

# 8 Ways to Become a U.S. Citizen



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The United States offers several ways to become a citizen.

Below is a list of various ways that you may qualify to become a US Citizen.

Choose the appropriate category and click [Learn More](#).

## 1. US Citizenship through Naturalization

You may be eligible to obtain U.S. citizenship if:

- You are a foreign national with 5 years permanent residence in the U.S. and at least half that time you were physically present inside the U.S. with no periods of absence over six months.
- You are a permanent resident for 3 years, who is currently married to a U.S. citizen, and has been married to the same U.S. citizen for the past 3 years.
- You have served the U.S. Armed Forces for at least three years
- You performed active duty military service in the U.S. Armed Forces during:
  - ▶ World War I (November 11, 1916 - April 6, 1917)
  - ▶ World War II (September 1, 1939 - December 31, 1946)
  - ▶ Korea (June 25, 1950 - July 1, 1955)
  - ▶ Vietnam (February 28, 1961 - October 15, 1978) or
  - ▶ Persian Gulf (August 2, 1990 - April 11, 1991)
- You were married to a U.S. citizen who died during a period of honorable active duty service in the U.S. Armed Forces

- You served on a vessel operated by the U.S. and have been a U.S. permanent resident for the past five years
- You are an employee or an individual under contract to the U.S. Government and have been a U.S. permanent resident for the past five years
- Are a person who performs ministerial or priestly functions for a religious denomination or an interdenominational organization with a valid presence in the U.S., and have been a U.S. permanent resident for the past five years
- You are a spouse of a U.S. citizen who is one of the following:
  - ▶ A member of the U.S. Armed Forces
  - ▶ An employee or an individual under contract to the U.S. Government
  - ▶ An employee of an American institution of research recognized by the Attorney General
  - ▶ An employee of a public international organization of which the United States is a member by law or treaty
  - ▶ An employee of an American-owned firm or corporation engaged in the development of foreign trade and commerce for the United States
  - ▶ A person who performs ministerial or priestly functions for a religious denomination or an interdenominational organization with a valid presence in the United States

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## 2. US Citizenship through Birth

- Any child born in the U.S. automatically acquires U.S. citizenship, even if the child's mother was in the U.S. illegally. This provision does not apply to a child whose parent was a foreign diplomat at the time of birth.

### 3. US Citizenship through Parents

Even though a child is born outside the U.S., the child automatically acquires U.S. citizenship if at least one parent was a U.S. citizen at the time of the child's birth

- If both parents were U.S. citizens at the time of a child's birth outside the U.S., and at least one parent had a prior residence in the U.S., the child automatically acquires U.S. citizenship.
- If only one parent was a U.S. citizen at the time of a child's birth outside the U.S., and that parent had previously resided in the U.S. for at least five years, with at least two of those years being after the age of 14, the child automatically acquires U.S. citizenship.

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### 4. US Citizenship through Adoption

- Children under 18 years of age holding green cards may be naturalized if petitioned for by a U.S. citizen parent.

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### 5. Reclaim Lost Citizenship

- Individuals born before 1934 in foreign countries to U.S. citizen mothers, and were denied citizenship because of retention requirements and the law of the day
- Former U.S. citizens who prior to September 22, 1922 lost U.S. citizenship because of marriage to a foreign national who was ineligible for naturalization
- Former citizens losing citizenship for failure to meet physical presence retention requirement according to law prior to 1978
- Former citizens losing citizenship by entering armed forces of foreign countries during World War II
- Children who lost their U.S. citizenship through failure to meet the retention requirements of the law

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## 6. Posthumous Citizenship

- Posthumous citizenship is granted to foreign nationals who died while on active duty service in the U.S. Armed Forces during the World War I, World War II, Korean or Vietnam hostilities, or in other periods of military hostilities.

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## 7. Doctrine of Constructive Retention

- Individuals born and raised outside the U.S., being unaware of having acquired U.S. citizenship through their parents and have therefore failed to fulfill U.S. residency requirements may claim U.S. citizenship through the Doctrine of Constructive Retention.

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## 8. Doctrine of Double Constructive Retention

- Individuals with grandparents who were U.S. citizens may be eligible to claim U.S. citizenship under Doctrine of Double Constructive Retention.

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