

# U.S. Department of Homeland Security

## U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services



## Language Access Plan

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## Introduction

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) is the component within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) responsible for efficiently and fairly adjudicating requests for immigration benefits, promoting citizenship, and ensuring the integrity of the nation's lawful immigration system. As a federal agency with a global reach, USCIS is committed to communicating with people from all over the world, including people with limited English proficiency.

Executive Order (EO) 13166 requires each federal agency to “examine the services it provides and develop and implement a system by which [Limited English Proficiency (LEP)] individuals can meaningfully access those services consistent with, and without unduly burdening, the fundamental mission of the agency...” (65 FR 50,121). The Department of Justice's (DOJ's) Civil Rights Division issued guidance that defined LEP persons as “individuals who do not speak English as their primary language and who have a limited ability to read, write, speak, or understand English...” (67 FR 41-459). USCIS drafted this plan in accordance with the [DHS Language Access Plan](#), which requires each component to draft its own plan.

## USCIS Policy Statement

The following policy applies to all USCIS employees who interact with the general public, whether in person or by electronic or telephonic means:

USCIS follows the DHS-wide language access policy in the DHS Language Access Plan and will take reasonable steps to provide meaningful access for individuals with limited English proficiency to its services, resources, activities, and programs, consistent with, and without unduly burdening, the agency's fundamental mission. USCIS will incorporate language access considerations in its routine strategic and business planning, identify and translate materials into the most frequently encountered languages, provide interpretive support or guidance where appropriate, and educate its personnel about language access responsibilities and how to use available language access resources.

## Language Access Plan Mission Statement

Our Language Access Plan establishes goals and guidelines to ensure that LEP individuals have meaningful access to our services and information. The plan summarizes our efforts to comply with EO 13166 and follow the guidance in DHS's Language Access Plan.

USCIS regularly interacts with individuals in languages other than English through translated materials, multilingual information sessions, the USCIS Contact Center's toll-free line, and in-person appointments in our offices. As part of our commitment, we also routinely produce educational and outreach materials in multiple languages and publish them in the [Multilingual Resource Center](#) on our public website, [uscis.gov](http://uscis.gov).

We also maintain an active Language Access Working Group (LAWG). The USCIS LAWG works to implement our Language Access Plan, ensuring that LEP individuals have meaningful access to immigration benefit services in a manner consistent with our mission. The USCIS LAWG consists of leaders and representatives from across the agency and meets regularly in group and subgroup settings.

## USCIS Language Access Working Group and Partners

### **USCIS Language Access**

USCIS provides access to information regarding immigration benefits in the United States. In line with the work of DHS, we seek to communicate effectively with the public, including individuals with LEP across our many missions and functions. The USCIS LAWG focuses on advancing these efforts.

### **USCIS LAWG**

The USCIS LAWG, composed of employees throughout USCIS, works to monitor agency progress on implementing the goals and expectations set forth in the USCIS Language Access Plan. The USCIS LAWG and its subgroups work collaboratively to establish consistency in implementing the plan across the USCIS components in public information, programs, and benefits.

The USCIS LAWG has established subgroups to enhance the agency's translation strategy, in-language services, and technology. The translation strategy subgroup focuses on web content, printed materials, press releases, applicant service tools, glossaries, and the prioritization of translation requests. The in-language services subgroup works on the provision of interpreters during immigration benefits interviews, multilingual engagements, and human resources initiatives. Lastly, the technology subgroup works on facilitating a responsive design and content strategy for applicant services through live and self-help channels. This includes contact centers, web services, social media, and accommodations.

LEP public awareness and advocacy are incorporated into our various platforms and tools. Options such as "Emma," an online virtual assistant, Live Chat, and including contact center communications are also available in Spanish and provide accommodations for such as "Emma," a computer-generated virtual assistant, Live Chat, myUSCIS, and deaf and hard of hearing users accommodations for language access purposes. by presenting simultaneous transcripts of online chats or TTY line with relay interpretation services. Additionally, each of these features is 508 compliant and Emma boasts a voice enable feature for both English and Spanish.

