

## The Diversity Visa System: A Fact Sheet

### What is the diversity visa lottery?

The diversity visa lottery was created to encourage legal immigration to the U.S. from countries other than the major immigrant sending countries. The current immigration system favors individuals who have close relationships with family members or employers in the U.S. People who do not have close family or employment in the U.S. have very few opportunities for permanent, legal immigration to the U.S.

The diversity immigrant category was created by the Immigration Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-649) to stimulate “new seed” immigration from parts of the world that are under-represented in the U.S. The Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act of 1997 (NACARA) temporarily reduced the 55,000 annual ceiling by up to 5,000 annually to offset immigrant visa numbers for certain NACARA beneficiaries. As of now, the diversity visa ceiling is still set at 50,000, and it is unclear how many more years the offset will continue.

The diversity lottery makes visas available each year to natives of countries with fewer than 50,000 total immigrant admissions over the preceding five years. Natives of Mexico, India, China, and other countries that send large numbers of immigrants to the U.S. are not eligible.

### Who is eligible for a diversity visa?

To be eligible, applicants must have a high school education or its equivalent, or 2 years experience in an occupation which requires at least 2 years of training or experience, and must be admissible under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). The applicant or the applicant’s spouse must be a native of one of the countries that qualify for the diversity visa lottery. Applications must be submitted electronically. Lottery winners are selected randomly by a computer, and the State Department notifies the winners. Winners then have a short time period to file the necessary paperwork demonstrating that they are admissible as legal permanent residents. In person interviews are then scheduled. Lottery winners may also bring their spouses and minor children to the U.S. as derivatives.

### Who has received the diversity visa?

Each year, diversity visa winners make up about 4% of all LPR admissions. In 2009, there were 47,879 green cards issued to diversity visa winners. Of those, 26,243 were principal applicants, 10,157 were spouses of principal applicants, and 11,479 were their children. The vast majority were new arrivals to the U.S. (46,602 vs. 1,277 adjustments of status for immigrants already in the U.S.).

In 2010, there were 49,763 green cards given to diversity visa winners and their families. Just over half were male. Just under three-quarters (74%) were 21 years of age and older.

### From which countries do diversity visa recipients come?

The national origins of diversity visa recipients show that underrepresented areas of the world receive the largest percentage of the visas:

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Africa	23,903	48%
Asia	14,776	30%
Europe	9,353	19%
North America	461	1%
Oceania	608	1%
South America	642	1%
Unknown	20	<1%

The single largest number of visas went to Ethiopia (3,987 visas), followed by Egypt (3,447), Uzbekistan (3,279), Nigeria (2,937), Bangladesh (2,800), and Kenya (2,279).

The countries benefiting from the Diversity visa lottery have changed over the years. From 1997-2002, Albania was the #1 recipient, followed by Nigeria, the Ukraine, and Bulgaria. In 2010, Albania was still a top recipient, receiving 1,638 visas.

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