



U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services

# USCIS Naturalization Policies Fact Sheet

*June 2021*

# USCIS NATURALIZATION POLICIES ISSUED SINCE JANUARY 2021

The Biden-Harris administration is committed to making the naturalization process both welcoming and accessible to all who are eligible. As part of that effort, President Biden issued [Executive Order 14012: Restoring Faith in Our Legal Immigration System and Strengthening Integration and Inclusion Efforts for New Americans](#). Since the beginning of the Biden-Harris administration, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has issued the following naturalization policies designed to support implementation of this Executive Order:

## **Reinstatement of the 2008 Civics Test-Revising Guidance on Naturalization Civics Educational Requirement**

- On Feb. 22, 2021, USCIS announced the reinstatement of the 2008 civics test, effective March 1, 2021.
- There was a brief period during which USCIS also offered the 2020 version of the test to applicants affected by the timing of the update.

## **Preserving Continuous Residence and Physical Presence of Naturalization for Purposes of Naturalization while Engaged in Religious Duties Outside the United States**

- On May 25, 2021, USCIS published guidance that applicants who are outside the U.S. for one year or more to engage in ministerial or priestly functions may treat such time abroad as continuous residence and physical presence in the United States for naturalization purposes.

## **Naturalization Eligibility and Voter Registration Through a State's Benefit Application Process**

- On May 27, 2021, USCIS published guidance regarding an applicant's registration to vote through a state's department of motor vehicles or other state benefit application process and the effects on an applicant's good moral character.
- This guidance also clarified that USCIS will not penalize applicants who unknowingly or unwillfully register to vote, and that USCIS does not consider an applicant to have unlawfully registered to vote if they did not complete or sign the voter registration section.

## **Veterans Residing Outside the United States and Naturalization**

- On May 28, 2021, USCIS published guidance to clarify that certain naturalization applications filed by veterans of the U.S. armed forces who served honorably during specifically designated periods of hostility and meet all other statutory requirements for naturalization are able to naturalize and become U.S. citizens in accordance with U.S. immigration laws.

## **Technical Update - Incorporating New INA 320(c) Provision into Nationality Chart 3 - Derivative Citizenship of Children**

- On May 24, 2021, USCIS published a technical update to the USCIS Policy Manual that incorporates into Nationality Chart 3 the new INA 320(c) provision, as amended by Section 2 of the Citizenship for Children of Military Members and Civil Servants Act, regarding the automatic citizenship of a foreign-born child of a U.S. citizen employee of the U.S. government or member of the U.S. armed forces.

## OVERSEAS MILITARY NATURALIZATION PROCESS:

USCIS is utilizing video capabilities for interviews and naturalization ceremonies at Department of Defense facilities for eligible military members and their qualifying family members stationed overseas. The first naturalization ceremony by remote video occurred on March 29, 2021.



## FY21 CITIZENSHIP AND INTEGRATION GRANTS PROGRAM:

On May 17, 2021, USCIS started accepting applications for two funding opportunities under the FY21 Grant Program that will provide up to \$10 million in grants for citizenship preparation programs in communities across the country. This is the agency's 13th year operating the grant program. Obviously, this year the announcement takes on special importance as we emphasize our commitment to welcoming immigrants and giving them the tools, they need to pursue the benefits of U.S citizenship. This year is the first-time organizations will have two months to apply. Also, this year we increased our outreach efforts through public engagements and webinars.

## OFFICE-TO-OFFICE INTERVIEWS:

To help meet the requirements of physical distancing due to the COVID-19 pandemic, USCIS deployed the use of video interviews for naturalization applicants, where an applicant comes to a USCIS facility but sits in a different room than the interviewing officer who conducts the interview using video technology.

- USCIS processed over 180,000 naturalization applications between March and April 2021.
- This has allowed USCIS to return to pre-pandemic levels when it comes to completing naturalization applications.

## OUTSTANDING AMERICANS BY CHOICE (ABC) INITIATIVE:

This initiative recognizes the outstanding achievements of naturalized U.S. citizens. Through civic participation, professional achievement, and responsible citizenship, recipients of this honor have demonstrated their commitment to this country and to the common civic values that unite us as Americans. Last recognizing a recipient in November 2017, USCIS has since revitalized the ABC initiative and has recognized the following individuals to date:

- In a naturalization ceremony celebrating Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month in May, USCIS recognized Sandy Hoa Dang and Dr. Nguyen Dinh Thang.
- In a naturalization ceremony with Second Gentleman of the United States Doug Emhoff to honor World Refugee Day in June, USCIS recognized Immaculée Ilibagiza.
- We also expect to recognize an ABC recipient who is a “COVID-19 hero” during a special Independence Day-themed naturalization ceremony.



Full biographies for the recent Outstanding ABC recipients are available on the [Outstanding Americans by Choice](#) page.

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