We are committed to providing language access to individuals with disabilities and LEP communities by formulating innovative policies and technologies to deliver public information, programs, and benefits in various languages.

Training and seminars among USCIS components and our partners are held on a frequent basis to share advanced techniques, resources, and information on promoting language access across the federal government.

### **DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties**

We are committed to working in close collaboration with the DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (CRCL) to maintain, enhance, and expand language access. We continue to work with CRCL to provide meaningful language access to LEP individuals. CRCL leads the DHS LAWG, of which we are active participants.

### **Language Services Section (LSS)**

The USCIS LSS provides expert foreign language interpretation, translation, and transcription services to USCIS, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). The nature of the interpretations and translations provided by LSS language specialists encompasses complex immigration and naturalization cases.

LSS was formed more than 40 years ago to help people with LEP access immigration information and services. USCIS meets its mission objectives by extending services to our diverse and multilingual stakeholder base. LSS has grown from an ad hoc group of five interpreters who provided language support services to the former Immigration and Naturalization Service proceedings in the New York District to a full-fledged section providing services nationwide.

## **USCIS Efficiency via Language Access**

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, nearly 21 percent of the U.S. population speaks a language other than English. Of that percentage, more than 40 percent speak English less than “very well.” An individual who reports speaking English less than very well is considered to be LEP. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that [at least 350 languages are spoken](#) in U.S. homes.

USCIS provides LEP individuals with access to USCIS-developed [online tools and resources](#). All of these efforts have promoted economic efficiency, streamlined operations, improved the speed for sharing information, reduced supply costs, and reduced the printing of emails and documents.

By providing access to information in multiple languages, USCIS is able to reduce the number of calls and appointments the public needs to make with our agency. Essentially, when people understand the criteria for the benefit(s) they are applying for, they fill out applications correctly, which in turn reduces the need to reject incorrectly filed applications, issue Requests for Evidence, or deny cases for missing information. Thus, our provision of language access serves to increase efficiency for USCIS.

## Current Efforts to Provide Language Access

USCIS strives to meet its obligation to provide LEP individuals with meaningful access to its services. We continue to find new ways to meet the needs of LEP individuals by providing public information sessions hosted in other languages, translating materials, and conducting self-assessments of language access efforts. Below is a summary of our more recent language access enhancements.

USCIS upcoming goals to improve language access include:

- Developing a new “Working with an Interpreter Training” for Immigration Services Officers at BASIC Training;
- Launching an online idea campaign to solicit internal ideas for upcoming language access initiatives; and
- Making the Multilingual Citizenship Outreach Toolkits available in a playable format in 13 languages plus American Sign Language, and determining whether there may be additional language access initiatives, even within other DHS components, that could take on a similar format for outreach purposes.

### **Multilingual Citizenship Outreach Toolkits**

Our agency leads an effort to create multilingual toolkits to support community relations officers (CROs) and other field office personnel who regularly host information sessions about U.S. citizenship and naturalization.

The citizenship outreach toolkits are available in 13 languages:

- Arabic
- Burmese
- Simplified Chinese
- Traditional Chinese
- English
- Farsi
- Haitian Creole
- Korean
- Kurdish
- Somali
- Spanish
- Tagalog
- Vietnamese

The citizenship outreach toolkit consists of the following resources:

- “Naturalization Process” presentation with audio (in all 13 languages)
- “Naturalization Process” presentation
- Naturalization interview skit transcript
- Engagement invitation in color and black and white
- Translated naturalization materials

A CRO or any other USCIS employee, regardless of foreign language ability, will be able to deliver a citizenship presentation in any of the above listed languages to meet the needs of the participating group. USCIS has worked with a professional, digital acting company to provide voice overs in-language for these toolkits in a playable format. The voice overs serve as a unique tool to aid and enhance our ability to provide multilingual support.

The multilingual citizenship outreach toolkits are posted on the DHS intranet site under the *USCIS Connect* page and will be updated to include information on online filing, online resources, and filing fees.

