



U.S. Citizenship  
and Immigration  
Services

# USCIS TODAY



A MESSAGE FROM  
ACTING DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
ROBERT DIVINE

At USCIS, we are committed to maintaining the integrity and security of our nation's immigration system. We accomplish this through our policies, our processes, and most importantly, our personnel. Our most valuable asset, more than 15,000 USCIS federal employees and contract personnel serve in all fifty states and in 26 countries worldwide. The November issue of USCIS Today spotlights the work of our International Offices and Programs.

From processing international adoptions of orphans, interviewing Asylum and Refugee applicants and naturalizing members of our military serving overseas, the men and women of USCIS working abroad form a vital component of the services we provide. These employees also carry the additional responsibility to act as honorable representatives of the United States and as USCIS ambassadors in their communities. This dual role requires a constant commitment to the USCIS core values of Integrity, Ingenuity and Respect, and obligations that extend after working hours and outside of the office.

The members of our international operations team do exceptional work within challenging environments, many times without the regular comforts and conveniences that we take for granted here in the U.S. I encourage you to explore this issue of USCIS and take the opportunity to learn more about your international colleagues and their valuable contributions to the USCIS mission.

## NOVEMBER 2005

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## AN INTRODUCTION TO USCIS INTERNATIONAL OFFICES

USCIS operates the largest immigration service in the world, with offices in 28 foreign cities. These offices are separated into three districts headquartered in Rome, Bangkok and Mexico City. Each International District Office is headed by a District Director, and covers a specified service area that includes several countries.

International District Offices accept certain applications and petitions for U.S. immigration benefits, and provide information and forms to the public. These offices and their Sub Offices work closely with the U.S. Department of State in various aspects of the visa-issuing process,

maintain close liaison with agencies of the countries within their jurisdictions, and provide assistance to domestic USCIS offices relating to foreign law and

foreign documentation. International District Offices also play significant adjudicative, logistical, and managerial roles in the U.S. Refugee Resettlement Program.

View an [Interactive Map](#) with more information on USCIS' International Offices and their locations at USCIS.gov.



INTEGRITY . RESPECT . INGENUITY

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# NOVEMBER IS NATIONAL ADOPTION MONTH

## LOVE HAS NO BORDERS...THE THOMPSON FAMILY



The Thompsons, with (from R to L) Hosanna, Hope, Gloria, Gabriel and Grace and their Naturalization Certificates

Steve and Morene Thompson of Tremont, Illinois are among a growing number of American parents who have adopted orphaned children from abroad and provided them with loving care and the gift of United States Citizenship. Morene Thompson shares her story of how she and her husband came to adopt five sibling orphans from Brazil, and how USCIS was able to help bring this new family together.

### **Tell us about why you chose to adopt and how many children you adopted...**

Steve and I became aware of our desire to adopt early in our marriage. We realized that we have a lot of love to give, and we wanted to provide that to children who do not have that. We have adopted nine children so far – and five from Brazil. We are currently waiting for a call to come to Brazil to adopt five more - another sibling group.

### **How are the children adapting to life in the U.S.?**

Amazingly! People cannot believe it. We believe that if you are with your family, you are loved, and you are cared for and nurtured, it does not matter where you are—you are at home. Within weeks they were speaking enough English to communicate fairly well, and people could not believe they had only been in the states for such a short time.

### **Why did you choose Brazil and how has the experience of adopting these children changed your lives?**

When the need for a family for these children was brought to our attention, Brazil just happened to be where they were from. We did not choose a particular country. Many people comment about how blessed the children are to be in our family, but we know that WE are the ones who are truly blessed by them. We have learned what is really important in life, and it is not material things. We have learned that love multiplies, it does not divide. This experience has expanded our world view, it has richened and deepened our lives to a level we never dreamed. We may never be rich financially, but we feel we are the richest people in the world.

### **Describe a typical day in your house. Is it hectic?**

We live in a big old farmhouse in the country and in a family our size there is always much work to be done, however we consider it a joy and a privilege. Our home is for the most part, peaceful, but we DO have our wild and crazy times too. Each of us has many responsibilities in a day and our home is very organized and is run in an orderly and efficient manner. We have many charts on our kitchen wall outlining schedules and everybody's chores. Steve says that we could run the Pentagon from that wall. A very important time in the day for our family - our supper hour is spent together at the table eating, sharing, discussing, laughing, and we have devotions afterward.

