



Annual Flow Report

REFUGEES AND ASYLEES: 2017

MARCH 2019



**Homeland
Security**

Office of Immigration Statistics
OFFICE OF STRATEGY, POLICY & PLANS

Refugees and Asylees: 2017

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INTRODUCTION

The United States provides refuge to certain persons who have been persecuted or have a well-founded fear of persecution through two programs: a refugee program for persons outside the United States and their eligible relatives, and an asylum program for persons in the United States and their eligible relatives. This Office of Immigration Statistics (OIS) *Annual Flow Report* presents information on persons admitted to the United States as refugees and those who entered the U.S. asylum process in 2017.¹

A total of 53,691 persons² were admitted to the United States as refugees during 2017. The leading countries of nationality for refugees admitted during this period were the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq, and Syria. An additional 26,568 individuals were granted asylum during 2017,³ including 16,045 individuals who were granted asylum affirmatively by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS),⁴ and 10,523 individuals who were granted asylum defensively by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). The leading countries of nationality for persons granted either affirmative or defensive asylum were China, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Travel documents were issued to 3,831 individuals who were approved for derivative asylum, allowing their admission to the United States. In addition to those approved overseas, 3,735 individuals were approved for derivative asylum status while residing in the United States.

DEFINING “REFUGEE” AND “ASYLUM” STATUS

To be eligible for refugee or asylum status, a principal applicant must meet the definition of a refugee set forth in section 101(a)(42) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), which states, in part, that a refugee is a person who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her country of nationality because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.⁵ Applicants for refugee status are outside the United States,

whereas applicants seeking asylum are either in the United States or arriving at a U.S. port of entry (POE).

To meet the INA’s refugee definition, a person must be outside their country of nationality, unless the person has no nationality, in which case they must be outside of the country in which they “last habitually resided.”

The INA provides the President with the authority to designate countries whose nationals may be processed for refugee status within their respective countries (referred to as “in-country processing”). In-country processing is also authorized for extraordinary individual protection cases for which resettlement consideration is requested by a U.S. Ambassador in any location. In 2017, certain nationals of Iraq, Cuba, Eurasia, and the Baltics were re-designated for in-country processing, as were qualified children from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras through the Central American Minors (CAM) program.⁶

REFUGEES

History of U.S. Refugee Resettlement

The United States has a long history of refugee resettlement. The Displaced Persons Act of 1948 was passed to address the migration crisis in Europe resulting from World War II, wherein millions of people had been forcibly displaced from their home countries and could not return. By 1952, the United States had admitted over 400,000 displaced people under the Act. The United States extended its commitments to refugee resettlement through legislation including the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 and the Fair Share Refugee Act of 1960. The United States also used the Attorney General’s parole authority to bring large groups of persons into the country for humanitarian reasons, including over 38,000 Hungarian nationals beginning in 1956 and over a million Indochinese beginning in 1975.

¹ In this report, years refer to fiscal years (October 1 to September 30).

² Refugee data in this report may differ slightly from numbers reported by the Department of State (DOS). DOS refugee numbers include Amerasians (children born in Cambodia, Korea, Laos, Thailand, or Vietnam after December 31, 1950, and before October 22, 1982, and fathered by a U.S. citizen), whereas the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) reports Amerasians as lawful permanent residents.

³ These asylum grants were based upon a principal asylum beneficiary’s application, which may also include an accompanying spouse and unmarried children under 21 years of age. They do not include individuals who were approved for follow-to-join asylum status while residing in the United States or abroad.

⁴ Affirmative asylum data for fiscal year 2017 were retrieved by the DHS Office of Immigration Statistics (OIS) in January 2018. Data in this report may differ slightly from fiscal year-end 2017 numbers retrieved and reported at different times by DHS’s U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Asylum Division.

⁵ Congress expanded this definition in the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, providing that persons who have been forced to abort a pregnancy or undergo involuntary sterilization or who have been persecuted for failure or refusal to undergo such a procedure or for other resistance to a coercive population control program shall be deemed to have been persecuted on account of political opinion.

⁶ The CAM program provided parents who were lawfully present in the United States the opportunity to be considered for refugee resettlement for their unmarried children. Minors who were determined to be ineligible for refugee status were then considered for parole into the United States. Under some circumstances, an in-country parent could also be approved to travel with the approved child. Under the CAM program, 1,045 children were admitted in 2016 while 2,057 were admitted in 2017. The program was phased out in 2018.

U.S. obligations under the 1967 United Nations Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees (to which the United States acceded in 1968) generally prohibits the United States from returning a refugee to a country where his or her life or freedom would be threatened on account of a protected ground. The Refugee Act of 1980 amended the INA to bring U.S. law into greater accord with U.S. obligations under the Protocol, which specifies a geographically and politically neutral refugee definition. The Act also established formal refugee and asylum programs.

Refugee Admissions Ceiling

Under the Refugee Act, the President consults with Congress to establish an overall refugee admissions ceiling and regional allocations before the beginning of each fiscal year.⁷ In 2017, the refugee ceiling was increased to 110,000. This was a 29 percent increase from the previous year and a 57 percent increase from the 2015 allocation. A pair of executive orders later adjusted the 2017 admissions to 50,000.

Similar to prior years, the largest regional allocations in 2017 were to the Near East/South Asia and Africa regions (Table 1). These two regions host the majority of registered refugees, and together they accounted for close to 80 percent of all refugee admissions to the United States. The largest numbers of refugees reside in Turkey (2.9 million, mainly Syrians and Iraqis), Pakistan (1.4 million, mainly Afghans), and Lebanon (1 million, mainly Syrians).

