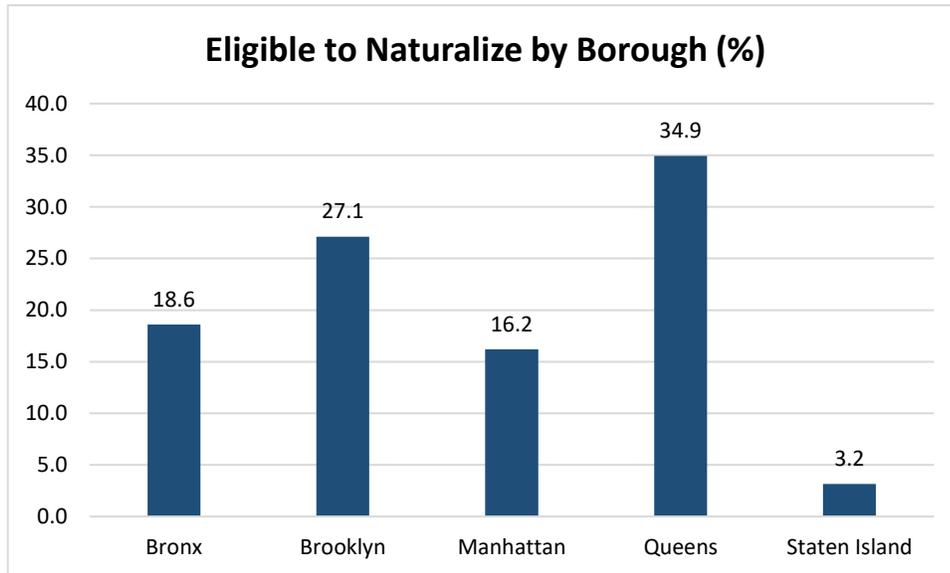


Fact Sheet: Eligible to Naturalize New Yorkers
December 2019

New York City is home to about 622,000 lawful permanent residents (green card holders) who are currently eligible to become U.S. citizens through naturalization but have not yet done so.¹ Significant numbers reside in all five boroughs, with the largest populations in Queens and Brooklyn.



Despite the benefits of naturalization, many immigrants who are eligible have not yet done so. The number who do naturalize each year (we estimate about 61,000²) is less than 10 percent of the eligible population, and it is significantly outpaced by the estimated 103,000 New York City residents who become green card holders every year,³ many of whom will join the eligible-to-naturalize population upon meeting durational residency requirements.⁴

A number of barriers prevent immigrants from applying for citizenship, including cost, lack of information, a need for legal assistance, and English language proficiency: the current application filing fee is \$725, which includes a \$640 application fee and an \$85 biometric fee. Additionally, applicants must pass interviews that include both an English and a civics test to assess applicants' abilities to speak, read, and write English as well as to assess their knowledge of U.S. government and history. The lengthy timeline for naturalization may also pose a deterrent: current application processing times for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) are up to 24 months in New York.⁵ The local backlog for

¹ All data in Fact Sheet, unless otherwise noted, is based on 2018 1-Year American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample (ACS PUMS) as augmented by the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity (OEO). OEO has derived a methodology to estimate immigration legal status in the ACS. For more information on the methodology, see "An Economic Profile of Immigrants in New York City," NYC Office for Economic Opportunity, accessed December 6, 2019, <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/opportunity/pdf/immigrant-poverty-report-2018.pdf>.

² In 2018, about 77,342 New York State residents became U.S. citizens in the local USCIS field offices of Long Island, New York, Brooklyn, and Queens. Because these field offices serve portions of New York City as well as portions of nearby counties, including Nassau, Suffolk, Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Sullivan, Ulster, and Westchester, this Fact Sheet makes an adjustment based on the portion of NYC non-citizen residents that make up the total non-citizen residents of all these counties (78.5%). 2018 1-Year ACS PUMS.

³ Every year about 143,100 New York State residents obtain lawful permanent resident status. See "Persons Obtaining Lawful Permanent Resident Status By State Or Territory Of Residence: Fiscal Years 2015 To 2017," U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, accessed December 3, 2019, <https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/yearbook/2017/table4>. This Fact Sheet makes an adjustment of 72% based on the proportion of New York State noncitizens who were New York City residents in 2018.

⁴ Pursuant to federal immigration law, to be eligible to naturalize, a lawful permanent resident must generally have lived in the U.S. for at least 5 years (or at least 3 years if they are married to a U.S. citizen).

