

# Citizenship: Benefits of Becoming a U.S. Citizen

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*[This information was current as of January 2009.]*

## Citizens can bring family members to live in the U.S.

Only citizens can get family visas for:

- parents
- married sons and daughters
- brothers and sisters



Permanent residents and U.S. citizens can get family visas for

- husbands and wives
- sons and daughters who are not married

But citizens can bring these family members to the U.S. much faster.

## Children of citizens become citizens the same day that their parents do.

This happens when the children:

- are under 18 at the time the parent is sworn in as a U.S. citizen,
- are in the U.S. legally, and
- are in the custody of the U.S. citizen parent

They don't have to pay a fee, send in an application, or have a criminal record check. They don't have to go to an interview, take a test, or take an oath. To prove that they are citizens, they can use their birth certificate and the parent's Certificate of Citizenship to apply for a U.S. passport and/or a Certificate of Citizenship in their own name.

## Citizens can travel with a U.S. passport.

This makes it easy to visit many countries. For some countries, U.S. citizens do not even need to get a visa for short visits. U.S. citizens can ask for help at any U.S. embassy or consulate if they have an emergency. For example, citizens can ask for help if their passports are stolen, if they are put in jail, or if they need emergency medical help.

## **Citizens can travel and live outside the U.S. for as long as they want to.**

They can usually return to the U.S. anytime without problems.

Permanent residents who are not citizens may lose their green cards if they leave the U.S. for more than six months. If they want to leave for more than six months, they should talk to an immigration lawyer.

## **Citizens can vote in elections.**

The U.S. democracy is a government of the people. Citizens have a chance to choose the leaders they want to run the U.S., state, and local governments. These leaders decide how the government will spend the money that people pay in taxes. They make the laws that affect every part of people's lives. These are important decisions.

Citizens can have a voice in these decisions by voting in elections.

Citizens can also serve on juries and run for public office (to become an elected leader).

## **Citizens can receive benefits from the U.S. government.**

Examples:

- SSI: Supplemental Security Income
- TANF: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
- Medicaid
- Food Stamps
- money for college

## **Citizens can apply for U.S. government jobs (or jobs with companies that do work for the U.S. government).**

## **Citizens cannot be deported unless they lied or gave false information to obtain their citizenship.**

Even if they commit a crime and go to jail, citizens cannot be sent back to their old country. (And remember that once children become citizens through their parents, they can never be deported either.)

## **Some immigrants feel that becoming American is a dream-come-true.**

It makes them feel proud to be able to say "I am an American." People who have made the U.S. their home often decide to become citizens as a way to show that they love their new country and want to stay here forever. Some people feel that they are not full members of the American community until they have become citizens. (People who become U.S. citizens have the same rights and responsibilities as people who are born in America, and no one can take these rights away\*.)

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\*Citizenship can only be taken away if a person lied about something important on the application or lied at the citizenship interview. If there were any irregularities in your application for permanent resident status, or if there were any questions about your eligibility for permanent resident status, talk to an immigration lawyer before you apply for citizenship.

### **Sources:**

#### **benefits, voting, government jobs, deportation**

*Citizenship for Us*, Catholic Legal Immigration Network 2008, Chapter One pgs. 2-8:  
<http://www.cliniclegal.org/Refugee/citzhandbook.html>

#### **citizenship for children**

<http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.5af9bb95919f35e66f614176543f6d1a/?vgnextoid=f3a1b6b1b8e1e010VgnVCM1000000ecd190aRCRD&vgnextchannel=96719c7755cb9010VgnVCM10000045f3d6a1RCRD>  
or do the following:

1. Go to <http://www.uscis.gov>.
2. Click on "Services and Benefits" at the top.

3. Click on "Citizenship" in the left column.
4. Click on "Citizenship of Children" at the bottom of the page.
5. Click on "Information for Parents of Foreign-Born Biological Children Residing in the U.S." in the right column

### **continuous residence**

<http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.5af9bb95919f35e66f614176543f6d1a/?vgnextoid=12e596981298d010VgnVCM10000048f3d6a1RCRD&vgnextchannel=96719c7755cb9010VgnVCM10000045f3d6a1RCRD>

or do the following:

1. Go to <http://www.uscis.gov>.
2. Click on "Services and Benefits" at the top.
3. Click on "Citizenship" in the left column.
4. Click on "Naturalization Information" at the bottom of the page.
5. Click on "General Naturalization Requirements" in the left column.

### **family visas**

[http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/bulletin/bulletin\\_3219.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/bulletin/bulletin_3219.html)

### **passports**

[http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/tips\\_1232.html#assistance](http://travel.state.gov/travel/tips/tips_1232.html#assistance)