The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) refers the majority of refugees who are resettled to the United States. While the numbers of refugees UNHCR refers each year vary, the number of refugees considered in need of resettlement is typically about eight percent of the global refugee population, which has been increasing over the last few years, reaching 22.5 million people by the end of the 2016 calendar year, the highest number ever recorded.⁸ Historically, the United States has been the world's top resettlement country.

Refugee Eligibility Requirements

To qualify for refugee status, a principal applicant must: (1) be of special humanitarian concern to the United States; (2) meet the refugee definition as set forth in section 101(a)(42) of the INA; (3) be admissible under the INA (or be granted a waiver of inadmissibility); and (4) not be firmly resettled in any

foreign country. Any person who has ordered, incited, assisted, or otherwise participated in the persecution of another on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion is ineligible for refugee status, including as a derivative refugee. Derivative refugees need not meet all these eligibility requirements, but they must be admissible to the United States and demonstrate a relationship as the spouse or child of a principal refugee applicant or an admitted refugee.

Refugee Application Process

The U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) establishes processing priorities that identify individuals and groups who are of special humanitarian concern to the United States and who are eligible for refugee resettlement consideration. The priority categories are Priority 1 (P-1)—individuals referred by UNHCR, a U.S. Embassy, or certain non-governmental organizations (NGO); Priority 2 (P-2)—groups of special humanitarian concern; and Priority 3 (P-3)—family reunification cases. Once principal refugee applicants are referred or granted access to USRAP under any of these Priorities, they still must meet all other eligibility criteria. Upon referral, a Resettlement Support Center, working under a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of State (DOS), conducts pre-screening interviews with the applicants. A U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) officer then interviews applicants and accompanying derivatives to determine eligibility for resettlement in the United States. Multiple security checks must be completed before a request for refugee status is approved. Additionally, applicants must also undergo a medical exam.

Individuals who successfully complete the application process are assigned to a resettlement agency (sponsor) that assists with housing, employment, and other services upon arrival. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) makes arrangements for the refugee's travel to the United States. After arrival, refugees are authorized to work and may request documentation to travel outside the United States.

Table 1.

Proposed and Actual Refugee Admissions by Regions: FY 2015 to 2017¹

Region	2017		2016		2015	
	Ceiling	Admissions	Ceiling	Admissions	Ceiling	Admissions
Total	110,000	53,691	85,000	84,988	70,000	69,920
Africa	35,000	20,232	25,000	31,624	17,000	22,472
East Asia	12,000	5,148	13,000	12,512	13,000	18,456
Europe/Central Asia	4,000	5,205	4,000	3,957	1,000	2,363
Latin America/Caribbean	5,000	1,688	3,000	1,340	4,000	2,050
Near East/South Asia	40,000	21,418	34,000	35,555	33,000	24,579
Unallocated Reserve	14,000	-	6,000	-	2,000	-

- Represents zero.

¹ Ceiling and admission numbers reflect revisions made each fiscal year.

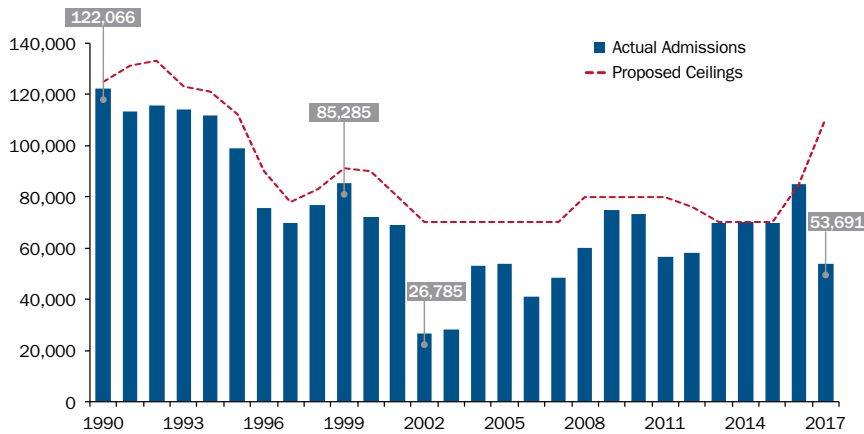
Source: U.S. Department of State.

⁷ In many cases, an unallocated reserve is also designated which can be used in any region if the need arises and only after notification to Congress.

⁸ This number included 17.2 million people under United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) mandate and 5.3 million Palestinian refugees registered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Figure 1.

Refugee Admissions and Proposed Ceilings to the United States: FY 1990 to 2017



Source: U.S. Department of State.

TRENDS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF REFUGEES

In 2017, the United States admitted 53,691 refugees, a 37 percent decrease from the previous year, due in large part to additional security vetting procedures. Refugee admissions under the current legal framework peaked at 122,066 in 1990 and then declined during the 1990s, as the refugee program’s focus shifted to more diverse populations across the world. Admissions decreased to a low point in 2002, due in part to security procedures and admission requirement changes after September 11, 2001. Refugee arrivals subsequently increased and reached a post-2001 peak of 74,602 in 2009. After a brief decrease from 2009 to 2011, refugee admissions began to increase sharply again in 2012, reaching another peak of 84,989

in 2016, the highest in 17 years, reflecting staffing increases and improvements in synchronizing security and medical checks for refugee families (Figure 1).

