

Refugees and Asylees: 2006

KELLY JEFFERYS

Each year thousands of persons who fear or face persecution in their country of origin seek asylum or refugee status in the United States. Those living outside the United States may be referred for refugee status, and if approved, enter the United States as refugees. Individuals already living in the United States or appearing at a U.S. port of entry may apply for asylum. This Office of Immigration Statistics *Annual Flow Report* provides information on the number of persons admitted to the United States as refugees or granted asylum in the United States in 2006¹.

In 2006, 41,150 persons were admitted to the United States as refugees (see Figure 1). The leading countries of origin² for refugees were Somalia, Russia, and Cuba. Also in 2006, 26,113 individuals were granted asylum, including 12,873 who were granted asylum affirmatively through an application process and 13,240 who were granted asylum defensively through an immigration judge. The leading countries of origin for asylum cases were China, Haiti, and Colombia.

DEFINING “REFUGEE”

A refugee is an alien outside the United States who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her country of origin 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. This definition of refugee is set forth in §101(a)(42) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), as amended by the Refugee Act of 1980 and generally conforms to the international definition of refugee contained in the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. In addition, the INA allows the President to designate certain nationalities that may be processed for refugee status within their homelands. In 2006, the designated areas included Cuba, Vietnam, and the countries of the former Soviet Union.

History of Refugee Legislation

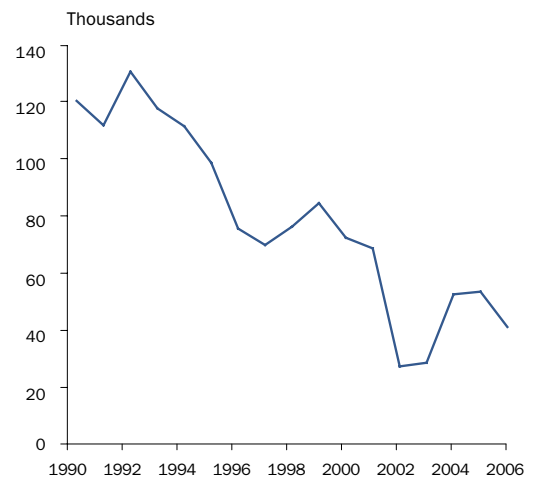
The first refugee legislation in the United States was the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, which brought 400,000 Eastern Europeans to the United States. Other ad hoc refugee related legislation followed, including the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 and the Fair Share Refugee Act of

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

² Refers to country of nationality or the country credited with the admission.

Figure 1.

Refugee Admissions to the United States: 1990 to 2006



Source: U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM).

Table 1.

Refugee Admissions Ceilings: 2004 to 2006

Region	Ceiling		
	2006	2005	2004
Total	70,000	70,000	70,000
Africa	20,000	20,000	30,000
East Asia	15,000	13,000	8,500
Europe/Central Asia	15,000	9,500	13,000
Latin America/Caribbean	5,000	5,000	3,500
Near East/South Asia	5,000	2,500	3,000
Unallocated Reserve	10,000	20,000	12,000

Source: U.S. Department of State, *Proposed Refugee Admissions for FY 2006 – Report to Congress*.



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1960. The United States began use of the Attorney General's parole authority to bring refugees into the country in 1956, culminating in the parole of several hundred thousand Indochinese as part of the Indochinese Refugee Act of 1977.

The 1967 United Nations Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (which the United States signed in 1968) prohibited any nation from returning a refugee to a country where his or her life or freedom would be threatened. Congress enacted legislation to bring U.S. law into compliance with the obligations it assumed under the Protocol in the form of the Refugee Act of 1980, which established a geographically and politically neutral adjudication standard for refugee status. The Refugee Act also made a distinction between refugee and asylee status and allowed certain refugees to be processed while in their countries of origin.

Admission Ceilings

Before the beginning of each fiscal year, the President consults with Congress to establish a worldwide refugee admissions ceiling for that year and to set allocations for each of the six geographic regions. In the case of an unforeseen emergency, the total ceiling and regional sub-ceilings may be adjusted. In 2006, the total ceiling for refugee admissions was 70,000. This ceiling was unchanged from 2005 and 2004 (see Table 1).

