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Immigration Update: The Increased Number of Permanent Residents; USCIS's Customer Identity Verification Program; New Electronic Visa Application Forms

Authors: Melanie Colvert Walker

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Immigrant Visa Numbers continue to advance with big jumps this month in the EB-3 category, and USCIS and Department of State implement technological advances.

Significant Advances in Visa Numbers Open More Doors to Permanent Residency

Since last month's jumps in the F2A (unmarried children and spouses of permanent residents) and EB-2 (Members of Professions holding Advanced Degrees or Exceptional Ability) categories, the roads to permanent residency continue to widen, this time in the Employment- Based 3rd Preference category (EB-3). The September 2013 Visa Bulletin published by the Department of State marks an unusually large leap forward for available immigrant visa numbers for applicants in the traditionally backlogged classification of EB-3. Individuals from Mexico, China and other countries (except for India and the Philippines) with priority dates of July 1, 2010 or earlier can finally file their adjustment of status applications to become permanent residents. This cut-off date reflects an 18-month advance from the January 1, 2009 date published in the August Visa Bulletin. Indian nationals saw an eight-month jump forward to September 22, 2003, while individuals from the Philippines saw even smaller advancement of only six weeks to December 1, 2006. It is unclear how long it will be before these visa numbers are again oversubscribed and retrogress as a result. Applicants with priority dates that qualify for an immigrant visa number should strongly consider filing quickly for adjustment of status this month while their window for filing is open.

Customer Identity Verification at USCIS Field Offices

Starting September 9, 2013, USCIS is implementing Customer Identity Verification (CIV), a verification tool, at its field offices nationwide. When appearing at local offices for interviews or to receive an immigration benefit, applicants will now submit biometric data at the counter (a scan of two fingerprints and a digital photo). Once an applicant's identity has been verified, he or she can proceed to complete the interview or to receive the requested immigration document. Those who are accompanying applicants or simply requesting an INFOPASS appointment will not be asked to provide biometric data. USCIS anticipates a reduction in identity fraud and increased defense against threats to national security through CIV's instant connection to the United States Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology's (US-VISIT) Secondary Inspections Tool (SIT). SIT processes and displays biometric data, and US-VISIT links databases associated with border inspections and security.

Full announcement at: <http://content.govdelivery.com/bulletins/gd/USDHSCIS-8a017c>

Department of State Implements the Electronic DS-260/DS-261 Worldwide

Effective September 1, 2013, Immigrant Visa Application and Choice of Address and Agent forms will no longer be submitted on the paper-based DS-230 and DS-3032 forms. New cases submitted to the National Visa Center on or after September 1 must complete the electronic forms DS-260 Immigrant Visa Application and DS-261 Choice of Address and Agent. After September 1, only Diversity Visa and Cuban Family

Reunification Parole applicants will continue to use the paper forms. Cases currently in the pipeline, where the DS-230 has already been submitted and accepted, should not require submission of the DS-260 unless instructed by the NVC or a consular officer, but individuals with pending applications should carefully review the Department of State website for additional details regarding the transition.