Category of Admission

In 2017, the majority of refugees were admitted under P-1 processing (62 percent)—individuals referred by the UNHCR, a U.S. Embassy, or certain NGOs—and P-2 processing (34 percent)—groups of special humanitarian concern (Table 2). Similar to 2016, P-3 processing (family reunification cases) constituted 0.5 percent of refugees admitted due to a four-year moratorium. Principal refugees accounted for 21,507 (40 percent) of the 53,691 refugees admitted to the United States in 2017. Accompanying spouses and dependent children represented 14 and 46 percent, respectively, of refugee admissions. There were 1,679 follow-to-join refugee beneficiaries (about three percent of total refugee admissions).

The spouse and unmarried children under the age of 21 of a principal refugee may obtain refugee status as an accompanying derivative.⁹ Accompanying derivatives may enter the United States with the principal refugee or within four months after the principal refugee’s admission.¹⁰ A spouse or child who joins the principal refugee more than four months after admission to the United States is a follow-to-join derivative. Principal refugees may petition for follow-to-join benefits for his or her qualifying derivatives up to two years after the principal was granted refugee status; the principal and the derivative relative’s relationship must have existed at the time of the principal’s admission into the United States. Principal refugees must file Form I-730, *Refugee/Asylee Relative Petition*,¹¹ for each qualifying follow-to-join derivative family member. These beneficiaries are not required to demonstrate an independent refugee claim. Once a principal’s I-730 has been approved, there are no time constraints placed upon that derivative relative’s travel to the United States, provided that (1) the principal’s status has not been revoked; (2) the relationship of the derivative to the principal is unchanged; and (3) in the case of a child, the child remains unmarried.

Table 2.

Refugee Arrivals by Relationship to Principal Applicant and Case Priority: FY 2015 to 2017

Relationship and case priority	2017		2016		2015	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
RELATIONSHIP TO PRINCIPAL APPLICANT						
Total	53,691	100.0	84,988	100.0	69,920	100.0
Principal Applicant	21,507	40.1	31,563	37.1	28,400	40.6
Dependents	32,184	59.9	53,425	62.9	41,520	59.4
Spouse	7,506	14.0	12,525	14.7	10,792	15.4
Child	24,678	46.0	40,900	48.1	30,728	43.9
CASE PRIORITY						
Total	53,691	100.0	84,988	100.0	69,920	100.0
Priority 1	33,291	62.0	54,047	63.6	34,559	49.4
Priority 2	18,477	34.4	28,901	34.0	33,230	47.5
Priority 3	244	0.5	459	0.5	96	0.1
Follow-to-join beneficiaries	1,679	3.1	1,582	1.9	2,035	2.9

Source: U.S. Department of State.

DATA

All refugee data presented in this report are from the Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System (WRAPS) of the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration of DOS.

⁹ Children may include those age 21 or over who are covered by provisions in the Child Status Protection Act, Pub. L. No. 107-208 (Aug. 6, 2002). A derivative child must remain unmarried until the time of admission to qualify.
¹⁰ In practice, the vast majority of accompanying derivative refugees enter the United States with the principal refugee.
¹¹ The petition is used to file for relatives of refugees and asylees. The USRAP program handles only refugee follow-to-join petitions, which are counted within the annual refugee ceiling. Asylum follow-to-join petitions are processed by USCIS and are not counted in the annual admission ceilings.

Country of Nationality

In 2017, the leading countries of nationality for individuals admitted as refugees were the Democratic Republic of the Congo (17 percent), Iraq (13 percent), Syria (12 percent), Somalia (11 percent), and Burma (9.5 percent) (Table 3). These top five countries made up close to two-thirds (63 percent) of total refugee admissions. Other leading countries included Ukraine, Bhutan, and Iran.

Since the inception of the refugee program, the number and nationalities of refugees admitted to the United States changed as U.S. policies evolved and new conflicts around the world arose. Since 2000 (the earliest year for which we have micro data), the United States has admitted more than a million refugees (1,063,078) from around the world. Sixteen percent (170,211) have been from Burma, 14 percent (147,650) from Iraq, and 11 percent (114,459) from Somalia (Figure 2). Refugees from the Near East/South Asia region accounted for a third of all refugee admissions during this time period. The Near East/South Asia, Africa, and East Asia regions remained the leading regions of admissions in 2017 (33, 28, and 20 percent of total admissions, respectively), despite each

experiencing drops of at least 40 percent compared to 2016. Europe experienced a 32 percent increase in admission, while Latin America and the Caribbean saw a 26 percent increase.

Age, Sex, and Marital Status

Three quarters of refugees admitted to the United States in 2017 were under 35 years of age, and three out of seven were children (Table 4). Refugees tend to be relatively younger than the native-born population, with a median age of 21 years for those arriving in 2017, compared to a median age of 37 years for the native-born population.¹² Refugees admitted in 2017 were slightly older than those admitted in 2016 (with a median age of 20 years at arrival) but remain one of the youngest cohorts since 2003. Refugee median age varies widely by region and country of birth: Refugees from Africa had the lowest median age of 18 years, while those from Europe had the highest median age of 24. The median ages of Congolese, Iraqi, and Syrian refugees were 17, 25, and 16 years, respectively. Roughly an equal number of male and female refugees were admitted in 2017, and 62 percent of adults were married at arrival.

Table 3.

