

Immigration Dept rejoices as "Lost Canadians" citizenship bill is passed

95% of the cases of "Lost Canadians" will be resolved, said Citizenship and Immigration Minister Diane Finley, thanks to Bill C-37.

People who are citizens when this law comes into force will not lose their citizenship as a result of these amendments.

The new law will give citizenship to:

Those who became citizens when the first citizenship act took effect on January 1, 1947 (including people born in Canada prior to 1947 and war brides) and who then lost their citizenship;

Any person who was born in Canada or became a Canadian on or after January 1, 1947, and who then lost citizenship; and

Any person born abroad to a Canadian on or after January 1, 1947, if not already a citizen, but only if they are the first generation born abroad.

An amendment to the Citizenship Act, Bill C-37 has sorted out various quirks in 19th century legislation that affected as many as 200,000 people who lost, or never had, their citizenship.

Bill C-37 has just received Royal Assent and is in its final stage of coming into law.

"Today is a very special day for Canada with the passage of this legislation," said Immigration Minister Finley on the 16th of April.

"By introducing this legislation last year, our Government took decisive action to help those people who had their citizenship questioned, and to protect the value of Canadian citizenship for the future."

Finally, the door has been opened to "Lost Canadians" to regain their citizenship, which they have either lost or never had in the first place due to little-known quirks in the Citizenship Act itself.

"We're very pleased to have been the government that was able to resolve this situation finally," Canada's Immigration Minister told CBC News.

The bill flowed out of a series of reports from CBC News in 2007 that highlighted the fact that thousands of people were at risk of losing their citizenship because of outdated provisions in existing and former citizenship laws.

Shocking findings by the news channel's investigation included that there may be more than 200,000 immigrants living in Canada who could lose their citizenship for various reasons.

These reasons include:

Canadian-born children who have lost their citizenship because their fathers became US citizens at a later stage;

The law from 1947 to 1977 required people living outside of Canada on their 24th birthday to sign a form to keep their citizenship;

Immigrants born in a hospital south of the border were not considered citizens unless they later registered as Canadians; and

Some immigrants were stripped of their citizenship because they or their ancestors were considered illegitimate.

In May of 2005, Parliament passed a law speeding up Canadian citizenship for those in the first category, a category which has affected more than 100,000 people.

Under the law of the time, children of fathers who decided to take out citizenship in another country automatically lost their Canadian citizenship as well, even if they weren't living with them at the time.

This new law will come into effect no later than a year following Royal Assent.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada said exceptions to the law allowing lost Canadians to register are those born in Canada to a foreign diplomat, those who've renounced their citizenship with Canadian authorities, and those whose citizenship was revoked by the government because it was obtained by fraud.

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