### **Was the adoption process easy? Please describe the basic steps you took.**

The adoption process is not easy—especially in Brazil. That is why the percentage of children adopted from Brazil is very low. There are mounds of paperwork and months of preparations, much red tape, much waiting, and once all the requirements have been met on both sides, the central adoption agency in Brazil approves us and invites us to Brazil for a 30-40 day cohabitation period and at the end of that, the adoption is made final in Brazil. We would like to say that though this is difficult, complicated, frustrating, and arduous at times, it is so very, very worth it. And...our Congressman Ray LaHood's office as well as USCIS have been very helpful, kind, and accommodating to us. USCIS has expedited things for us on more than one occasion and we are very grateful. Not to be critical, but after working with another government, we are always so happy to be home in the U.S. working with our government. Thank you.

### **What steps do you need to take now to adopt again?**

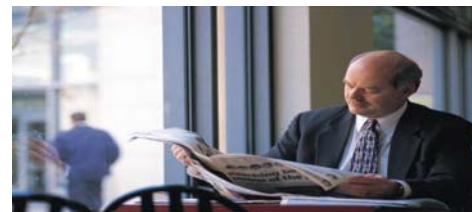
We have had to go through the entire process again to adopt again. The first time we adopted from Brazil, the process took nine months. This time it has taken eighteen months and it is not over yet.

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**“SECURING AMERICA’S PROMISE”**

# NEWS YOU CAN USE...

## FROM THE OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS



### [USCIS Reminds Customers of Fee Adjustments](#)

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has announced in the *Federal Register* a revised fee structure for immigration benefits. The new fee structure became effective on October 26, 2005 and will add an average of \$10 to each application and petition in order to account for inflation. Fees collected from persons filing immigration benefit applications and petitions are used to fund the full cost of providing immigration benefits, including the full cost of providing benefits such as asylum and refugee admission for which no fee is charged.

The fees were last adjusted in April 2004 to account for additional security enhancements performed on all immigration benefits after September 11, 2001 and other costs. The new fee structure reflects an inflation adjustment, as required by the April 2004 fee rule, to be published by notice in the *Federal Register* for periods on or after October 1, 2005.

USCIS does have the ability to waive fees on a case-by-case basis. Any applicant or petitioner who has an "inability to pay" the fees may request a fee waiver. In determining "inability to pay," USCIS officers will consider all factors, circumstances and evidence supplied by the applicant including age, disability, household income and qualification within the past 180 days for a Federal means-tested benefit.

## USCIS CONDUCTS OVERSEAS MILITARY NATURALIZATIONS ON U.S. NAVY SHIPS AT SEA

The product of close cooperation with the United States Navy, USCIS employees participated in what is believed to be the first naturalization ceremonies onboard United States Naval Warships at sea since World War II.



The DHS Flag flying proudly over the USS Kitty Hawk



USS Kearsarge sailors taking the Oath of Allegiance



USS Kitty Hawk sailors celebrating their Citizenship

After arriving on the USS Kitty Hawk and USS Kearsarge, U.S. Navy Legal Affairs and Public Affairs offices provided the USCIS Naturalization teams with bunk beds in temporary quarters. With important work to complete before the ceremony, the USCIS team was also provided with a desk and materials within the ship's tight public affairs office aboard the Kitty Hawk. Several public announcements were made on the ships to let all hands know that USCIS officers were aboard and available to answer immigration questions, and question and answer sessions were held for sailors with concerns about naturalization, adoption, marriage and the like.

Aboard the Kitty Hawk, the naturalization ceremony was held on the deck of the carrier in beautiful, if slightly windy, weather. The DHS Flag flew proudly from the ship's observation deck while Twenty-nine newly naturalized sailors and many of their shipmates and chain of command attended the ceremony. Aboard the Kearsarge, the ceremony took place below deck, and former USCIS Director, Ambassador Eduardo Aguirre gave the keynote address to thirty-five sailors who became America's newest citizens.