USCIS has received significant, positive feedback from CROs throughout the United States who have been using the toolkits. We routinely ask the CRO regional leads for input after presentations. Based on this feedback, we created a [Best Practices When Utilizing the Multilingual Citizenship Outreach Toolkits Guide](#) with helpful hints for use of the toolkits.

### **USCIS LAWG *Connect* Page**

The USCIS LAWG has designed a new site on *USCIS Connect*, the agency's intranet site, dedicated to language access. In developing this site, the USCIS LAWG sought to create a thoughtful, online tool so that DHS employees could find information regarding USCIS collective access efforts. The *Connect* page houses resources on translation requests, the multilingual citizenship outreach toolkits, language resources, USCIS disability access, the USCIS LAWG, and USCIS language access. This creative, engaging, and collaborative site serves as a repository designed to aid all DHS employees with their working knowledge and promotion of language access.

### **USCIS Multilingual Resources Bookmark**

At USCIS, we strive to provide LEP individuals with meaningful access to immigration information in the language they understand. Accordingly, the USCIS LAWG has created a bookmark highlighting several of our multilingual and online resources.

Available in paper form or online, the USCIS multilingual resources bookmark features the USCIS written resources that are available in languages other than English. CROs, field office personnel, and employees hosting information sessions may distribute these bookmarks to individuals who are interested in our work.

This bookmark emphasizes that USCIS offers immigration benefits information in the 25 languages listed below as well as other languages:

- Amharic
- Arabic
- Armenian
- Carolinian
- Chamorro
- Japanese
- Korean
- Nepali
- Palauan
- Polish

- Chinese (Simplified and Traditional)
- French
- German
- Haitian Creole
- Hindi
- Ilocano
- Indonesian
- Italian
- Portuguese
- Russian
- Somali
- Spanish
- Tagalog
- Urdu
- Vietnamese

The USCIS multilingual resources bookmark lists the following USCIS multilingual resources:

- Naturalization resources such as eligibility requirements and test preparation materials in other languages at the Citizenship Resource Center: [uscis.gov/citizenship](https://uscis.gov/citizenship).
- “How Do I?” information guides in multiple languages at [uscis.gov/how-do-i-languages](https://uscis.gov/how-do-i-languages).
- Digital Multilingual Resources Page materials at [uscis.gov/tools/multilingual-resource-center](https://uscis.gov/tools/multilingual-resource-center) in over 25 languages.
- Our public websites, [uscis.gov](https://uscis.gov) and [e-verify.gov](https://e-verify.gov), are in in English and Spanish, where individuals can access information and check case status in both languages.
- The Emma virtual assistant tool in English and Spanish.

More USCIS multilingual resources are available at [uscis.gov/tools/multilingual-resource-center](https://uscis.gov/tools/multilingual-resource-center).

### **Citizenship Resources in Other Languages**

The USCIS Office of Citizenship (OoC) is a public education, training, and outreach office responsible for developing educational products and resources to welcome immigrants and promote the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

OoC provides immigrants with information regarding citizenship and naturalization eligibility requirements in multiple languages. This information can be found in the Citizenship Resource Center on the [Other Languages](#) page.

### **Citizenship and Digital Literacy**

Digital literacy, which is the ability to communicate, navigate, and conduct research using technology, is an essential component to supporting language access for LEP populations. USCIS is committed to collaborating with internal and external partners to expand digital literacy efforts. For example, OoC has honed in on a number of digital literacy initiatives. In upcoming fiscal years, OoC plans to promote education on protecting personal information online, understanding rights and responsibilities, and providing instructions on how to fill in online forms. Additional initiatives include:

- Adding digital literacy to general National Citizenship Education curriculum;

- Working in tandem with the U.S. Department of Education to highlight its digital literacy initiatives;
- Including a digital literacy component in the annual new grantee orientation for the Citizenship and Assimilation Grant Program;
- Working with vendors to encourage them to add digital literacy to their citizenship education textbooks and products; and
- Working with universities and colleges to encourage them to include digital literacy into their Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) certification and degree programs.

