

What is a Green Card vs citizenship? What are the differences and privileges?

Possessing a Green Card, officially known as a Permanent Resident Card, allows an individual to work and reside permanently in the US. But being a permanent resident is not the same as being a permanent citizen.

Green Card holders don't have all the privileges of US citizenship, and in certain situations could be deported. However, receiving a Green Card provides one of the routes to becoming a US citizen.

Differences between having a Green Card and citizenship

Green Cards provide one of the legal routes to living and working in the US for an unlimited amount of time, although your status needs to be renewed every ten years. Usually, getting a Green Card is the first step toward attaining US citizenship. Other temporary permits allow individuals to work or study while they reside in the US, but are for those who do not intend, at least initially, to immigrate to the US.

Citizenship gives you the franchise

US citizens are allowed to vote in federal and local elections, serve on juries and apply for government jobs. As a Green Card holder there are government aid programs that you can apply for, but citizenship opens the door to additional state and federal benefits only available to US citizens such as health insurance and retirement insurance programs, as well as loans, scholarships, grants, and other types of financial assistance.

You will also be able obtain citizenship for your children who are born outside of the US and file Green Card applications for a number of family relations to join you in the US. Those family members will have to go through the interview process to gain permanent resident status. Depending on your children's age or whether they are immediate family, some of those relations may be considered "preference relatives," and have to go on a waiting list.

As a Green Card holder, it is possible to apply for permanent residency for your spouse and unmarried children under 21. However, they will be considered "preference relatives," which means they will have to wait based on "priority date", which could be few years, before they can obtain a Green Card and come to the US.

Travel outside the United States

While a Green Card allows you to live, work and travel freely within the US, travel outside the US could result in loss of permanent resident status if it is determined that you didn't plan to make the US your permanent residence. "Temporary or brief [international] travel usually does not affect your permanent resident status," according to the US Citizen and Immigration Services. But if you are planning to be out of the US for an [Finnish id card](#) extended time you are recommended to first apply for a reentry permit on Form I-131. This does not guarantee reentry into the US, you may also be asked upon your return to prove your admissibility again.



As a US citizen you can apply for a US passport which permits visa-free travel to a number of countries. As a US passport holder, you do not have to go through the hassle of proving admissibility at a port of entry and there are no restrictions on the number of days that you can remain abroad.

Deportation

Permanent resident status does not protect an individual from deportation. Simply changing address without notifying the US Citizenship and Immigration Services could result in removal proceedings and deportation. Green Card holders that try to vote in federal or state elections before they attain citizenship will be deported, as well certain other crimes or violations could lead to deportation.

By obtaining US citizenship, unless it is determined that you committed fraud to obtain your citizenship, you will be free of any threat from being deported to your home country.

Becoming a US citizen

US citizenship is automatically granted to those born in the US or born the child of a US citizen. Those wishing to become a US citizen can gain naturalization by either serving in the US military or obtaining a Green Card to begin the process. After living and working in the US with a Green Card for 3 to 5 years, it is possible to apply for US citizenship. The process can take 12 to 18 months from the time of application to the interview. The applicant is required to show general fluency in English and knowledge of US history and civics through a written and oral exam.