Eligibility Requirements

In order to qualify for refugee status, an applicant must meet all of the following criteria: be a refugee as set forth in section 101(a)(42) of the INA; be of special humanitarian concern to the United States; be admissible under the INA; and not be firmly resettled in any foreign country. Spouses and minor children of qualifying refugees may derive status and also enter the United States as refugees, either accompanying or following to join the principal refugee. Eligibility for refugee status is determined on a case-by-case basis. Applicants with criminal records or serious health problems may be inadmissible to the United States even if USCIS has determined them to be a refugee. The United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) also has a priority system for determining access to the program, including individual referrals (priority one), groups of special humanitarian concern (priority two), and family reunification cases (priority three).

Application Process

Applicants to the USRAP are usually referred by officials from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or a U.S. Embassy or Consulate. Some applicants may apply to the USRAP directly if they are of certain nationalities designated as being of special humanitarian concern to the United States. Once an

Table 2.

Refugee Arrivals by Category of Admission: Fiscal Years 2004 to 2006

Category of admission	2006		2005		2004	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	41,150	100.0	53,738	100.0	52,837	100.0
Principal Applicant	14,961	36.4	18,232	33.9	17,821	33.7
Dependents	26,189	63.6	35,506	66.1	35,016	66.3
Spouse	6,055	14.7	8,511	15.8	7,007	13.3
Parent	70	0.2	205	0.4	132	0.3
Child	18,711	45.5	24,967	46.5	25,668	48.6
Sibling	570	1.4	797	1.5	1,029	1.9
Other	783	1.9	1,026	1.9	1,180	2.2

Source: U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), Office of Admissions, Refugee Processing Center (RPC).

Table 3.

Refugee Arrivals by Country of Origin: Fiscal Years 2004 to 2006

(Ranked by 2006 Country of Origin)

Country	2006		2005		2004	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	41,150	100.0	53,738	100.0	52,837	100.0
Somalia	10,357	25.2	10,405	19.4	13,331	25.2
Russia	6,003	14.6	5,982	11.1	1,446	2.7
Cuba	3,143	7.6	6,360	11.8	2,980	5.6
Vietnam	3,039	7.4	2,009	3.7	974	1.8
Iran	2,792	6.8	1,856	3.5	1,786	3.4
Ukraine	2,483	6.0	2,889	5.4	3,482	6.6
Liberia	2,402	5.8	4,289	8.0	7,140	13.5
Sudan	1,848	4.5	2,205	4.1	3,500	6.6
Burma	1,612	3.9	1,447	2.7	1,056	2.0
Ethiopia	1,271	3.1	1,663	3.1	2,689	5.1
All other countries, including unknown	6,200	15.1	14,633	27.2	14,453	27.4

Source: U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), Office of Admissions, Refugee Processing Center (RPC).

Table 4.

Refugee Arrivals by Age, Gender, and Marital Status: Fiscal Years 2004 to 2006

Age	2006		2005		2004	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	41,150	100.0	53,738	100.0	52,837	100.0
0 to 17 years	15,430	37.5	21,838	40.6	22,329	42.3
18 to 24 years	8,057	19.6	9,141	17.0	9,704	18.4
25 to 34 years	6,365	15.5	8,138	15.1	7,896	14.9
35 to 44 years	4,942	12.0	6,460	12.0	5,399	10.2
45 to 54 years	3,059	7.4	3,821	7.1	3,270	6.2
55 to 64 years	1,782	4.3	2,237	4.2	2,306	4.4
65 years and over	1,515	3.7	2,103	3.9	1,933	3.7
Gender						
Male	21,188	51.5	27,484	51.1	26,733	50.6
Female	19,962	48.5	26,254	48.9	26,104	49.4
Marital status						
Married	14,457	35.1	19,557	36.4	16,843	31.9
Single	24,555	59.7	31,590	58.8	33,317	63.1
Other	2,138	5.2	2,591	4.8	2,677	5.1

Source: U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), Office of Admissions, Refugee Processing Center (RPC).

Table 5.

