

Non-Citizens in the U.S. Military Fact Sheet

What are the requirements for non-citizens to join the U.S. military? To join the U.S. military, non-citizens must be living permanently and legally in the United States. Non-citizens must also have permission to work in the United States, possess an I-551 (Permanent Residence Card), have obtained a high school diploma and speak English.

How many non-citizens currently serve in the U.S. military? Between 1999 and 2010, approximately 80,000 non-citizens joined the U.S. military force.¹ Most recent data from the Department of Defense (DOD) showed that 24,000 noncitizens were on active duty in 2012, with 5,000 legal permanent residents (LPRs) enlisting into the U.S. military force each year.

How many non-citizen service members have naturalized? From FY2001-FY2015, USCIS naturalized 109, 321 noncitizen service members. Since 2008, USCIS has also naturalized 2,650 military spouses.²

What are the naturalization requirements for noncitizen service members? Generally, non-citizen service members wishing to naturalize must demonstrate 1) good moral character; 2) knowledge of the English language; 3) knowledge of the U.S. government and history; and 4) attachment to the U.S. and allegiance to the U.S. Constitution.

Non-citizen service members may wave residency requirements necessary for naturalization. For those who serve during peacetime, non-citizens may qualify for naturalization so long as he or she has served honorably in the U.S. military force for at least one year, have legal permanent residency, and file for naturalization while in service or within 6 months of service. For those who serve during wartime, noncitizens who meet the general requirements can immediately file for naturalization.

The United States also offers posthumous citizenship for non-citizens killed in combat. More than 100 noncitizens have been granted posthumous citizenship after dying in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan.

How many veterans are foreign-born? As of 2016, 511,000 foreign born veterans resided in the United States, making up approximately 3 percent of the total veteran population. 82 percent (417,000) of immigrant veterans were naturalized U.S. citizens with the top two countries of birth being Mexico (83,000) and the Philippines (68,000). Other countries include Germany (33,000), Canada (31,000), Haiti (17,000), and India (15,000).³

What are current challenges for non-citizens in the U.S. military?

There currently exists several limitations for non-citizens seeking advancements within the U.S. military. For example, federal law requires that all military officers have U.S. citizenship. This means that non-citizens can only join the military as an enlisted member. Additionally, federal law does not allow granting of security clearance to non-citizens, which limits high level job opportunities for non-citizens in the force.

¹ <u>http://nation.time.com/2012/04/06/non-citizens-make-better-u-s-soldiers/</u>

² <u>https://www.uscis.gov/news/fact-sheets/naturalization-through-military-service-fact-sheet</u>

³<u>http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/immigrant-veterans-united-states</u>