# FACES OF AMERICA

## NEW CITIZENS, UNIQUE STORIES

### DONG G. NGUYEN - VIETNAM



Dong Nguyen celebrates American Citizenship with his daughter Quynh

Shortly after his birth in 1973, Dong G. Nguyen's parents and his nine brothers and sisters fled Vietnam and came to the United States as refugees from their war-torn nation. Describing the challenges his close-knit family faced when they first arrived here, Mr. Nguyen recalled, "We were refugees in a new country with nothing but hope for a better life. My parents raised my brothers and sisters on a job that paid \$3.15 an hour. Through hard work and a strong faith we were able to build a better life for ourselves."

Inspired by his parent's tireless work ethic, Mr. Nguyen graduated from the Kansas University School of Pharmacy at age 23, and became a registered pharmacist. Settling in Lenexa, Kansas, Dong married his college sweetheart and started a family of his own and has three young daughters.

At a special ceremony in Kansas City during Citizenship Day, Nguyen, now 32, became a U.S. Citizen. "This is the only place that I have lived in and I'm happy to finally be able to call it my home," Nguyen remarked. "I am thankful for the opportunity this great country has granted me, and will do my best to assist if ever asked by our government. With a strong faith in God and hard work, anything is possible. This is truly a land of opportunity."

## ARE YOU ONE OF THE "FACES OF AMERICA?"

[SUBMIT YOUR STORY TODAY](#)

## USCIS ONLINE PRODUCTS...TOOLS YOU CAN USE!!!

**New Immigrant Orientation Guide:** <http://uscis.gov/graphics/citizenship/welcomeguide/index.htm>

**"How Do I...?" Series Factsheets:** <http://uscis.gov/graphics/services/factsheet/index.htm>

**Citizenship Test Flash Cards:** <http://uscis.gov/graphics/citizenship/flashcards/index.htm>

**E-Filing Online Application Center:** <http://uscis.gov/graphics/formsfee/forms/eFiling.htm>

**The USCIS Strategic Plan:** <http://uscis.gov/graphics/aboutus/repstudies/USCISSTRATEGICPLAN.pdf>

## BY THE NUMBERS...BACKLOG ELIMINATION EFFORTS

The September Backlog Elimination figures rose slightly last month due to the unusually high numbers of applications received in March, 2005. These new cases were added to existing backlog figures after their six-month pending status expired and they were reclassified as backlog cases.

Overall, USCIS employees are continuing to produce results and make steady progress towards eliminating the backlog. The amount of pending cases was decreased by more than 100,000 in September and completions exceeded receipts by about 170,000.

Date	Number of Backlog Cases	Percent Change
May	1,053,902	+ 12 %
June	1,183,099	- 4.5 %
July	1,129,708	- 11%
August	999,220	+ .5%
September	1,003,869	

**"SECURING AMERICA'S PROMISE"**

# USCIS INITIATES NEW REFUGEE OFFICER CORPS

The establishment of a Refugee Corps as part of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is becoming a reality with the selection of over thirty refugee officers and a new director of the Office of Refugee Affairs. Barbara Strack, most recently the Senior Immigration Analyst in the Office of the CIS Ombudsman, has been named as the Director of the Office of Refugee Affairs, which includes the Refugee Corps. Previously, Strack served in the policy office of the Immigration and Naturalization Service and worked on immigration issues in the nonprofit sector.

The USCIS Refugee Corps is a new initiative that will create a cadre of officers dedicated to the adjudication of refugee applications at overseas locations. Previously, refugee interviews were conducted by officers detailed from other USCIS programs such as Asylum and Adjudications and by staff from the overseas district offices. Refugee Corps officers will be based in Washington, DC, but will travel overseas for 50 percent of the year. Building on a tradition of balancing humanitarian commitments and national security concerns, the Refugee Corps will expand USCIS's capacity and flexibility to meet ever-changing global developments.

The first member of the Refugee Corps reported for duty in September, with additional staff joining in upcoming months. Officers will be deployed to overseas assignments beginning in January after DC-based training.

Establishment of the Refugee Corps requires a transformation and realignment of responsibilities within the Office of Refugee Affairs as well as overseas. Programs and Operations functions are being expanded to support the Corps and to increase the focus on training, fraud prevention, and quality assurance.

The U.S. Refugee Program (USRP) is a complex interagency effort involving a number of governmental and non-governmental partners both overseas and in the U.S.

