

Penn State Law

Penn State Law eLibrary

---

Immigration Law Blog

Student Scholarship

---

11-15-2023

## Long-Term Immigration and the Path to Citizenship

Ángela Sánchez-Gago

Follow this and additional works at: <https://elibrary.law.psu.edu/ilsblog>



Part of the [Immigration Law Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Sánchez-Gago, Ángela, "Long-Term Immigration and the Path to Citizenship" (2023). *Immigration Law Blog*. 2.

<https://elibrary.law.psu.edu/ilsblog/2>

This Blog Post is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at Penn State Law eLibrary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Immigration Law Blog by an authorized administrator of Penn State Law eLibrary. For more information, please contact [ram6023@psu.edu](mailto:ram6023@psu.edu).

# Long-Term Immigration and the Path to Citizenship

By: Ángela Sánchez-Gago<sup>1</sup>

## My Journey

It all began eleven years ago. I arrived in the United States as a tourist and enjoyed, for what I thought was going to be a short period of time, all the stereotypical American activities often portrayed in the movies: New York City, Central Park, museums, musicals, pretzels from a street cart, the Capitol, the White House, and squirrels everywhere.

Slowly, I moved past all these stereotypes and started recognizing the many values of American culture, such as independence, democracy, meritocracy, directness, innovation, and effective use of time. Organically, and without realizing at the time, I felt connected with some aspects of the American culture and found myself daydreaming about staying for a longer period of time. Living abroad gave me a new self-awareness and I wanted to further explore my new self.

It was decision time: should I stay, or should I go? The answer was obvious. By contrast, figuring out how to stay in the country and understanding the legal implications of my decision was a process full of obstacles, challenges, fees, and tons of documents.

After a multitude of different permits and visas (you name it—ESTA,<sup>2</sup> J-2,<sup>3</sup> H-4,<sup>4</sup> H-1B<sup>5</sup>), COVID-19 related delays due to processing office closures, and a practical exam to show my knowledge of the Spanish language—since, apparently, being a national of Spain and having lived there for thirty years was not enough proof of my Spanish proficiency for my Specialty Occupation Visa—I am now the proud holder of a Green Card, and I am on my way to attaining citizen status.

## The Personal and Emotional Implications of American Citizenship

For most people seeking naturalization, their new citizen status is a dream come true, the end of a long journey and a well-deserved reward after years of arduous work and commitment to the community. They are grateful for the opportunities they enjoy and the new life they anticipate (aspects that are especially important for refugees and asylum seekers).

---

<sup>1</sup> Ángela Sánchez-Gago is a lawyer from Spain, a current Penn State Law LL.M. student, and the Student Bar Association LL.M. Justice. She has worked in Customs, Excise Duties and Financial Institutions. This piece is intended to reflect on her personal and emotional experience with the American Immigration system. The author encourages readers to further explore topics of social justice, assimilation, civic integration, and implications of long-term immigration. [linkedin.com/in/ángela-sánchez-gago-b9377a271](https://www.linkedin.com/in/ángela-sánchez-gago-b9377a271).

<sup>2</sup> *Official ESTA Application*, U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION, <https://esta.cbp.dhs.gov/> (last visited Nov. 9, 2023).

<sup>3</sup> *About the J-2 VISA*, BRIDGEUSA, <https://j1visa.state.gov/basics/j2-visa/> (last visited Nov. 9, 2023).

<sup>4</sup> *Employment Authorization for Certain H-4 Dependent Spouses*, U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES, <https://www.uscis.gov/working-in-the-united-states/temporary-workers/h-1b-specialty-occupations-and-fashion-models/employment-authorization-for-certain-h-4-dependent-spouses> (last visited Nov. 9, 2023).

<sup>5</sup> *H-1B Specialty Occupations, DOD Cooperative Research and Development Project Workers, and Fashion Models*, U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES, <https://www.uscis.gov/working-in-the-united-states/h-1b-specialty-occupations> (last visited Nov. 9, 2023).

During the naturalization ceremony, you take an oath<sup>6</sup> swearing to support and defend the values of the laws and the Constitution of the United States against its enemies.

Up to this point, nothing should shock the reader: all American citizens are generally responsible for doing the same things. Easy to understand and follow (for some). However, that is not the end of your oath. You have to explicitly renounce all allegiance to your previous state; that is your country, your birth land, and, probably, the place where the majority of your family still lives. This last part is what may bring emotional distress to the end of the journey. The American Dream exacts an emotional toll.

During your years as an immigrant in the country, you may have navigated the inherent challenges and opportunities of living abroad: learning a new language, finding a new job, eating new foods, adapting to different schedules, and the list goes on. Additionally, some of us have to navigate the hostility from some groups against our ethnicity, culture, or religion. Assimilation is not easy. Furthermore, some of the values of American culture might contradict your previous ones. Merging cultural identities is not a straightforward process.

The U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services, through its Citizenship Resource Center, suggests that Civic Integration<sup>7</sup> is key to fully understand and enjoy your new citizenship status. Your interactions with the community and American institutions are geared towards facilitating economic and social integration. This Center offers a wide variety of resources for employers and individuals promoting the long-term civic integration of lawful permanent residents.

Whether you cherish your new status or are deeply concerned about its emotional ramifications, it turns out that what you believed to be the end of the journey is just the beginning of a new life, full of rights and responsibilities to the country that has welcomed you, because you have now become an American by choice.

---

<sup>6</sup> *Naturalization Oath of Allegiance to the United States of America*, U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES, <https://www.uscis.gov/citizenship/learn-about-citizenship/the-naturalization-interview-and-test/naturalization-oath-of-allegiance-to-the-united-states-of-america> (last visited Nov. 9, 2023).

<sup>7</sup> *Civic Integration*, U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES, <https://www.uscis.gov/citizenship/civic-integration> (last visited Nov. 9, 2023).