## **Welcome to the United States: A Guide for New Immigrants**

This comprehensive guide is currently available in 14 languages and provides practical information to help immigrants settle into everyday life in the United States. It also provides basic civics information that introduces the U.S. system of government. The guide is now available in:

- |                       |              |
|-----------------------|--------------|
| • Arabic              | • Portuguese |
| • Simplified Chinese  | • Russian    |
| • Traditional Chinese | • Somali     |
| • English             | • Spanish    |
| • French              | • Tagalog    |
| • Haitian Creole      | • Urdu       |
| • Korean              | • Vietnamese |

### **Additional Language Access Resources**

USCIS offers several additional language access resources for LEP individuals, including USCIS Contact Center bilingual service support, multilingual issue-based outreach, multilingual media, and multilingual resources and fact sheets.

**Bilingual Services:** The USCIS Contact Center provides nationwide live assistance to people inquiring from within the United States about immigration benefits and services. Individuals are immediately informed that all levels of call support are available in Spanish when they contact us by phone through our toll-free number.

**Spanish Language Websites:** We maintain a USCIS Spanish-language website at [uscis.gov/espanol](https://uscis.gov/espanol) and [e-verify.gov/es](https://e-verify.gov/es) where the content mirrors the majority of the USCIS English website. To serve LEP individuals, we have a dedicated Spanish language content team that provides Spanish language translations for the website and our social media platforms.

The USCIS Spanish websites contain more than 2,000 pages of content that reach approximately 500,000 users per month. Web use averages about 1 million sessions per month on the Spanish

websites. Approximately 70 percent of users who access the Spanish websites use a mobile device, 25 percent use a desktop device, and 5 percent use a tablet. Approximately 60 percent of users are under the age of 35.

The five most frequently used pages are:

1. [Formularios](#) (English: [Forms](#))
2. [Preguntas de la parte de educación cívica del Examen de Naturalización](#) (English: [Civics \(History and Government\) Questions for the Naturalization Test](#))
3. [Mientras mi Caso está en Trámite](#) (English: [While My Case is Pending](#))
4. [Tarjeta Verde](#) (English: [Green Card](#))
5. [Procesos y Procedimientos para la Tarjeta Verde](#) (English: [Green Card Processes & Procedures](#))

**Multilingual Issue-Based Outreach at the Local Level:** USCIS regularly hosts multilingual information sessions throughout the United States to allow the LEP community to engage with us on a variety of issues in person and by teleconference, email, social media, and live streaming video. We have also hosted engagements in Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, and Arabic, among other languages. USCIS received the following recommendations from stakeholder engagement events, which we are taking into consideration for future outreach:

- Provide more in-language print resources;
- Provide assistance by phone, text or email in-language;
- Translate form instructions, particularly for Form N-400, Application for Naturalization;
- Provide additional in-language engagements; and
- Provide online tools, such as change of address requests, in other languages.

Based on feedback we received over time from engagement events, we have translated certain web pages on [uscis.gov](https://uscis.gov) into the following languages:

- Arabic
- Haitian Creole
- Nepali
- Spanish

**Multilingual Media Outreach:** USCIS regularly disseminates materials to foreign language media and disseminates translated material, such as press releases and fact sheets, to Spanish-language media outlets. We regularly use social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, to disseminate translated messages in Spanish and in other languages, as needed.

**Multilingual Resources and Fact Sheets:** USCIS regularly translates informational brochures into other languages. The [Multilingual Resources Page](#) centralizes program-specific materials available in different languages.

**Translation of Updated Form Instructions:** When requested or needed, USCIS will consider translating the instructions for the most commonly filed forms into languages other than English.

**Translations for Outreach and Education Documents:** USCIS maintains a contract with a translation company that has certified translators to provide services in multiple languages, as needed. This company supports USCIS components that request translated brochures, educational materials, or other documents. We continue to assess which additional documents should be translated based on feedback from surveys, internal assessments, and input from USCIS components. Our agency conducts data calls with USCIS personnel in the field (specifically CROs) by routinely participating in meetings, recording feedback received from meetings, and recording data on our SharePoint site to track the languages requested for translation of USCIS materials, and the type of materials needed for translation into languages other than English.

