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A GUIDE FROM THE LAWYERS AT MY SPAIN VISA

SPANISH CITIZENSHIP · 2026

Becoming a Spanish citizen: routes, timelines and dual nationality

Which route fits you, how many years each one asks for, what happens to your current passport, and where applications stall.



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Is Spanish citizenship the right goal for you?

Spanish citizenship gives you a Spanish passport, a vote, and the right to live and work anywhere in the European Union. Unlike a residence card, it does not need renewing. It is also the slowest status to earn, and for most people from the US, the UK or Canada it comes with a formal renunciation of their current nationality.

For most people citizenship is the last step after years on another permit, such as a non-lucrative visa, a digital nomad permit or a work permit. The question clients bring us is rarely "can I apply?" It is "which route, when, and what happens to my other passport?"

Citizenship usually makes sense if

- You have lived legally in Spain for years and plan to stay for good.
- You want an EU passport, the vote, and no more renewals.
- You are married to a Spaniard, or a parent or grandparent was Spanish by origin.

Permanent residency may suit you better if

Permanent residency is the long-term permit you can get after five years of legal residence.

- You are American, British or Canadian and do not want to sign a renunciation at all.
- You want to live and work in Spain indefinitely but a vote and an EU passport matter less to you.
- You are hoping to buy your way in. Spain has no citizenship by investment, and the golden visa (residence through property investment) closed on 3 April 2025.

The numbers that matter

10 years
of legal residence, the **general rule** (US, UK, Canada and most others)

2 years
for nationals of **Ibero-American countries**, Portugal, the Philippines, Andorra, Equatorial Guinea and people of Sephardic origin

1 year
if you are **married to a Spaniard** and have lived here legally for a year

1 year
if you were **born in Spain**, or a parent or grandparent was Spanish by origin

1 year
the Ministry of Justice's **legal deadline** to decide; many files take longer

180 days
to swear the **oath of nationality** once the grant is notified

The routes, in plain words

By residence. This is the route most of our clients take. Ten years is the general rule. Nationals of Ibero-American countries, Portugal, the Philippines, Andorra and Equatorial Guinea, and people of Sephardic origin, need two. Recognised refugees need five. One year is enough if you were born in Spain or a parent or

grandparent was Spanish by origin, meaning Spanish from birth. The years count from the day your first residence permit takes effect, not from the day you collect the card, and they must be legal, continuous and right before you apply. Time on a tourist stay or a student permit does not count, because Spain treats those as stays, not residence. If you file every renewal on time, the months while it is being decided still count. Short trips abroad do not normally break the period. The law sets no fixed number of days, so long or frequent absences are judged case by case.

By marriage. If you are married to a Spanish citizen, one year of legal residence in Spain is enough, as long as you have been married for that whole year without separating. The wedding can take place anywhere, but it has to be registered in Spain.

By origin and by option. Opting is a declaration that gives you nationality without the years of residence. If your father or mother was born Spanish in Spain, you can opt for Spanish nationality at any age. Children of foreigners who become Spanish, people who have been in the custody of a Spaniard, and people adopted by Spaniards after turning 18 also have an option route, which generally has to be used by the age of 20.

What closed in 2025. The Democratic Memory Law, known as the grandchildren's law, let children and grandchildren of Spaniards who lost their nationality through exile opt for Spanish nationality from abroad. It stopped taking new applications on 22 October 2025, although files lodged in time are still being resolved. Today a grandchild of a Spaniard of origin needs one year of legal residence in Spain to apply by residence.

Dual nationality and the renunciation question

Spain lets you keep your current nationality if you are a national of an Ibero-American country, Portugal, the Philippines, Andorra or Equatorial Guinea, or of Sephardic origin. French nationals keep theirs under the 2021 Spain-France agreement, although they generally still need ten years of residence.

Everyone else, including Americans, Britons and Canadians, is formally asked to renounce their previous nationality when taking Spanish citizenship. That renunciation is a declaration made to the Spanish authorities, and Spain does not notify Washington, London or Ottawa. Under US law, to lose your citizenship you must perform a voluntary and intentional act of relinquishment at a US consulate, and signing a paper in a Spanish registry typically does not meet that threshold. In practice most Americans who naturalise hold both passports: Spanish inside the EU, American to enter the United States.

