

**My parents left me here and I cannot make it on my own. I left my country because of abuse, neglect or abandonment. My parents are hitting, slapping, or kicking me.**

#### **Special Immigrant Juvenile Status**

Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), sometimes called SIJ status, is a special way for children and youth in the United States to get legal status. You can apply for SIJS if:

- you are under 21
- you are unmarried
- a juvenile or probate court finds you cannot be reunified with one or both of your parents because of abuse, neglect or abandonment
- returning to your home country is not in your best interest

To be eligible, all the requirements above must be true. You must also appear in a juvenile or probate court and then file your case with immigration authorities before you turn 21. Talk to us right away if you think you might qualify.

If you are granted Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, you can apply for a green card.



#### **If am here without legal status, can I still go to school?**

Yes. Even if you are here without legal status, you have the right to go to public school through high school. You also have the right to free and reduced-price lunch and breakfast if you qualify financially.

#### **If I am here without legal status, can I apply for financial aid for college?**

Immigrants without legal status do not qualify for federal financial aid. However, there are private sources of school funding that do not require citizenship or residency, and some colleges and universities do not charge tuition at all for families that meet certain income guidelines.

Also, if you live in Connecticut, graduate from a Connecticut high school after attending a Connecticut high school for four years, and you sign a piece of paper saying you will apply for legal status when/if it becomes available, you can pay in-state tuition at a Connecticut State College.

Some immigrants without legal status could also be eligible for institutional financial aid at Connecticut public colleges if they meet certain requirements. Call us for more information.

#### **If am here without legal status, can I apply for public benefits like welfare, food stamps, and medical?**

No. Only citizens and lawful permanent residents can apply for most public benefits. If you are here without legal status and say you are a citizen or a lawful permanent resident to collect public benefits, this may mean you are committing fraud. If you commit fraud, it may be harder for you to become a resident or citizen later.

#### **If I am pregnant, can I get benefits for myself or for my baby if I don't have legal status?**

If you are pregnant, you can receive WIC benefits, some medical benefits, and you can apply for benefits for your child if s/he was born in the United States. You can also qualify for emergency medical care.



## **Resources**

### **For immigration questions concerning children and teens**

#### **Center for Children's Advocacy**

Hartford: 860-570-5327

Bridgeport: 203-335-0719

### **For general immigration questions**

#### **Connecticut Institute for Refugees and Immigrants (CIRI)**

Hartford: 860-692-3085

Bridgeport / Main Office: 203-336-0141

Stamford: 203-965-7190

#### **USCIS website**

[uscis.gov](http://uscis.gov)

The information in this brochure is intended as reference only and should not be interpreted as legal advice in an individual case. If you need specific information about the law, please call 860-570-5327 or 203-335-0719.



Center for  
**Children's**  
Advocacy

[cca-ct.org](http://cca-ct.org) and [speakup teens.org](http://speakup teens.org)

# Some facts about Immigration

**What are my rights?  
What are my options?**

**Immigration issues are very complex and many factors determine your legal options.**

**Talk with an immigration lawyer if you have questions about your legal status.**

#### **What is a lawful permanent resident?**

A lawful permanent resident - someone who has a “green card” - can live and work permanently in the United States and travel outside the United States. Lawful permanent residents cannot vote, and they can be deported for certain criminal convictions or other serious problems.

Lawful permanent residents must always keep a permanent home in the United States and should not leave the country for more than one year (unless they first get special permission from the immigration agency) because they may lose their permanent resident status.

#### **How do I become a lawful permanent resident?**

To become a lawful resident, you must apply for a “green card” from the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS). The green card allows you to live and work in the U.S. permanently. A green card must be renewed every ten years.

Not everyone will qualify for a green card, and getting one can take a long time. It depends on your age, your country of origin, your legal status and the legal status of your family.

#### **Here are examples of ways people qualify for a green card:**

- **Family Petition**  
Certain relatives of U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents qualify for green cards. Generally, family-based options may work for spouses, children (including stepchildren, adopted children and adult children), parents or stepparents, brothers and sisters of adult U. S. citizens. In some cases, this process can take several years.
- **Special Immigrant Juvenile Status**  
If you have been abused or neglected, you may qualify for a green card. There is more information about Special Immigrant Juvenile Status in this brochure.
- **T & U Visas**  
Anyone who has been the victim of certain violent crimes, including being bought or sold by “traffickers,” and has been helpful to the police in investigating those crimes, may qualify for a T or U Visa. Once you get a T or U Visa, you can eventually apply for a green card.

- **Domestic Violence**  
If you were abused by a parent or spouse who is a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident, or if you are under 18 and your parent was abused by a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident, you may qualify for a green card under a law called the Violence Against Women Act. This law protects not only women but also boys, girls and men. See *Violence Against Women Act* in this brochure.
- **Asylum**  
If you left your country because of persecution (poor treatment, harassment or discrimination) or a fear of persecution due to race, religion, nationality, membership in a certain social group or political opinion, you may qualify for asylum in the United States.
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#### **How can I become a U.S. citizen?**

If you were born in the U.S., Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands or another U.S. territory, you are a U.S. citizen by birth. If you were born to a U.S. citizen while living outside of the U.S. or if your parent became a U.S. citizen while you were less than 18 years old, you may qualify as a citizen. If you are not a citizen by birth, you must apply to become a citizen. This process is called naturalization.

If you are under 18, to become naturalized you must apply with the help of your parents unless you meet certain exceptions. Contact us for more information.



#### **My parents are hitting, slapping, or kicking me. Can I can apply for a green card without my parents' help?**

##### **Violence Against Women Act**

If you are abused by your parent or stepparent who is a lawful resident or U.S. citizen, you may qualify to become a permanent resident under the Violence Against Women Act. This Act applies to boys, girls, men and women. Usually, people who are under 18 have to apply for a green card with their parents' help, but if you are being abused by a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident parent, you can apply on your own.

If your parent or stepparent is not a lawful resident or citizen, see the section on Special Immigrant Juvenile Status.

If you are being abused or neglected, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) can help keep you safe. DCF cannot refuse services to you because of your immigration status, and can find you a safe place to live if you are abused or neglected at home. If you need help from DCF you can call 1-800-842-2288 any time of the day or night.