USCIS has continued to translate our public-facing materials. We maintain an extensive library of our translated documents in 25 languages within our online Multilingual Resource Center. We have also translated our Multilingual Citizenship Outreach Toolkits into 13 languages.

USCIS gathers feedback on translated materials through its interagency LAWG subgroups and online campaigns such as a public and a private IdeaScale tool. We used the feedback we received to tailor our strategic priorities for language access.

USCIS plans to conduct periodic reviews of our in-language outreach and education documents by providing LEP populations with the opportunity to provide feedback on translated materials used at naturalization presentations. Feedback forms in English will be provided after in-language naturalization presentations and eventually translated into the target language.

### **Language Access in USCIS Asylum Division Interviews**

The Asylum Division is responsible for adjudicating applications for asylum under section 208 of the Immigration and Nationality Act and requests for suspension of deportation or special rule cancellation of removal under section 203 of the Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act (NACARA). In addition, the Asylum Division conducts credible fear, reasonable fear, and Safe Third Country Agreement screenings.

Generally<sup>1</sup>, under 8 C.F.R. § 208.9(g), the Asylum Division requires that applicants/witnesses provide their own interpreters during asylum or NACARA interviews, and the Asylum Division provides a monitor to verify the accuracy of the interpretation. The Asylum Division provides interpreters for protection screenings (credible fear, Safe Third Country Agreement, and reasonable fear screening interviews).

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<sup>1</sup> In instances in which asylum officers cannot conduct an asylum interview with the interpreter provided by an applicant because the interpreter is prohibited from serving as an interpreter, or the interpreter is incompetent or has abused his or her role, asylum officers may use an interpreter contracted by USCIS to monitor the interview to provide direct interpretation during the interview so as to avoid having to reschedule the interview, thus delaying the adjudication process.

The Asylum Division uses a telephonic interpretation service to monitor asylum interviews in order to ensure the quality and integrity of the interpretation. If the monitor alerts the officer that the interpreter is not competent to interpret accurately, the officer may use a telephonic interpreter to complete the interview or may reschedule the interview and require the applicant bring a competent interpreter. Apart from providing monitoring services for asylum interviews, the Asylum Division provides telephonic interpretation services to individuals in credible fear, reasonable fear, and safe third-country screenings, and for asylum interviews related to applications filed by Unaccompanied Alien Children (UAC). Regulations or Asylum Division procedures mandate that the government provide interpreters to individuals undergoing each of these screening processes including when they receive an orientation, when they are interviewed for each type of protection screening determination, and when the government issues its decision.

The Asylum Division has contracted with several interpretation services companies. The contract interpreters are vetted by the contracting company to ensure that they are not biased against a person's race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, the Asylum Division has worked with our interpreter contractors to increase the number of cleared interpreters on our contract in all languages to increase access to interpretation and reduce wait time.<sup>3</sup>

Lastly, the Asylum Division regards a minor (less than 18 years of age) as not competent to act as an interpreter. In an asylum interview conducted under the settlement agreement in *American Baptist Churches v. Thornburgh*, 760 F. Supp. 796 (N.D. Cal. 1991) ("ABC settlement agreement"), USCIS cannot disqualify an interpreter simply on the basis of age; however, the interpreter must be able to assist the applicant or witness to communicate effectively with the asylum officer.

### **Affirmative Asylum Applications**

Asylum applicants must provide their own interpreter who is at least 18 years of age and fluent in English and a language spoken by the applicant. The interpreter may be a family member, friend, or other person associated with the LEP person, but cannot be the applicant's attorney or representative, a representative or employee of the applicant's country of nationality or last habitual residence, an individual with a pending asylum application or a witness testifying on behalf of the applicant.

For asylum applications subject to the ABC settlement agreement, the regulations and policies in effect as of October 1, 1990 must be followed. Applicants may choose anyone who is competent

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<sup>2</sup> As required by Section 603 (a) of the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, Pub. L. 105-292, 112 Stat. 2787 (Oct. 27, 1998), as amended.