Refugee Arrivals by Country of Nationality: FY 2015 to 2017

(Ranked by 2017 country of nationality)

Country of nationality	2017		2016		2015	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	53,691	100.0	84,988	100.0	69,920	100.0
Dem. Rep. Congo	9,377	17.5	16,370	19.3	7,876	11.3
Iraq	6,886	12.8	9,880	11.6	12,676	18.1
Syria	6,557	12.2	12,587	14.8	1,682	2.4
Somalia	6,130	11.4	9,020	10.6	8,858	12.7
Burma	5,078	9.5	12,347	14.5	18,386	26.3
Ukraine	4,264	7.9	2,543	3.0	1,451	2.1
Bhutan	3,550	6.6	5,817	6.8	5,775	8.3
Iran	2,577	4.8	3,750	4.4	3,109	4.4
Eritrea	1,917	3.6	1,949	2.3	1,596	2.3
Afghanistan	1,311	2.4	2,737	3.2	910	1.3
All other countries, including unknown.	6,044	11.3	7,988	9.4	7,601	10.9

Source: U.S. Department of State.

State of Initial Resettlement

In 2017, more than half of admitted refugees (55 percent) were resettled in the top ten resettling states (Table 5). Although the most populous states—California, Texas, and New York—resettled the most refugees (10, 9.0, and 6.0 percent of admitted refugees, respectively), Nebraska, North Dakota, and Washington resettled the most refugees per capita (Figure 3). Iraqi and Somali refugees were among the top nationalities resettled in all three states, while Ukrainian refugees were the top nationality resettled in Washington State.

Lawful Permanent Residence and Naturalization of Refugees

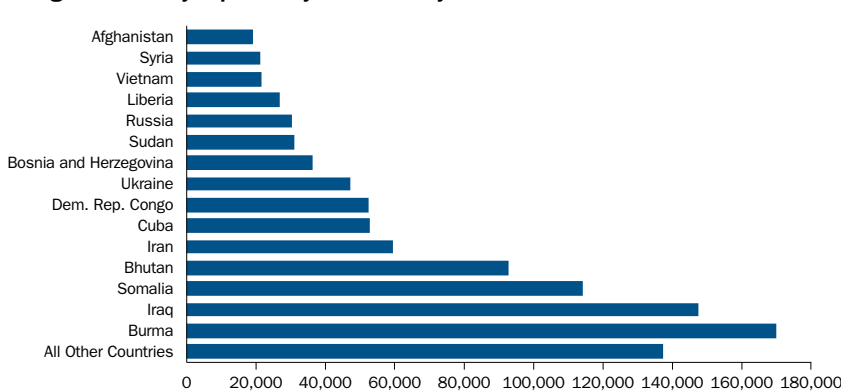
One year after being admitted to the United States, refugees are required by statute to apply for lawful permanent resident (LPR) status. Of those arriving between 2000 and 2015, 95 percent gained LPR status by the end of 2017.¹³ Refugees granted LPR status may apply for naturalization five years after their admission as refugees. Refugees have some of the highest naturalization rates of all immigrants: Of the adult refugees who obtained LPR status between 2000 and 2010, 60 percent naturalized within six years and

¹² Calculated from the March 2017 Current Population Survey public use microdata file from the U.S. Census Bureau.

¹³ Although the majority of refugees apply for LPR status one year after admission, due to operational and other factors, processing time can vary widely for those who apply.

Figure 2.

Refugee Arrivals by Top Country of Nationality: FY 2000 to 2017



Source: U.S. Department of State.

Table 4.

Refugee Arrivals by Age, Sex, and Marital Status: FY 2015 to 2017

Characteristic	2017		2016		2015	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
AGE						
Total	53,691	100.0	84,988	100.0	69,920	100.0
0 to 17 years . .	22,884	42.6	37,710	44.4	27,681	39.6
18 to 24 years .	7,874	14.7	11,335	13.3	9,624	13.8
25 to 34 years .	9,570	17.8	15,550	18.3	14,198	20.3
35 to 44 years .	6,290	11.7	10,315	12.1	9,072	13.0
45 to 54 years .	3,663	6.8	5,365	6.3	4,916	7.0
55 to 64 years .	2,058	3.8	2,807	3.3	2,564	3.7
65 years and over	1,352	2.5	1,906	2.2	1,865	2.7
SEX						
Total	53,691	100.0	84,988	100.0	69,920	100.0
Female	26,979	50.2	41,727	49.1	33,335	47.7
Male	26,712	49.8	43,261	50.9	36,584	52.3
Unknown	–	–	–	–	1	–
MARITAL STATUS						
Total	53,691	100.0	84,988	100.0	69,920	100.0
Married ¹	17,525	32.6	28,241	33.2	25,063	35.8
Single ²	33,241	61.9	52,578	61.9	41,105	58.8
Other ³	2,925	5.4	4,169	4.9	3,752	5.4

– Represents zero.

¹ Includes persons in common law marriage.

² Includes persons who were engaged and not yet married.

³ Includes persons who were divorced, separated, widowed, or of unknown marital status.

Source: U.S. Department of State.

Table 5.

Refugee Arrivals by State of Residence: FY 2015 to 2017
(Ranked by 2017 state of residence)

State of residence	2017		2016		2015	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	53,691	100.0	84,988	100.0	69,920	100.0
California	5,160	9.6	7,909	9.3	5,718	8.2
Texas	4,765	8.9	7,802	9.2	7,479	10.7
New York	3,098	5.8	5,026	5.9	4,052	5.8
Washington	2,920	5.4	3,230	3.8	2,621	3.7
Ohio	2,867	5.3	4,194	4.9	2,989	4.3
Michigan	2,536	4.7	4,258	5.0	3,012	4.3
Arizona	2,249	4.2	4,107	4.8	3,133	4.5
Pennsylvania	2,147	4.0	3,219	3.8	2,764	4.0
North Carolina	1,916	3.6	3,342	3.9	2,475	3.5
Georgia	1,869	3.5	3,017	3.5	2,889	4.1
Other	24,164	45.0	38,884	45.8	32,788	46.9

Source: U.S. Department of State.

