienced immigration attorney; it is often far cheaper than fixing a serious mistake later. Professional counsel recommended

Resources

If you are preparing Form I-485 or advising someone who is, it is essential to work from current, primary documents and high-quality practice guides. The following PDF resources provide the official form, detailed instructions, and practical checklists that complement the information in this article.

- USCIS “Instructions for Form I-485, Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjust Status”
  – The official USCIS instructions that explain who can file, which category to select, how to complete each part of the form, and what evidence is required for different eligibility groups.
- USCIS I-485 Instruction Supplement (Reginfo.gov)

– An additional version of the instructions that outlines filing categories, admissibility concepts, and cross-references to the Immigration and Nationality Act for more technical readers.

- AILA “Form I-485 Instructions” (Practice Copy)
  – A practitioner-oriented copy of the USCIS instructions maintained by the American Immigration Lawyers Association, useful for checking that your approach aligns with how experienced attorneys structure I-485 filings.
- AILA “Instruction Booklet for Filing Form I-485 and Supplement A”
  – A comprehensive booklet that walks through eligibility categories (including family, employment, refugees/asylees, and special programs) and gives extra explanation around complex sections like INA 245(i) and Supplement A.
- Consolidated I-485 Instructions (including Medical and Public-Charge Sections)
  – A consolidated PDF version of the instructions that is particularly helpful for reviewing the medical exam (Form I-693), public-charge questions, and general eligibility/inadmissibility grounds all in one place.
- University Adjustment of Status (I-485) Instructions (UGA)
  – A university-produced guide that illustrates how an institution organizes I-485 filings for students and scholars, including practical tips on forms, evidence, and timing for employment-based and family-based cases.
- I-485 Application Checklist (ImmigrationDirect) – PDF Version
  – A checklist-style resource that summarizes common supporting documents for family-based adjustment, including identity, relationship, financial, and criminal-history evidence you should gather before filing.
- I-485 Documents Checklist & Complete Filing Guide (2025/2026)
  – A thorough document checklist and filing guide that shows how to structure a full I-485 packet, from cover letter to

exhibits, which is especially useful for avoiding missing items that can trigger Requests for Evidence.

- Family-Based I-485 Checklist (CitizenPath)
  – A family-specific checklist that breaks down exactly what most marriage- and family-based applicants need to include, including examples of bona fide relationship evidence and financial documentation.
- Green Card Supporting Document Checklist (Illinois Legal Aid)
  – Legal-aid guidance on typical green card evidence and fee-waiver documentation, helpful if you are considering fee relief or working with a nonprofit legal services provider.
- USCIS Public-Charge Policy Manual Update Summary
  – A practitioner summary that explains USCIS's recent updates to the public-charge section of the Policy Manual and how those changes affect I-485 applicants.
- ILRC Comments on USCIS Public-Charge Policy Manual Update
  – Advocacy-focused comments from the Immigrant Legal Resource Center that can help you understand common concerns about public-charge policy and how practitioners analyze the new questions on Form I-485.
- USCIS Filing Fee Increases Effective April 1, 2024 – Practice Summary
  – A summary of the filing-fee rule that explains the new I-485, I-765, and I-131 fee structure and why the total cost of an adjustment package has changed for many applicants.
- CLINIC: Fee Increases for Form I-485, Form I-765, and Form I-131
  – A nonprofit-authored explainer with charts and examples that show how the new fee schedule applies to different categories of adjustment applicants.

When using these resources, always double-check that you are looking at the latest edition of each form and instruction.

For case-specific strategy and risk analysis, especially in complex or high-stakes situations, consider consulting directly with an experienced immigration attorney such as Lunel Law's immigration team in Atlanta.