- The Department of State (DOS) has overall responsibility overseas and in proposing annual admissions ceilings and processing priorities.
- The UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) refers high priority refugee cases to the USRP and provides important information on the worldwide refugee situation.
- Overseas Processing Entities, either international or non-governmental organizations, work under a cooperative agreement with DOS to carry out administrative and processing functions such as case pre-screening and file preparation.
- The International Organization for Migration arranges the transportation of refugees to the United States.
- Within DHS, USCIS has responsibility for adjudicating applications for refugee status, and CBP screens arriving refugees for admission at ports of entry.
- The Department of Health and Human Services administers domestic resettlement to aid arriving refugees.
- Domestic non-governmental organizations assist arriving refugees with resettlement benefits and services.

In FY05, USCIS officers conducted over 65,000 interviews in 51 countries for refugee applicants from over 60 nations. Almost 54,000 refugees were admitted to the U.S. for resettlement, almost 150 new immigrants each day.

In FY06, the President has proposed admitting 70,000 refugees. With the new Refugee Corps in place, USCIS is prepared to fulfill this important humanitarian commitment.



Kosovar Refugees on the Albanian border



Refugee Interviewing Officer Lori Rothamel, Kampala, Uganda, September 2005



Burundian refugees, Lukole Refugee Camp, western Tanzania

# “How Do I...?”

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AT USCIS



## HOW DO I...ADOPT A CHILD FROM OVERSEAS OR HELP MY ADOPTED CHILD BECOME A PERMANENT RESIDENT?

Adopting a child is a major decision for a family, and USCIS has several programs to help. Over 20,000 inter-country adoptions are taking place per year in addition to the more than 200,000 foreign-adopted children already living in the U.S. The Department of Homeland Security and USCIS are proud to play a key role in this family-building process.

There are two ways to bring an adopted child into the United States. The fastest and easiest way is to adopt an orphan who automatically becomes eligible to enter the United States as an immediate relative. Only U.S. citizens are eligible to immigrate a child as an orphan. The second way is to adopt a child and reside with that child for two years prior to petitioning for the child. U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents may immigrate a child with whom they have lived for two years.

Prospective adoptive parents are encouraged to familiarize themselves with inter-country adoptions processes before they begin filing applications for a particular child. A good place to start is with the booklet, [The Immigration of Adopted and Prospective Adopted Children](#). Prospective adoptive parents may find the services of an adoption agency helpful for guidance and assistance with the immigration of orphans and adoptive children.

While USCIS cannot recommend specific agencies, we strongly advise prospective adoptive parents to seek out a reputable agency with established foreign adoption experience and/or competent legal representation in their efforts to bring foreign-born orphans into the United States. One place to start looking for an agency is through the [adoption advocacy community](#).

The adoption of a foreign-born orphan does not automatically guarantee the child's eligibility to immigrate to the United States. The adoptive parent needs to be aware of U.S. immigration law and legal regulatory procedures. An orphan cannot legally immigrate to the United States without U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services processing.

If you are considering adopting an older child, you should be aware of the age limits on eligibility for adoptions and immigration, regardless of whether or not your state laws permit the adoption of older children (or even adults).

US law allows the adoption and immigration of children who are under 16 years of age, with two exceptions:

- Siblings of a child adopted by the same parents may be adopted if under 18 years of age; and
- Orphans over the age of 16 may be adopted, as long as the [I-600](#) petition was filed on their behalf before their 16th birthday (or in the case of an orphan who is the sibling of a child adopted by the same parents, before their 18th birthday).

There are two ways to immigrate an adopted child:

- Immigration/Adoption of child based on 2-years residence through submitting Form [I-130](#):

If you adopt a child before the child turns 16 (or 18, as described above), and you live with the child for two years as the child's primary caregiver, then you may file an I-130 petition for an alien relative. Please note that, generally, all qualifying criteria must be established BEFORE the child may enter the U.S.)

- Immigration/Adoption of an orphan through submitting Form [I-600](#):

If you adopt or intend to adopt a child who meets the legal definition of an orphan, you may petition for that child at any time prior to the child's 16th (or 18th, as described above) birthday, even if the adoption takes place subsequently (and in many cases, the adoption does not occur until the child comes to the US).

The “How Do I...?” Section of USCIS Today contains answers to frequently asked questions from USCIS customers. The information provided in this section is available in English and Spanish on the [How Do I...? Section of the USCIS website](#).