<sup>3</sup> Since January 2019, the Asylum Division has received over 700 security packages for interpreters that we have submitted to USCIS Office of Security and Integrity for review. Of those, over 400 have been cleared to work on the contract and many remain pending. Currently we have over 1700 interpreters cleared to work on the contract. (Note: this number may not reflect recent separations/departures from the contractor).

to serve as an interpreter except their attorney, or authorized representative of record, or a witness testifying on their behalf. There are no other restrictions.

### **NACARA 203 Applications**

Applicants under NACARA section 203 who are unable to proceed with the interview in English must provide a competent interpreter, at no expense to the government, who is fluent in English and a language in which the applicant is fluent. The interpreter may be a family member, have a pending application for NACARA 203 or asylum but cannot also testify as a witness on behalf of the applicant.

- Applicants who have submitted both Form I-589, Application for Asylum and for Withholding of Removal, and Form I-881, Application for Suspension of Deportation or Special Rule Cancellation of Removal (Pursuant to Section 203 of Public Law 105-100, NACARA).
  - The following individuals may not serve as the applicant's interpreter (8 CFR 240.67(b)(3)):
    - Someone who is under 18 years of age;
    - The applicant's attorney or representative of record;
    - A witness testifying on the applicant's behalf; or
    - A representative or employee of the applicant's country of nationality, or if stateless, country of last habitual residence.
- Applicants who have submitted Form I-881 only.
  - The following individuals may not serve as the applicant's interpreter (8 CFR 240.67(b)(3)):
    - An individual who is under 18 years of age;
    - The applicant's attorney or representative of record; or
    - A witness testifying on the applicant's behalf.

Many NACARA appointment, procedural, and decision notices are available in English and Spanish.

### **Screening Processes: Credible Fear, Reasonable Fear, and Safe Third Country Agreement**

Currently, the credible fear orientation document (informing respondents of their rights and what to expect during the screening process) is available in 11 languages: English, Albanian, Arabic, Chinese, Haitian Creole, French, Portuguese, Russian, Serbo-Croatian (Latin and Cyrillic characters), Somali, and Spanish. The reasonable fear orientation document is in English and Spanish, while the Safe Third-Country Agreement orientation document is available only in English. USCIS has encountered challenges in finding competent translators to translate information in any of the indigenous languages of Central America. USCIS is working with the DHS Language Access Working Group to find better ways to communicate with this population in a consistent manner.

Customs and Border Protection and Immigration and Customs Enforcement staff usually provide applicants with the orientation in a language the applicants understand before making a referral to the Asylum Division. If available in the applicant's language, the translated materials are used in the orientation process, which requires that the information be communicated by a DHS employee orally, using an interpreter in a language that the applicant understands. If the applicant is not oriented in a language they understand before referral to USCIS, the Asylum Division staff will read the documents to the applicants through a telephonic interpreter.

### **Language Access at USCIS Domestic Field Offices**

USCIS domestic field offices handle scheduled interviews for benefit applications. The Field Operations Directorate follows the guidance established in [The Role and Use of Interpreters in Domestic Field Office Interviews, PM-602-0125.1 \(Jan.17, 2017\)](#). Appointment notices for USCIS interviews instruct applicants to bring an interpreter with them if they need one.

Field offices supplement the information provided by the USCIS Contact Center and [uscis.gov](http://uscis.gov) by providing information through brochures and scheduling of information counter appointments through the Contact Center. Language access services, such as the provision of interpreters, upon availability, are provided at a number of designated offices throughout the country. USCIS will continue to study options for providing more interpretation services during interviews in our USCIS domestic field offices.

## **Contact Information**

For more information, call the USCIS Contact Center at 1-800-375-5283.

For individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have a speech disability, call 1-800-767-1833 (TTY) or email us at [public.engagement@uscis.dhs.gov](mailto:public.engagement@uscis.dhs.gov).

You can file complaints about language access in USCIS programs and activities with DHS CRCL. For more information about filing complaints with CRCL, go to [dhs.gov/crcl](http://dhs.gov/crcl), or call 202-401-1474 or 1-866-644-8360. Complaints may be filed in any language.

## **Use**

This plan is intended only to improve the internal management of USCIS's language access program and does not create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law, or equity by a party against the United States, its agencies, its officers or employees, or any person.