

# Minister McEntee opens temporary process for granting citizenship during COVID-19

From [Department of Justice](#)

Published on 18 January 2021

Last updated on 20 January 2021

- **in person ceremonies not possible during COVID-19 restrictions**
- **from today, a signed statutory declaration witnessed by a designated official can be exchanged for a certificate of naturalisation**
- **online payments also introduced for citizenship applicants as part of Minister McEntee's digital reform agenda to modernise the Justice Sector**

The Minister for Justice, Helen McEntee TD, has today opened a temporary system which will enable citizenship applicants to complete their naturalisation process by signing a statutory declaration of loyalty.

This signed statutory declaration replaces the requirement for citizenship applicants to attend citizenship ceremonies, which have been temporarily suspended during COVID-19.

Minister McEntee said:

"The granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation is a privilege and an honour which is recognised by the thousands of people who apply every year. I am pleased that we can now bring some certainty to the people whose applications have effectively been on hold during the pandemic.

"Approximately 4,000 applicants have not been able to receive a certificate of naturalisation due to the temporary suspension of citizenship ceremonies. The process I am opening today means that certificates can now be granted again, once the signed and witnessed statutory declaration and relevant fee has been received by my department.

"A significant number of healthcare and other frontline workers who have made extraordinary contributions during the pandemic will benefit from these new arrangements over the coming weeks and months."

Under the temporary new system, qualifying applicants will be asked to complete a statutory declaration that will be sent to them by email from the Citizenship Division of the Department of Justice and bring it to one of the listed designated officials.

The designated official must witness the applicant sign the statutory declaration. The applicant must then send the signed statutory declaration, the appropriate fee and any other requested documentation to the department's Citizenship Division.

Final processing will then take place and a certificate of naturalisation, which will be signed by the Minister, will be sent to the applicant.

The new system will be in place from today - Monday 18 January 2021 - and the Department of Justice will communicate with applicants regarding the requirements on a phased basis over the next few months until in-person citizenship ceremonies are able to recommence.

It is expected that the 4,000 applicants currently waiting on naturalisation will have been provided with an opportunity to gain citizenship by the end of March.

While the provision of legal services is an essential service during Level 5 restrictions, the Minister would also like to remind everyone of the need to adhere to the public health guidelines at all times, for their own and other's safety and not to undertake unnecessary travel during Level 5 restrictions.

The Minister also reiterated her commitment to resuming ceremonies at the earliest opportunity:

"Since their establishment in 2011, citizenship ceremonies have been joyous occasions which mark the granting of Irish citizenships in a dignified manner and they have become a welcome addition to our public and civic life.

"We have provisionally scheduled in-person ceremonies to resume in December, subject to the safety of all involved being assured."

Highlighting the additional digital measures that have recently been implemented to deal with the current level of demand for citizenship services, the Minister said:

"The Citizenship website has been significantly revamped to make it more user friendly, As part of this process, a new online chat conversation application, or "Chatbot" called Tara was introduced last December. This provides users with an instant response to frequently asked questions and mimics real-time text or message exchanges with a member of staff. There have been over 4,600 interactions on the chatbot since it launched.

"I am putting the Justice Sector on a Digital First footing and will move our services away from old, paper based systems.

"Plans for the digitalisation of the naturalisation process are well advanced, through increased digital and ICT investment. As part of this process, eTax-clearance for citizenship applicants has been introduced. Online payments have been trialled for applications from minors and the process is currently being rolled out to adult applications on a phased basis."

**ENDS**

## **Notes**

There are currently in excess of 24,000 citizenship applications on hand including approximately 4,000 that are ceremony ready or in the final processing stages. Waiting until large in-person citizenship ceremonies could take place again is not an option as many

applicants would have their opportunity to be made Irish citizens postponed for an indefinite period of time through no fault of their own.

Last October, the Minister instructed her officials to urgently put in place the necessary arrangements in accordance with the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 to make provision, as a temporary measure while COVID-19 restrictions are in place, for applicants for a certificate of naturalisation to make the declaration and undertaking required under section 15(1)(e) of the 1956 Act by way of a statutory declaration, witnessed by a person of legal standing, as laid out in Statutory Instrument 569 of 2011.

The necessary arrangements are now in place and from 18 January 2021, the Department of Justice will communicate with applicants, on a phased basis over the coming months, outlining the necessary steps to complete their naturalisation process and details of the temporary measure will be available on the citizenship website.