# REAL PEOPLE, REAL PROGRESS

## USCIS RECOGNIZES EMPLOYEE EXCELLENCE

### Background:

Born and raised in Salem, NH, Kendra Shyne dreamed of a career in public service. After graduating Magnum Cum Laude from the University of Southern Maine in 1991, with a BA in Criminology, she accepted a job with INS in San Francisco as a Immigration Examiner / Inspector. Since beginning her career with INS, Kendra has served on details abroad in Haiti and Guantanamo Bay, traveling to Yemen, Austria, Italy, South Africa, Botswana, Zambia, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Kuwait. She also led the San Francisco Anti-Fraud Unit, managed the daily operations of the nine ASC locations in California, and spent five years at the USCIS Frankfurt Office as an Immigration Officer. Recently, Kendra was appointed Supervisory Refugee Officer for the Office of International Affairs, Office of Refugee Affairs at USCIS HQ in Washington, and is the first Refugee Corps Officer to enter on duty.



**Name:** Kendra D. Shyne  
**Position:** Supervisory Refugee Officer  
**Location:** Washington, D.C.

### Describe what it's like to work overseas for USCIS:

To summarize, working overseas is challenging, exciting, and varied. For many years, I had been applying for overseas positions in Europe, Africa and Asia. I was willing to go just about anywhere. Working in Germany was a 'dream come true' as my mother had been born and raised in Germany and immigrated to the U.S. before I was born. On a more general level, living and working overseas for USCIS can be challenging. Our policies and activities are often under a microscope. Additionally, trying to navigate within the foreign governments' rules/regulations can be tricky. It is important to strike a balance with the host country so as not to 'step on their toes', but at the same time, maintain integrity within the USCIS mission. And of course, living and working overseas can be exciting. Having the opportunity to travel and experience so many different cultures is priceless. I had so many unique experiences that I normally would never have had. I met and worked with some wonderful people and gained such a variety of experiences.

### Which of your contributions to USCIS are you most proud of?

I love to learn and figure out new ways to tackle a project. I am proud of what I have been able to give back to USCIS through my dedication and willingness to go the extra mile to complete a case. Sometimes it is so much easier to just adjudicate a case, but I want to make sure I make the correct decision, based on sound legal grounds. Through my experiences throughout the years, I have been able to give back to the Service as a senior officer and now again as a supervisor. I was fortunate to have had such great senior officers for my 'on-the-job' training in San Francisco and I hope that I can touch more people by sharing my knowledge and experiences with them, as my training offices did with me.

### What are the most memorable moments you've experienced at USCIS?

After 15+ years, I have had the good fortune to experience so many wonderful things. My experiences in Haiti and Guantanamo Bay changed me personally and professionally, living overseas has given me a broader outlook on life. But the most memorable experiences I have had, deal with individual feedback I've received from applicants. In Frankfurt, I was responsible for processing Orphan Petitions for International Adoptions. To the prospective adoptive parents, the process represents the opportunity to bring a child into their lives, and the outpouring of appreciation and gratitude I received reminded me of the impact we have on these families. Other memorable experiences have come from the Military Naturalization process when I had the opportunity to travel to Kuwait, Iraq and Afghanistan to conduct interviews and naturalization ceremonies for over 200 active duty military personnel; men and women who were fighting for our country before they were U.S. citizens. I am in awe of the sacrifices these soldiers are making and I was honored to be a part of that process. It is humbling to realize what 'just doing my job' means to the individuals, when I am the one who received so much from that experience. Often Immigration is seen as the 'bad guys'; in these cases we are the good guys.

### How has USCIS changed since March 2003?

On the individual level, I don't see the major changes in USCIS since March 2003. Since USCIS is mostly made up of the former Adjudications operations, I feel we have gone through less 'transition' as other branches of legacy-INS. We have not had to split up and realign with any other entities of other agencies; there have been less 'growing pains' since we haven't had to merge with other mindsets. I think the biggest changes have been in the Administrative Support we receive from the tri-agency branches (i.e., personnel support from CBP; IT support from ICE). And, positively, USCIS has been able to focus more specifically on our mission; "To secure America's promise as a nation of immigrants".

### Would you like to work at USCIS?

Visit [USAJOBS Online](http://USAJOBS) for more information on openings and opportunities at USCIS and other federal agencies.

## DON'T WAIT IN LINE...GO ONLINE!!!

Make an appointment using [USCIS' Internet Appointment System: INFOPASS](#)

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT USCIS OCOMM 202.272.1200