ASYLEES

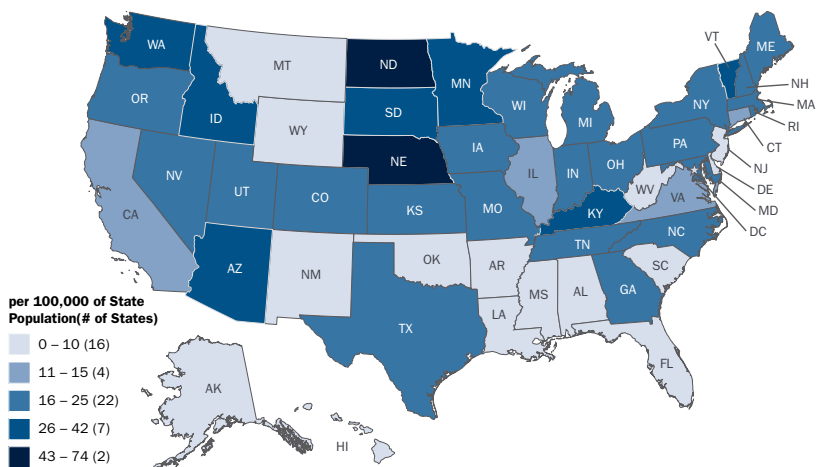
Filing of Claims

Generally, any foreign national present in the United States or arriving at a POE may seek asylum regardless of immigration status. Those seeking asylum must apply within one year from the date of last arrival or establish that an exception applies based on changed or extraordinary circumstances. Principal applicants obtain asylum in one of two ways: affirmatively through a USCIS asylum officer or defensively in removal proceedings before an immigration judge of DOJ’s Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR). An individual applies for asylum by filing Form I-589, *Application for Asylum and for Withholding of Removal*.

Spouses and unmarried children under the age of 21¹⁵ who are listed on the principal’s asylum application but not included in the principal’s grant of asylum may obtain derivative asylum status. A principal asylee may petition for follow-to-join benefits for qualifying derivatives up to two years after he or she was granted asylum, as long as the relationship between principal spouse and/or child existed on the date the principal was granted asylum.¹⁶ The principal asylee must file a Form I-730 for each qualifying family member, who may be located abroad or in the United States. Once an I-730 is approved for an individual located abroad, there are no time constraints placed upon the derivative relative’s travel to the United States, as long as (1) the principal’s status has not been revoked; (2) the relationship of the derivative to the principal is unchanged; and, (3) in the case of a child, the child remains unmarried.

Figure 3.

Per Capita Refugee Resettlement by State of Residence: FY 2017



Source: U.S. Department of State and U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division.

73 within 10 years.¹⁴ For comparison, non-refugee immigrants who obtained LPR status between 2000 and 2010 had 6- and 10-year naturalization rates of 29 and 49 percent, respectively.

¹⁴ The data were restricted to immigrants who were 18 years of age and older when LPR status was obtained. More recent cohorts, with less time spent in LPR status, tend to have lower cumulative naturalization rates.

¹⁵ See reference to Child Status Protection Act, n. 11, *supra*.

¹⁶ In practice, the vast majority of derivative asylum status beneficiaries receive follow-to-join benefits.

Adjudication of Claims

The USCIS Asylum Division adjudicates claims and may grant asylum directly through the affirmative asylum process. During interviews, asylum officers determine if the applicant meets the definition of a refugee, is credible, is not barred from obtaining asylum, and warrants a grant of asylum as a matter of discretion. Individuals may be barred for previously committing certain crimes, posing a national security threat, engaging in the persecution of others, or firmly resettling in another country before coming to the United States.

If applicants with a valid immigration status (e.g., a foreign student) fail to establish eligibility for asylum, USCIS denies the application, and the applicant remains in his or her valid status. If applicants are not in a valid status and are found ineligible for asylum, USCIS places these applicants in removal proceedings before an EOIR immigration judge, where the application is considered anew.

Individuals who have not previously filed for asylum may apply defensively after being placed in removal proceedings by immigration enforcement officials because they are illegally present, are in violation of their status when apprehended, or were apprehended while attempting to illegally enter the United States without proper documentation. Defensive applicants file for asylum directly with EOIR. During the proceedings, an immigration judge may grant asylum or deny the asylum application and issue a removal order. Applicants may appeal a denial to the Board of Immigration Appeals and, if unsuccessful there, may seek further review by a U.S. Court of Appeals, and finally the Supreme Court.

Asylum follow-to-join beneficiaries are not required to demonstrate a persecution claim because their status is derived from the principal asylee. Beneficiaries in the United States at the time of application are granted derivative asylum immediately upon the approval of their I-730 petitions. Beneficiaries abroad at the time of application are granted derivative asylum when admitted into the United States at a POE.

Lawful Permanent Residence and Citizenship

One year after being granted asylum, asylees are eligible to apply for LPR status along with qualifying family members who meet the eligibility criteria. Asylees may apply for naturalization five years after their final grant of asylum, provided they applied for and were granted LPR status.¹⁷

¹⁷ Asylees may count a maximum of one year of their time in asylum status toward the required five years of permanent residence for naturalization eligibility purposes.

