

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-105021](#), a report to congressional requesters.

Why GAO Did This Study

Noncitizens have a long history of serving in the military. Over 100,000 noncitizens joined the military from fiscal years 2010 through 2021. The Immigration and Nationality Act authorizes the expedited naturalization of current and former servicemembers.

GAO was asked to review issues related to the military naturalization process. This report examines (1) servicemember naturalization application data from fiscal year 2010 through 2021; (2) the extent DOD, the services, and USCIS developed and implemented military naturalization policies and procedures; and (3) the extent DOD, the services, the VA, and USCIS assist with military naturalizations and assess these efforts.

GAO analyzed USCIS data on servicemember naturalization applications and processing times. GAO also reviewed DOD, service, and USCIS military naturalization policies and procedures. GAO interviewed DOD, service, VA, and USCIS officials to determine the extent they assist with and assess military naturalization efforts.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making 11 recommendations including that the services develop procedures to collect information on military service certification processing timeliness; DOD establish a policy to ensure the services inform noncitizen servicemembers about naturalization assistance; and DOD, VA, and USCIS develop plans to regularly assess their military naturalization assistance efforts. DOD, VA, and USCIS agreed with our recommendations.

View [GAO-22-105021](#). For more information, contact Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512-8777 or gambler@gao.gov.

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MILITARY NATURALIZATIONS

Federal Agencies Assist with Naturalizations, but Additional Monitoring and Assessment Are Needed

What GAO Found

Servicemember naturalization applications fell by 78 percent from approximately 11,000 in fiscal year 2017 to approximately 2,500 in 2018. These applications returned close to pre-fiscal year 2018 levels by fiscal year 2021. The percentage of these applications that U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) approved also fell in fiscal years 2017 and 2018. According to USCIS and Department of Defense (DOD) officials, these temporary declines were due in part to DOD policy changes, such as longer service requirements to obtain military service certification.

To improve military naturalization efforts, DOD, the services, USCIS, and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) should:

Develop procedures to ensure timely processing of military service certifications. Four of the five services lack procedures to ensure the timely processing of servicemember requests for certification of honorable military service. DOD policy directs the services to process these requests—a key step in the naturalization process—within 30 days.

Establish a DOD policy to ensure the services inform noncitizen servicemembers about naturalization assistance. The services offer military naturalization assistance. The Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard have processes to inform noncitizen servicemembers of such assistance. The Army also recently emailed noncitizen servicemembers about naturalization, but the Marine Corps has no such process.

Processes Services Use to Inform Noncitizen Servicemembers about Military Naturalization and Related Resources, as of April 2022



Legend

- Email to servicemembers
- Recruiting policies or guidance
- Information on website

Source: GAO analysis of related documents and interviews with officials from the military services. | GAO-22-105021

^aMarine Corps does not have a process to inform noncitizen servicemembers about military naturalization resources.

Develop plans to assess military naturalization assistance efforts. DOD, USCIS and VA have taken coordinated actions, but they have not assessed their military naturalization assistance efforts.

Addressing these issues would help ensure that servicemembers do not face unnecessary delays, and provide insights into whether noncitizen servicemembers, veterans, and their families receive appropriate information about the military naturalization process.