Refugee Arrivals by State of Residence: Fiscal Years 2004 to 2006

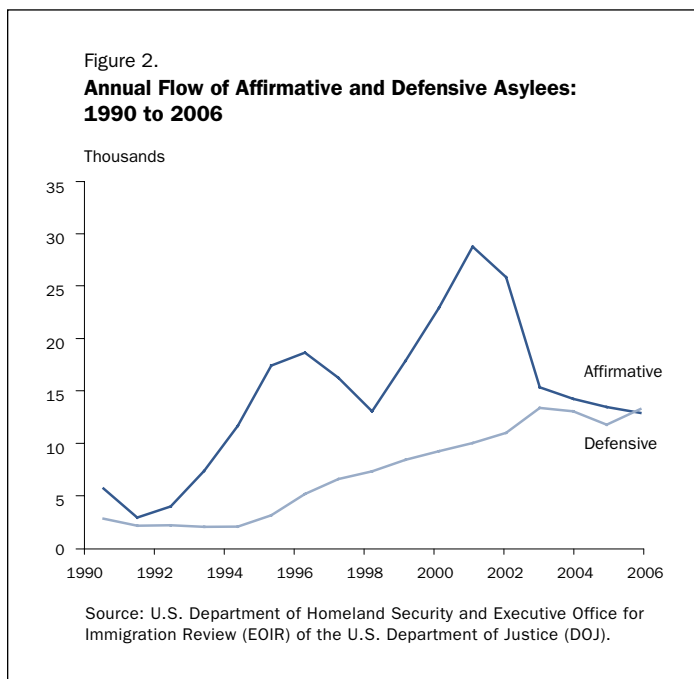
(Ranked by 2006 State of Residence)

State	2006		2005		2004	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	41,150	100.0	53,738	100.0	52,837	100.0
California	5,163	12.5	7,505	14.0	6,755	12.8
Minnesota	4,578	11.1	6,357	11.8	5,931	11.2
Texas	2,764	6.7	3,243	6.0	3,382	6.4
Florida	2,582	6.3	4,799	8.9	2,955	5.6
Washington	2,458	6.0	2,841	5.3	3,016	5.7
New York	2,303	5.6	2,561	4.8	3,046	5.8
Ohio	1,943	4.7	1,560	2.9	1,434	2.7
Arizona	1,649	4.0	1,868	3.5	1,978	3.7
Georgia	1,442	3.5	1,870	3.5	2,150	4.1
Pennsylvania	1,280	3.1	1,521	2.8	1,524	2.9
Other	14,988	36.4	19,613	36.5	20,666	39.1

Source: U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM), Office of Admissions, Refugee Processing Center (RPC).

makes arrangements for his/her travel to the United States. After arrival, refugees are not permitted to travel outside the country unless they obtain permission to return before traveling.

Spouses and unmarried children under the age of 21 may obtain derivative refugee status from the principal applicant. An “accompanying derivative” is a spouse or child who enters with the applicant or within four months after admission. A “following-to-join derivative” is a spouse or child who joins the principal applicant more than four months after his/her admission to the United States. It is possible to apply for derivative refugee benefits up to two years after the principal refugee is admitted to the United States using Form I-730, *Refugee/Asylee Relative Petition*, as long as the relationship between the principal and spouse and/or child existed when the application was filed and continues to exist.



individual has been referred, an Overseas Processing Entity, working on behalf of the U.S. Department of State, conducts a pre-screening interview and completes the required documents for submission to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Once all application materials have been submitted and security checks have been completed, an immigration officer interviews the applicant to determine whether he/she meets the definition of a refugee. Individuals who are found eligible must satisfy medical criteria and be assigned to a sponsor. A “sponsor” is a resettlement agency that is responsible for meeting the refugee at the airport, making housing arrangements, and preparing a resettlement plan. If an applicant is approved for relocation, he/she is assigned a refugee admission number, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM)

Authorization for Employment

Refugees (including spouses and children over the age of 14) are authorized to work in the United States. The refugee submits Form I-765, *Application for Employment Authorization*, at the time of entry in the U.S. in order to obtain an *Employment Authorization Document (I-766)*. One year after being admitted to the United States, refugees may apply for legal permanent resident status.

DATA

The refugee data presented in this flow report were derived from data on refugee admissions that are maintained in the Worldwide Refugee Admissions Processing System (WRAPS) of the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) of the U.S. Department of State. Overseas Processing Entities and immigration workers in the United States enter data into the system.