⁵ "Processing time for Application for Naturalization (N-400) at New York City, NY," U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, accessed December 3, 2019, <https://egov.uscis.gov/processing-times/>.

naturalization applications is 83,019, and the national backlog is now over 685,000⁶ – up from 391,800 in 2012.⁷

Immigrants who are eligible to naturalize are deeply integrated into the economic and social life of New York City.

- **Average years in the U.S.** Eligible-to-naturalize immigrants have lived in the U.S. for an average of 18 years.
- **Age.** They are an older population, with a median age of 47.
- **Employment.** They participate in the labor force at about the same rate as the general population. About 24 percent are in the education and health service industries.
- **Educational attainment.** About 24 percent (of those aged 25 and over) have a bachelor’s degree or higher, and about 35 percent have less than a high school education.
- **Health coverage.** About 9 percent (53,000 people) are uninsured, compared to 4 percent of the native-born population in NYC. Among these uninsured eligible-to-naturalize residents, the vast majority qualify for public health insurance programs, with 78 percent eligible for Medicaid, the Essential Plan, or Affordable Care Act subsidies because they fall below 400 percent of the federal poverty level.
- **Economic contributions.** Every year, this population accounts for approximately \$19 billion in earnings in New York City.
- **Homeownership.** Nearly a quarter live in homes owned by a member of the household.
- **Neighborhoods.** The top ten community districts for this population, each of which are home to about 15,000+ eligible-to-naturalize immigrant residents, are:

	Community District	Neighborhood(s)	Percent
1	Queens Community District 7	Flushing, Murray Hill & Whitestone	5.1
2	Queens Community District 3	Jackson Heights & North Corona	4.4
3	Manhattan Community District 12	Washington Heights, Inwood & Marble Hill	3.5
4	Queens Community District 2	Sunnyside & Woodside	3.4
5	Brooklyn Community District 11	Bensonhurst & Bath Beach	3.3
6	Queens Community District 4	Elmhurst & South Corona	3.1
7	Bronx Community District 5	Morris Heights, Fordham South & Mount Hope	3.0

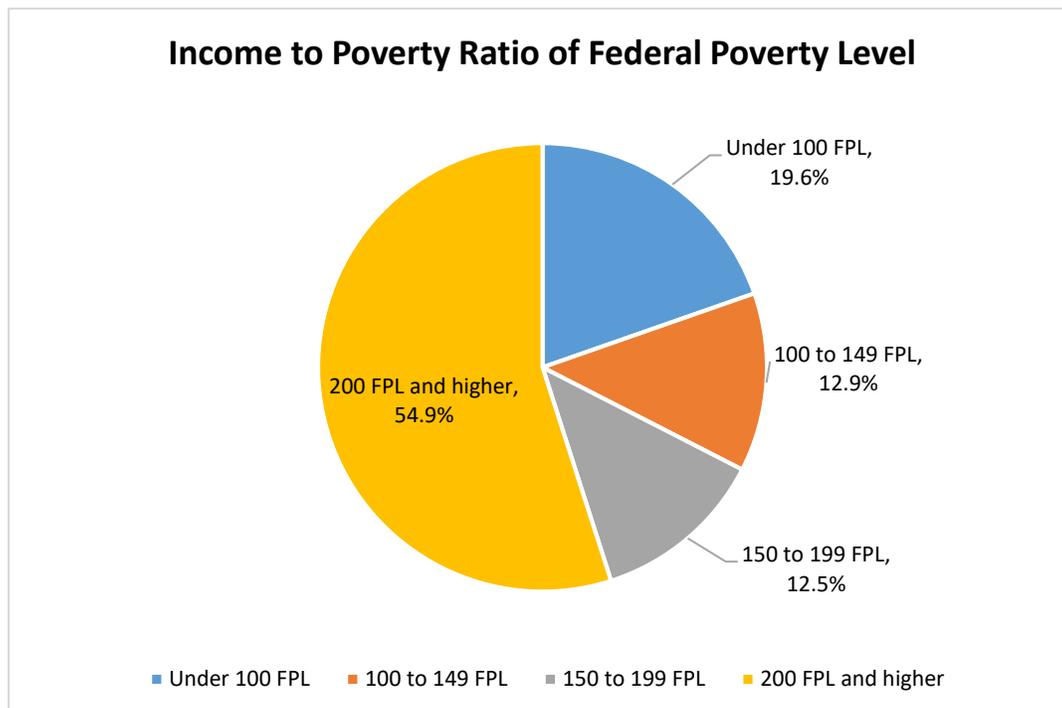
⁶ “Number of Form N-400, Application for Naturalization, by Category of Naturalization, Case Status, and USCIS Field Office Location, April 1 – June 30, 2019” (for Brooklyn, Long Island, NYC, and Queens), U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, accessed December 3, 2019, https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Resources/Reports%20and%20Studies/Immigration%20Forms%20Data/Naturalization%20Data/N400_performancedata_fy2019_qtr3.pdf.

