



May 25, 2021

PA-2021-07

## Policy Alert

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

### Purpose

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is updating policy guidance in the [USCIS Policy Manual](#) regarding preservation of continuous residence and physical presence for naturalization purposes for applicants engaged outside the United States in a qualifying religious vocation under section 317 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA).<sup>1</sup>

### Background

To be eligible for naturalization, an applicant generally must have resided continuously in the United States after admission as a lawful permanent resident for at least 5 years (or 3 years or less under certain spousal provisions).<sup>2</sup> Certain applicants who are outside the United States for 1 year or more to engage in ministerial or priestly functions (or other related specified functions) may treat such time abroad as continuous residence and physical presence in the United States for naturalization purposes.<sup>3</sup> This guidance, contained in Volume 12 of the Policy Manual, is effective immediately. The guidance contained in the Policy Manual is controlling and supersedes any related prior guidance.

### Policy Highlights

- Specifies that applicants engaged outside the United States in a qualifying religious vocation provided under INA 317 must file an Application to Preserve Residence for Naturalization Purposes ([Form N-470](#)) with USCIS to have time outside the United States considered towards the continuous residence and physical presence requirements.
- Clarifies that such applicants may file the Form N-470 before, during, or after an absence from the United States, even if the absence lasted for more than 1 year.
- Clarifies that such applicants may establish 1 year of uninterrupted physical presence at any time before filing the Application for Naturalization ([Form N-400](#)) and need not comply with this requirement before filing Form N-470.

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<sup>1</sup> See [INA 317](#).

<sup>2</sup> See [INA 316\(a\)](#) and [8 CFR 316.2\(a\)\(3\)](#) (5-year requirement). See [INA 319](#) and [8 CFR 319](#) (3-year requirement).

<sup>3</sup> See [INA 317](#).

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**Citation**

Volume 12: Naturalization and Citizenship, Part D, General Naturalization Requirements [[12 USCIS-PM D](#)].