DATA

The affirmative asylee data presented in this report were obtained from the Refugee, Asylum, and Parole System (RAPS) of USCIS. Defensive asylee data were obtained from EOIR. Follow-to-join asylum derivative data for people residing outside the United States at the time of their admission were obtained from the Case and Activity Management for International Operations (CAMINO) system of USCIS and the Consular Consolidated Database (CCD) of DOS. These data reflect travel documents issued, not admissions. Follow-to-join data for people residing within the United States at the time of the approval of their I-730 petition were obtained from the Computer-Linked Application Information Management System (CLAIMS) of USCIS.

TRENDS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF ASYLEES

Asylum Filings

USCIS received an estimated 139,801 affirmative asylum applications¹⁸ in 2017, 21 percent more than the year before and close to a 150 percent increase since 2014 (Table 6a). This is the eighth consecutive annual increase and the highest level since 1995, when USCIS received close to 144,000 applications. Applications from Venezuelans increased thirteen fold since 2014 to reach 27,579 in 2017.¹⁹

The number of affirmative asylum applications by individuals from Central America's Northern Triangle Countries (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras) continues to rise. In the past five years, applications rose from 3,523 in 2012 to 31,066 in 2017, an almost 800 percent increase. Unaccompanied children filed the majority of affirmative asylum applications from the Northern Triangle Countries, making up 66 percent of the applications in 2015 and 56 percent in both 2016 and 2017.

¹⁸ These include principal applicants only. There were an additional 69,894 dependents.

¹⁹ Venezuelan applications exceeded Chinese applications by 64 percent; with the exceptions of 2004 and 2005, China has been the top country of origin for asylum seekers in the United States for each of the last 17 years.

Table 6a.

Affirmative Asylum Cases Filed with USCIS by Country of Nationality: FY 2015 to 2017
(Ranked by 2017 country of nationality)

Country	2017		2016		2015	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	139,801	100.0	115,433	100.0	83,032	100.0
Venezuela	27,579	19.7	14,792	12.8	5,664	6.8
China, People's Republic	16,792	12.0	16,508	14.3	13,877	16.7
Guatemala	12,175	8.7	10,720	9.3	8,277	10.0
Mexico	11,941	8.5	14,660	12.7	8,820	10.6
El Salvador	11,913	8.5	9,444	8.2	7,133	8.6
Honduras	6,978	5.0	5,698	4.9	5,147	6.2
India	4,057	2.9	3,230	2.8	2,276	2.7
Haiti	3,860	2.8	3,004	2.6	1,918	2.3
Colombia	2,650	1.9	1,395	1.2	820	1.0
Russia	2,649	1.9	1,909	1.7	1,447	1.7
All other countries, including unknown	39,207	28.0	34,073	29.5	27,653	33.3

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

The number of pending affirmative applications continued to increase, from 109,000 cases at the end of 2015 to almost 280,500 at the end of 2017, the highest number since 2004 and a 40 percent increase from just a year ago. More than three quarters (78 percent) of the applications pending at the end of 2017 were filed within the last two years while another 20 percent were filed between 2013 and 2015.²⁰

Total number of defensive asylum applications filed with EOIR also increased, from 65,747 applications in 2015 to 72,605 in 2016 and 119,303 in 2017. Similar to last year, the largest numbers of applications lodged with the courts were from citizens of the Northern Triangle Countries (76,328) and Mexico (16,652) (Table 6b).

²⁰ See Supplemental Table: Asylum Workload by Top Twenty Nationalities: 2017, available in the OIS reading room (<https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/readingroom>) for more details.

Table 6b.

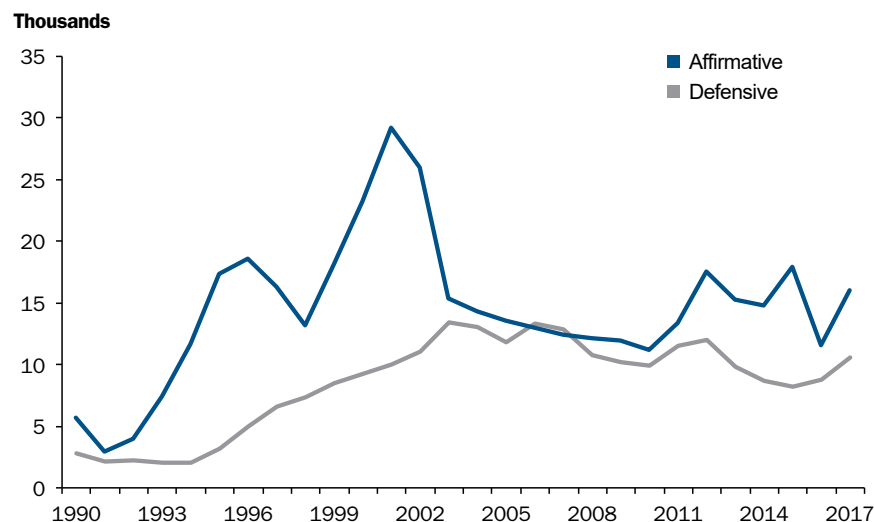
Defensive Asylum Cases EOIR Received by Country of Nationality: FY 2015 to 2017

(Ranked by 2017 country of nationality)

Country	2017		2016		2015	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	119,303	100.0	72,605	100.0	65,747	100.0
El Salvador	35,347	29.6	18,928	26.1	11,781	17.9
Guatemala	21,223	17.8	12,240	16.9	8,380	12.7
Honduras	19,758	16.6	11,495	15.8	9,345	14.2
Mexico	16,652	14.0	14,837	20.4	13,750	20.9
Haiti	3,849	3.2	424	0.6	477	0.7
India	3,533	3.0	2,027	2.8	2,108	3.2
China, People's Republic	2,814	2.4	1,979	2.7	4,709	7.2
Ecuador	2,029	1.7	1,183	1.6	3,171	4.8
Brazil	1,246	1.0	446	0.6	240	0.4
Romania	989	0.8	422	0.6	251	0.4
All other countries, including unknown	11,863	9.9	8,624	11.9	11,535	17.5

Source: U.S. Department of Justice.