> **Before you sign anything**
>
> Living as Spanish in Spain and as a US or UK citizen elsewhere has consequences for tax, military service and consular protection. Before you file, we go through each of the three with you for both of your countries.

The two exams: DELE A2 and CCSE

Applying by residence, including by marriage, requires two Instituto Cervantes certificates. The **DELE A2** is a basic Spanish language diploma. You do not sit it if you come from a country where Spanish is an official language. The **CCSE** (constitutional and sociocultural knowledge) tests your knowledge of Spain's constitution, government, culture and geography. It has 25 questions drawn from a public bank of about 300, you have 45 minutes, and 15 correct answers is a pass. If you completed compulsory secondary education (ESO) in Spain, you are exempt. If you fail, the fee covers one retake.

How long it really takes

The Ministry of Justice has one year by law to decide. In practice many files take longer. If the year passes with no answer, the silence counts as a refusal, but you do not start again: the silence can be appealed, and the Ministry is still obliged to issue a decision.

The exams come first, and foreign criminal record certificates are often valid for only 90 days, so the file has to be ready close to the filing date. We file online for every client, which avoids postal delays and lets us answer the Ministry's requests quickly. Once the grant is notified you have **180 days** to swear the oath of nationality. Miss that window and the grant lapses. After the oath you apply for your Spanish DNI like anybody else, and then your passport.

Where applications go wrong

- **Counting the years from the wrong date.** Months on a tourist stay or a student permit, or the gap before your first permit took effect, are not residence.
- **Documents that expire mid-process.** Criminal record certificates with a short life, or apostilles (the stamp that legalises a foreign document) and sworn translations into Spanish done out of sequence.
- **An incomplete file.** The Ministry asks for what is missing, and every request pushes the decision further away.
- **Missing the 180-day oath window.** The grant lapses and the whole application starts again.

How we work with you

1. **A consultation with a lawyer.** We look at your residence history, your nationality, your family and your plans, and tell you which route fits, or whether permanent residency serves you better.
2. **Your dates, checked.** We work out exactly when your years are complete, so you neither file too early nor wait longer than you need to.
3. **Your file, reviewed piece by piece.** Exam certificates, criminal records, civil records and translations, checked so the Ministry has as little as possible to send back.
4. **Filing and follow-up.** We file online, answer requests quickly, and act if the legal year passes without a decision.
5. **Oath and beyond.** We keep track of the 180-day window and help with your DNI and passport. Our tax advisors can look at what dual nationality means for your taxes.

Situations we see often

TYPICAL CASE

US retiree after ten years on residence permits

A typical path: an American moves on the non-lucrative visa, becomes a permanent resident after five years and reaches ten years of legal residence. The question at that point is the renunciation. We explain what the Spanish declaration does and does not do under US law, so they can choose between citizenship and staying permanent residents with the full picture.

TYPICAL CASE

Grandchild of a Spaniard after October 2025

The grandchildren's law has closed, but the family tie still counts. One year of legal residence in Spain is enough to apply by residence, and a parent born Spanish in Spain opens the option route at any age. We check which applies to your family tree before you order a single certificate.

Why clients choose My Spain Visa



Lucía Lagunas Reyes

Lucía is a Spanish immigration lawyer, registered with the Pamplona Bar Association (no. 2572) since 2012. My Spain Visa started in 2010 as a blog she wrote while still a law student. Today more than ten legal professionals handle its cases from Barcelona, Marbella and Valencia. She works in English, Spanish and German.

- **Since 2010** guiding people through Spanish immigration, and more than 5,000 clients from over 100 countries.
- **Rated 4.9** on Google (523 reviews) and on Trustpilot (385 reviews), November 2026.

Let a lawyer look at your case

In a consultation we look at your nationality, your residence history and your family, and tell you which route fits, when you can apply, and what dual nationality would mean for you.

Book a consultation with our team

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