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So You Want A Second Passport: How US Citizens Can Obtain Citizenship In Another Country Based On Ancestry

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President [Trump's immigration policy](#) and plans to [construct a Mexican border wall](#) have led more than a few U.S. citizens to express a desire – serious or in jest - to flee the country.

In fact, some individuals may be lucky enough to have the option of obtaining a [second citizenship](#) based on ancestry. Whether they plan to become “Trump refugees” or they have other motivations – such as honoring their heritage or being less conspicuous when traveling abroad – having a second passport can be a useful tool in today’s complex and ever-changing global landscape.

Many countries offer citizenship to children or grandchildren of nationals, regardless of where those individuals were born.

In addition to *jus soli* (“right of soil” or birthright citizenship), the U.S. grants citizenship to children of U.S. citizens born outside the country based on the principles of *jus sanguinis* (“right of blood” or citizenship by ancestry), however, like most countries, the rules for qualifying for this process are complex.

Below is a brief snapshot of nationality laws from immigration experts around the world for those who may have an interest in exploring obtaining a second citizenship.

In Western Europe, nationality laws based on ancestry are fairly generous.

Marco Mazzeschi of the Italian law firm Mazzeschi states that “Italian citizenship law reaffirms the principle of *jus sanguinis*, by which any children born of an Italian father or mother instantly inherit Italian citizenship.” A child living abroad who is the descendent of

an Italian ancestor generally can claim Italian citizenship as long as the ancestor never gave up their Italian citizenship.

Spain also follows the *jus sanguinis* principle. Pamela Mafuz, a Spanish immigration attorney, notes that if an individual has held a different nationality (i.e. not Spanish) from birth, they can obtain Spanish citizenship as long as their father or mother, grandfather or grandmother was originally Spanish.

According to Karl Waheed of Karl Waheed Avocats in Paris, a child who has at least one French parent is “French” regardless of whether the parents are married or not, and whether the child was born in France or abroad. Other provisions of French law allow derivation of citizenship from ancestors beyond parents (i.e. grandparents).

“British nationality law is extraordinarily complex – there are currently six types of British citizens” states Nichola Carter of Carter Thomas Solicitors in London. Many U.S. nationals may be unaware that they have a claim to British citizenship through their parents or grandparents, even if they have not lived in the U.K. themselves. Those who discover that they are automatically British citizens may apply directly for a British passport.

Although not in Europe, Brazil also allows for passing citizenship by *jus sanguinis*. Letitia Ribeiro C. de Figueiredo, a Brazilian immigration attorney, notes that under the Brazilian constitution, Brazilian citizens are (i) individuals born in Brazil, even if the parents are foreigners; (ii) individuals born in a foreign country, if the father or the mother are Brazilian citizens who are providing services for the country abroad (i.e. diplomatic or military assignments); or (iii) individuals born in a foreign country, if the father or the mother are Brazilian citizens, and the child is registered at the Brazilian Consulate or comes to reside in Brazil and chooses Brazilian nationality, at any time, after reaching the age of majority.

In contrast to their Western neighbors, many Eastern European countries make it difficult to acquire citizenship.

Martin Hrodek, an immigration attorney in the Czech Republic, notes that only former Czechoslovak citizens who do not currently hold Slovak citizenship can acquire Czech citizenship by declaring their Czech citizenship before a local administrative authority. He adds “it is generally not possible for foreign citizens to acquire Czech citizenship by ancestry, i.e., by declaration, just because one of their ancestors was a Czech or Czechoslovak citizen.” The only exception is related to the split of former Czechoslovakia into the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1992 – the descendants of Czechoslovak citizens, who acquired neither Czech nor Slovak citizenship after the split, can obtain Czech citizenship by declaration. All other descendants of former Czechoslovak and Czech

citizens will be treated like other foreigners – they have to meet relatively complicated conditions, such as living in the Czech Republic for 5 years and learning the Czech language.

In Hungary, while it is possible to derive citizenship based on ancestry, the requirements are stricter than in many Western European nations. Eva Nagy, a Hungarian immigration lawyer, notes that a U.S. citizen having Hungarian ancestry may acquire Hungarian citizenship if he or she meets certain conditions, including the absence of a criminal record and the ability to speak Hungarian.

In Canada and Mexico, citizenship can be passed on through ancestry, but only to the first generation.

Betsy Kane of Capelle Kane in Ottawa, Canada states that “Canadian citizenship is acquired by birth on Canadian soil or by birth to a Canadian born parent residing outside of Canada.” She further notes that some Americans are surprised to learn that as of April 17, 2009, people who are in the second generation of Canadian citizens born abroad are no longer entitled to Canadian citizenship by virtue of their descent from Canadian parents or grandparents.

Raul Lara-Maiz of Baker & McKenzie in Mexico states “you are considered a Mexican citizen if you are the child of a Mexican national who was born in Mexico; however, the son or daughter of a Mexican national who was not born in Mexico, is not considered a Mexican national.” Only the first generation not born in Mexico is able to benefit from Mexican nationality.

The quotes above provide a high-level overview of derivative citizenship rules around the world. If you are seriously exploring this option, it is best to consult with a qualified [immigration attorney](#) who can help you navigate complex nationality laws.