Figure 4.
Annual Grants of Affirmative and Defensive Asylum: FY 1990 to 2017



Data exclude follow-to-join asylees.
U.S. Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Department of Justice.

Asylum Grants

The total number of persons granted asylum in the United States increased 31 percent from 20,340 in 2016 to 26,568 in 2017. The number of persons granted asylum affirmatively through USCIS increased by 39 percent while the number of persons granted asylum defensively by an immigration judge increased by 20 percent (Figure 4).

Country of Nationality

In 2017, the three leading countries of nationality of persons granted either affirmative or defensive asylum were China (21 percent), El Salvador (13 percent), and Guatemala (11 percent) (Table 7). Nationals of these countries accounted for 45 percent of all persons granted asylum. The same countries were also the three leading countries of nationality for affirmative asylum grants, accounting for 43 percent of all persons granted affirmative asylum (Table 8).

The number of persons granted asylum defensively by an EOIR immigration judge increased from 8,758 in 2016 to 10,523 in 2017. EOIR denied an additional 17,139 cases in 2017. The leading countries of nationality for persons granted defensive asylum were China (26 percent), El Salvador (13 percent), and Guatemala and Honduras (8.9 percent each) (Table 9). Forty-eight percent of those granted asylum defensively in 2017 were nationals of these countries.

The leading countries of nationality for follow-to-join asylees authorized for travel to the United States in 2017 were China (49 percent), India (11 percent), and Haiti (7.9 percent) (Table 10). Nationals of these three countries accounted for two thirds of all follow-to-join derivative relatives issued travel documents prior to their admission into the United States. Additionally, 3,735 individuals were approved for derivative asylum status while residing in the United States.

Age, Sex, and Marital Status

In 2017, 58 percent of persons granted affirmative asylum were between the ages of 18 and 44 (Table 11). Like refugees, affirmative asylees are, on average, younger than the native-born U.S. population: the median age of persons granted affirmative asylum in 2017 was 24 years, compared to 37 for

Table 7.**Individuals Granted Asylum Affirmatively or Defensively by Country of Nationality: FY 2015 to 2017**

(Ranked by 2017 country of nationality)

Country	2017		2016		2015	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	26,568	100.0	20,340	100.0	26,011	100.0
China, People's Republic	5,548	20.9	4,476	22.0	6,155	23.7
El Salvador	3,471	13.1	2,148	10.6	2,164	8.3
Guatemala	2,954	11.1	1,916	9.4	2,059	7.9
Honduras	2,048	7.7	1,482	7.3	1,407	5.4
Egypt	1,109	4.2	799	3.9	1,588	6.1
Mexico	1,048	3.9	919	4.5	873	3.4
India	700	2.6	483	2.4	493	1.9
Syria	673	2.5	654	3.2	868	3.3
Venezuela	548	2.1	344	1.7	495	1.9
Eritrea	519	2.0	310	1.5	293	1.1
All other countries, including unknown	7,950	29.9	6,809	33.5	9,616	37.0

Note: Data exclude follow-to-join asylees.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Department of Justice.

Table 8.**Individuals Granted Asylum Affirmatively by Country of Nationality: FY 2015 to 2017**

(Ranked by 2017 country of nationality)

Country	2017		2016		2015	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	16,045	100.0	11,582	100.0	17,818	100.0
China, People's Republic	2,802	17.5	1,373	11.9	2,544	14.3
El Salvador	2,142	13.3	1,381	11.9	1,859	10.4
Guatemala	2,019	12.6	1,282	11.1	1,686	9.5
Honduras	1,115	6.9	857	7.4	1,098	6.2
Egypt	968	6.0	650	5.6	1,450	8.1
Syria	536	3.3	579	5.0	767	4.3
Iraq	457	2.8	550	4.7	652	3.7
Mexico	490	3.1	454	3.9	669	3.8
Ethiopia	336	2.1	374	3.2	678	3.8
Iran	307	1.9	371	3.2	628	3.5
All other countries, including unknown	4,873	30.4	3,711	32.0	5,787	32.5

Note: Data exclude follow-to-join asylees.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Table 9.**Individuals Granted Asylum Defensively by Country of Nationality: FY 2015 to 2017**

(Ranked by 2017 country of nationality)

Country	2017		2016		2015	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	10,523	100.0	8,758	100.0	8,193	100.0
China, People's Republic	2,746	26.1	3,103	35.4	3,611	44.1
El Salvador	1,329	12.6	767	8.8	305	3.7
Guatemala	935	8.9	634	7.2	373	4.6
Honduras	933	8.9	625	7.1	309	3.8
Mexico	558	5.3	465	5.3	204	2.5
India	464	4.4	310	3.5	299	3.6
Nepal	291	2.8	265	3.0	256	3.1
Eritrea	238	2.3	152	1.7	138	1.7
Cameroon	218	2.1	115	1.3	92	1.1
Ethiopia	153	1.5	183	2.1	252	3.1
All other countries, including unknown	2,658	25.3	2,139	24.4	2,354	28.7

Note: Data exclude follow-to-join asylees.

