

# Fact Sheet

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## Naturalization

The United States has a long history of welcoming immigrants from all parts of the world. During the last decade, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) welcomed more than 6.6 million naturalized citizens into the fabric of our nation. In fiscal year 2010, approximately 676,000 individuals were naturalized.

Deciding to become a U.S. citizen can be a very important milestone in an immigrant's life. Individuals must demonstrate a commitment to the unifying principles that bind us as Americans and in return, will enjoy many of the rights and privileges that are fundamental to U.S. citizenship.

### About the Naturalization Process

In general, an individual over the age of 18 seeking to become a citizen of the United States must apply for naturalization by filing an Application for Naturalization, [Form N-400](#). To be eligible for naturalization, an applicant must fulfill certain eligibility requirements set forth in the [Immigration and Nationality Act \(INA\)](#).

These general eligibility requirements specify that the applicant must:

- Be at least 18 years of age;
- Be a lawful permanent resident (green card holder);
- Have resided in the United States for at least five years;
- Have been physically present in the United States for at least 30 months;
- Be a person of good moral character;
- Be able to speak, read, write and understand the English language;
- Have knowledge of U.S. government and history; and
- Be willing and able to take the [Oath of Allegiance](#).

Special naturalization provisions exempt certain applicants from one or more of the general requirements for naturalization. Spouses of U.S. citizens and members of the military constitute the main categories of individuals who are exempt from some of the general requirements for naturalization.

- The majority of individuals naturalizing as spouses of U.S. citizens may do so three years after being admitted as lawful permanent residents, rather than the five years prescribed under the general provisions.
- Spouses of U.S. citizens stationed abroad may not be required to meet any particular residence or physical presence requirement.
- Members of the military who served honorably during certain periods of conflict may be eligible for naturalization even though they have not been admitted as lawful permanent residents and even if they are under the age of 18.
- Members of the military who served honorably for at least one year, at any time, and apply for naturalization within a certain time after their military service, are also exempt from the general residence and physical presence requirements.

In addition to these naturalization provisions, the INA also provides for the naturalization of children who are under the age of 18.

- A child under the age of 18, who is a lawful permanent resident residing in the United States in the legal and physical custody of a U.S. citizen parent, may automatically acquire U.S. citizenship. To obtain evidence of U.S. citizenship, an Application for Certificate of Citizenship, [Form N-600](#), must be filed on behalf of the child.
- A child who is residing abroad, who is temporarily present in the U.S. based on any lawful admission, may be eligible to apply for naturalization while under the age of 18 if he or she has at least one parent who is a citizen of the United States, and the parent (or qualifying grandparent) meets certain physical presence requirements in the United States.
- There are exemptions benefiting children of active-duty members of the military stationed abroad.

All persons filing an Application for Naturalization who have submitted a complete application along with all required documents will be scheduled for an interview by a USCIS officer. Those applicants found qualified are scheduled for an oath ceremony before a judge or an officer delegated the authority by the Director of USCIS to administer the [Oath of Allegiance](#). Applicants do not become U.S. citizens until they have taken the Oath.

### **Naturalization Statistics**

- Each year, USCIS welcomes approximately 680,000 citizens during naturalization ceremonies across the United States and around the world.
- In FY 2009, 74 percent of all persons naturalizing resided in 10 states (in descending order): California, New York, Florida, Texas, New Jersey, Illinois, Virginia, Massachusetts, Washington and Maryland.
- In FY 2009, the leading metropolitan areas of residence were New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, NY-NJ-PA (15 percent), Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA (11 percent) and Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach, FL (7.3 percent).
- In FY 2009, the top countries of origin for naturalization were in the following order: Mexico, India, Philippines, China and Vietnam.<sup>1</sup>
- Since September 2001, USCIS has naturalized more than 64,000 members of the military, in ceremonies across the United States and in the following 22 countries: Afghanistan, Bahrain, China, Cuba, Djibouti, El Salvador, Germany, Greece, Haiti, Honduras, Iceland, Iraq, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Kosovo, Kuwait, Philippines, South Korea, Spain, Thailand and the United Kingdom.
- Since 2008, USCIS has naturalized 883 military spouses during ceremonies in Bulgaria, China, El Salvador, Germany, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Oman, Panama, Philippines, South Korea, Spain, Thailand, Turkey and the United Kingdom.

<b>Total Naturalized Citizens: Fiscal Years 2001-2010</b>			
2010	675,967	2005	604,280
2009	743,715	2004	537,151
2008	1,046,539	2003	463,204
2007	660,477	2002	573,708
2006	702,589	2001	608,205

For additional information on USCIS and its programs, visit [www.uscis.gov](http://www.uscis.gov).

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<sup>1</sup> Lee, James, 2010. *Annual Flow Report-Naturalizations in the United States: 2009*. Office of Immigration Statistics, Policy Directorate, U.S. Department of Homeland Security.