⁷ “Field Offices Form N-400 Applications for Naturalization Receipts, Completions and Pending, Fiscal Years: 2010 through 2012,” U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, accessed December 3, 2019, https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/USCIS/Resources/Reports%20and%20Studies/Immigration%20Forms%20Data/Naturalization%20Data/N400-performancedata_2012-sep.pdf.

8	Brooklyn Community District 7	Sunset Park & Windsor Terrace	2.6
9	Queens Community District 12	Jamaica, Hollis & St. Albans	2.6
10	Queens Community District 8	Briarwood, Fresh Meadows & Hillcrest	2.5

Immigrants in New York City face many barriers to naturalization, even where eligible to apply.

- **Low-income.** About 45 percent of the eligible-to-naturalize population, or 280,100 residents fall below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), qualifying them for a fee waiver or reduced fee from USCIS under current rules. The mean earnings for an individual that is eligible to naturalize is \$49,000.



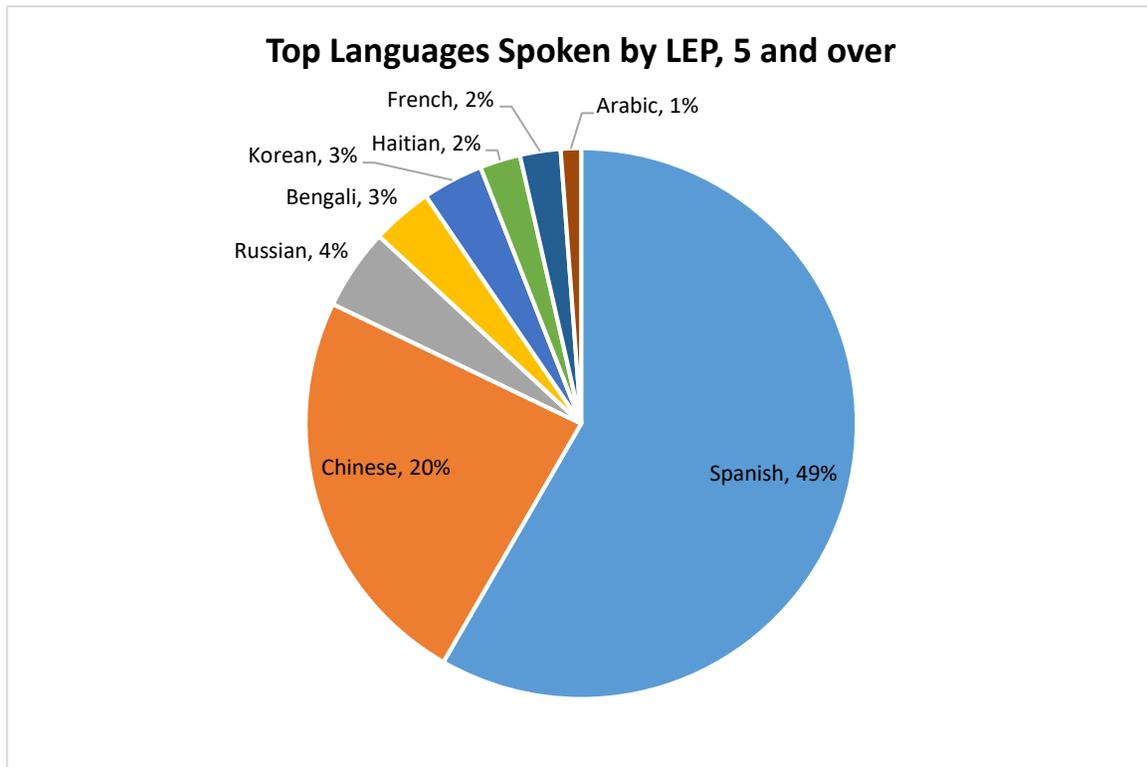
Addressing Cost Barriers

Naturalization applicants with household income of less than 200% FPL are currently eligible for either a full fee waiver or partial fee reduction from the \$640 application fee and \$85 biometric fee.⁸

Income as % of FPL	Fee Waiver/Reduction Eligibility
Less than 150%	Full fee waiver, including biometric fee (total cost is \$0)
150% up to 200%	Partial fee reduction of 50 percent, no reduction of biometric fee (total cost is \$405)
200% and over	Not eligible for a fee waiver (total cost is \$725)

⁸ The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has recently proposed a new regulation (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Fee Schedule, DHS Docket No. USCIS-2019-0010; RIN 1615-AC18) that would eliminate fee waivers for citizenship where they are not statutorily required. The proposed rule would also increase the naturalization fee from \$640 to \$1,170.