Source: U.S. Department of Justice.

the native-born population. Fifty-two percent were male, and 48 percent of adults were married. The median age of follow-to-join beneficiaries was 18 years (Table 12). Data on marital status are not available for this group.

State of Residence

In 2017, the leading states of residence for individuals granted asylum affirmatively were California (46 percent) and New York (9.4 percent) (Table 13). More than half (55 percent) of individuals granted affirmative asylum in 2017 resided in these two states. Per capita, the leading areas include California, Hawaii, and the District of Columbia, with 19, 12, and 10 recipients per 100,000 residents, respectively.

State of residence data are not available for defensive or follow-to-join asylees.

Naturalization of Asylees

Ninety-two percent of those granted affirmative asylum between 2000 and 2015 gained LPR status by the end of 2017. Similar to refugees, asylees have some of the highest naturalization rates of all immigrants. Of the adults granted asylum (affirmative and defensive) who gained LPR status between 2000 and 2010, 58 percent naturalized within six years and 76 percent within ten years.²¹

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit the Office of Immigration Statistics Web page at <http://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics>.

²¹ The data were restricted to individuals who were 18 years of age and older when LPR status was obtained. More recent cohorts, with less time spent in LPR status, tend to have lower cumulative naturalization rates.

Table 10.

**Follow-to-join Asylee Travel Documents Issued by Country of Nationality:
FY 2015 to 2017**

(Ranked by 2017 country of nationality)

Country	2017		2016		2015	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	3,831	100	5,653	100	7,456	100
China, People's Republic	1,895	49.5	3,207	56.7	3,278	44.0
India	375	9.8	292	5.2	287	3.8
Haiti	306	8.0	326	5.8	381	5.1
Guatemala	242	6.3	230	4.1	204	2.7
El Salvador	209	5.5	138	2.4	101	1.4
Eritrea	72	1.9	87	1.5	63	0.8
Somalia	68	1.8	34	0.6	35	0.5
Gambia	62	1.6	122	2.2	98	1.3
Guinea	62	1.6	61	1.1	76	1.0
Uganda	55	1.4	21	0.4	64	0.9
Kenya	50	1.3	90	1.6	97	1.3
All other countries, including unknown	435	11.4	1,045	18.5	2,772	37.2

Source: U.S. Department of State and U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Table 11.

**Individuals Granted Asylum Affirmatively by Age, Sex, and Marital Status:
FY 2015 to 2017**

Characteristic	2017		2016		2015	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
AGE						
Total	16,045	100.0	11,582	100.0	17,818	100.0
0 to 17 years	5,004	31.2	3,645	31.5	5,264	29.5
18 to 24 years	3,130	19.5	2,054	17.7	3,206	18.0
25 to 34 years	3,488	21.7	2,708	23.4	4,489	25.2
35 to 44 years	2,664	16.6	1,853	16.0	3,026	17.0
45 to 54 years	1,230	7.7	864	7.5	1,223	6.9
55 to 64 years	373	2.3	294	2.5	390	2.2
65 years and over	156	1.0	164	1.4	220	1.2
SEX						
Total	16,045	100.0	11,582	100.0	17,818	100.0
Female	7,636	47.6	5,377	46.4	8,438	47.4
Male	8,409	52.4	6,205	53.6	9,380	52.6
MARITAL STATUS						
Total	16,045	100.0	11,582	100.0	17,818	100.0
Married	10,168	63.4	7,326	63.3	10,974	61.6
Single	5,310	33.1	3,863	33.3	6,149	34.5
Other*	567	3.5	393	3.4	695	3.9

* Includes persons who were divorced, separated, widowed, or of unknown marital status.

Note: Data exclude follow-to-join asylees.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Table 12.**Follow-to-join Asylee Travel Documents Issued by Age and Sex: FY 2015 to 2017**

AGE	2017		2016		2015	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	3,831	100.0	5,653	100.0	7,456	100.0
0 to 17 years	1,890	49.3	2,735	48.4	3,550	47.6
18 to 24 years	798	20.8	1,019	18.0	1,333	17.9
25 to 34 years	349	9.1	560	9.9	851	11.4
35 to 44 years	413	10.8	721	12.8	935	12.5
45 to 54 years	287	7.5	466	8.2	592	7.9
55 to 64 years	85	2.2	131	2.3	169	2.3
65 years and over	9	0.2	21	0.4	26	0.3
SEX						
Total	3,831	100.0	5,653	100.0	7,456	100.0
Female	1,951	50.9	2,934	51.9	3,981	53.4
Male	1,743	45.5	2,557	45.2	3,331	44.7
Unknown	137	3.6	162	2.9	144	1.9

Source: U.S. Department of State and U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Table 13.**Individuals Granted Asylum Affirmatively by State of Residence: FY 2015 to 2017**

(Ranked by 2017 state of residence)

State of residence	2017		2016		2015	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	16,045	100.0	11,582	100.0	17,818	100.0
California	7,344	45.8	5,110	44.1	7,535	42.3
New York	1,510	9.4	1,267	10.9	2,231	12.5
New Jersey	791	4.9	644	5.6	850	4.8
Texas	612	3.8	480	4.1	733	4.1
Florida	580	3.6	885	7.6	1,463	8.2
Virginia	552	3.4	464	4.0	720	4.0
Tennessee	451	2.8	57	0.5	73	0.4
Illinois	420	2.6	189	1.6	279	1.6
Louisiana	331	2.1	149	1.3	38	0.2
Washington	326	2.0	219	1.9	371	2.1
Other	3,128	19.5	2,118	18.3	3,525	19.8

Note: Data exclude follow-to-join asylees.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.