

Introduction

A **citizen** is a person who is a resident of a country or nation by birth or choice claiming allegiance to the government and entitled to its protection. **Citizenship** is the membership of a person in a particular country or nation. People may become citizens of a country in different ways:

1. **Birth:** A child automatically becomes a citizen of the country in which it is born.
2. **Naturalization:** Each country establishes its own conditions for naturalization. Included in these conditions, the person seeking to become a new citizen usually has to renounce allegiance to his/her original nation and take an **oath of allegiance** to the new nation.

Each country has different rights of which citizens are assured, usually through a written or unwritten constitution. This **Constitution** gives citizens the privilege of voting. In Canada, all citizens are equally entitled to the rights, privileges and responsibilities laid out in the laws of the country. These rights include the right to vote and run for office, and the right to enter, remain in or leave Canada. Only Canadian citizens can carry Canadian passports. All persons born in Canada, with some exceptions, are Canadian citizens at birth. One exception is the children of foreign diplomats who are considered citizens of the native country of the parents. Similarly, children of Canadian diplomats living abroad are considered Canadian citizens.

The process of becoming a Canadian citizen is laid out in the **1977 Citizenship Act**. In the most common cases, a person comes to live in Canada with the status of a **permanent resident**. This means that the person intends to live and work in Canada permanently. Adults who are admitted to Canada may apply for citizenship after a period of three years.

Applications are heard by a judge who may or may not approve the request. If the person qualifies, he/she is sworn in as a Canadian citizen, but if the request has been denied, the person may appeal the judge's decision.

Citizenship may also be **revoked**, or taken away, if it was granted under false pretenses.



The **Secretary of State** is the federal government department responsible for citizenship. Its minister may in special cases waive some requirements for citizenship, such as in the case of refugees or to reward those who have rendered exceptional service to Canada.

Citizenship is different from **immigration**. Immigration is the movement of people into a country from other countries. Canada has been settled by immigrants from all over the world. Since the arrival of the first Europeans, millions of people have come to settle in Canada from hundreds of different countries. Today, one out every six Canadians was born outside of Canada and of these, two out of three were born in Europe.