- **Limited English proficiency.** More than half (59 percent) of the eligible-to-naturalize population have limited English proficiency (LEP). The top three languages spoken by eligible-to-naturalize residents with LEP are Spanish (49 percent); Chinese, including Cantonese and Mandarin (20 percent); and Russian (4 percent).



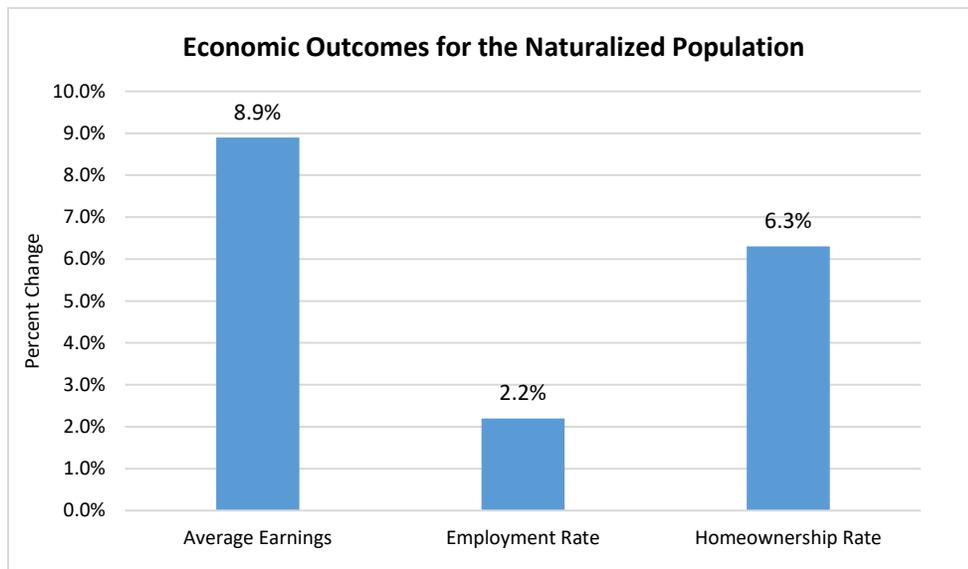
In addition to being associated with more limited financial means, limited English proficiency may play a significant role in preventing many immigrants from naturalizing. During the naturalization process, USCIS tests applicants' abilities to read, write, and speak English.⁹ Immigrants must also pass a civics test to naturalize.

⁹ Certain older applicants may be exempt from the English language requirement. <https://www.uscis.gov/us-citizenship/citizenship-through-naturalization/exceptions-accommodations>.

Economic impacts of naturalization

Access to citizenship is among the most important tools available to empower and engage immigrant communities, particularly at a time of increased enforcement, fear, and confusion. Supporting those who are eligible to naturalize would have the following positive impacts on New York City:

- Benefits for individual New Yorkers:** For individuals who naturalize, research shows that individual annual earnings increase by an average of 8.9 percent or \$3,200; the employment rate rises 2.2 percentage points; and homeownership increases 6.3 percentage points. These economic gains can be attributed to a number of reasons, including access to a broader range of employment opportunities and the fact that naturalization provides a sense of permanency that can promote long-term investments such as buying a home, starting a business, and investing.¹⁰



- Greater civic engagement:** Naturalization gives immigrants the right to vote in national, state, and local elections.
- Fiscal Benefits for City, State, and Federal government:** If all eligible-to-naturalize immigrants in New York City were to become U.S. citizens, annual city, state, and federal tax revenue would rise by \$789 million and public benefits costs would decrease by \$34 million, for a net benefit of \$823 million per year.¹¹

¹⁰ Maria Enchautegui and Linda Giannerelli, Urban Institute, *The Economic Impact of Naturalization on Immigrants and Cities* (2015), <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/76241/2000549-The-Economic-Impact-of-Naturalization-on-Immigrants-and-Cities.pdf>. Enchautegui and Giannerelli also discuss the reasons why naturalization is associated with these positive outcomes. Note that Enchautegui and Giannerelli's economic impact estimates are based on slightly different population estimates than those described in earlier sections of this Fact Sheet because their research uses 2011-2013 ACS IPUMS data.

¹¹ Ibid.