RESULTS

Trends in Admission

The total number of refugees admitted to the United States decreased 23 percent from 53,738 in 2005 to 41,150 in 2006. The annual average number of refugee arrivals declined from approximately 100,000 during the 1990s to 50,000 during the 2000 to 2006 period. This decline is partly due to changes in security procedures after 9/11 and admission requirements resulting from the USA Patriot Act of 2001 and the Real ID Act of 2005.

Category of Admission

Of the 41,150 refugees admitted to the United States in 2006, 14,961 (36 percent) were principal applicants (see Table 2). Dependent children and spouses represented 46 percent and 15 percent, respectively, of refugee admissions. Three additional classes including parents, siblings, and other comprised the remaining 3 percent.

Country of Origin

In 2006, the leading countries of origin for refugees were Somalia (25 percent), Russia (15 percent), and Cuba (7.6 percent)(see

Table 3). Forty seven percent of refugees were from these three countries.

Age, Gender, and Marital Status

The majority of refugees (57 percent) admitted to the United States in 2006 were under 25 years of age, with 38 percent under age 18 (see Table 4). A slight majority of refugees were male (52 percent). More than half of all refugees admitted in 2006 (60 percent) were single, 35 percent were married, and 5 percent fell into other or unknown marital status categories.

State of Residence

The largest percentages of refugees admitted to the United States in 2006 settled in California (13 percent) and Minnesota (11 percent) (see Table 5). Other major refugee receiving states included Texas (6.7 percent), Florida (6.3 percent), Washington (6.0 percent), and New York (5.6 percent). Nearly one-half of all refugees settled in one of these six states.

DEFINING “ASYLEE”

An “asylee” must meet the definition of refugee set forth in §101(a)(42) of the INA as summarized above; however, whereas a refugee is located outside the United States at the time of application, an asylee is located in the United States or at a port of entry. U.S. asylum policy is governed by the Refugee Act of 1980. The Refugee Act established a statutory process for granting asylum consistent with the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol.

Filing of Claims

Generally, any alien present in the United States or at a port of entry may apply for asylum regardless of his or her immigration status. Asylum may be obtained in two ways: affirmatively through an asylum officer of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) of the Department of Homeland Security or defensively with an immigration judge of the Executive Office of Immigration Review (EOIR) of the Department of Justice as part of a removal hearing. In order to obtain asylum, the alien must apply within one year from the date of last arrival or establish that an exception applies based on changed or extraordinary circumstances. An alien applies affirmatively for asylum in the United States by filing form I-589, *Application for Asylum and for Withholding of Removal* with USCIS.

Adjudication of Claims

The Asylum Officer Corps (AOC) within USCIS is responsible for the adjudication of asylum claims filed with the agency. During the interview, an Asylum Officer determines whether the applicant meets the definition of a refugee and whether any bars to obtaining asylum apply. Individuals may be barred from obtaining

Table 6.

All Asylees by Country of Origin: 2004 to 2006

(Ranked by 2006 Country of Origin)

Country	2006		2005		2004	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	26,113	100.0	25,160	100.0	27,218	100.0
China	5,568	21.3	5,218	20.7	4,320	15.9
Haiti	3,001	11.5	2,940	11.7	2,320	8.5
Colombia	2,964	11.4	3,361	13.4	4,368	16.1
Venezuela	1,359	5.2	1,108	4.4	1,257	4.6
Ethiopia	771	3.0	727	2.9	1,011	3.7
Indonesia	743	2.8	469	1.9	530	1.9
Guatemala	642	2.5	386	1.5	381	1.4
El Salvador	600	2.3	242	1.0	160	0.6
Cameroon	587	2.2	645	2.6	866	3.2
Albania	548	2.1	695	2.8	900	3.3
All other countries, including unknown	9,330	35.7	9,369	37.2	11,105	40.8

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security and Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) of the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ).

Table 7.

Affirmative Asylees by Country of Origin: 2004 to 2006

(Ranked by 2006 Country of Origin)

Country	2006		2005		2004	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	12,873	100.0	13,423	100.0	14,203	100.0
Haiti	2,431	18.9	2,287	17.0	1,785	12.6
Colombia	2,189	17.0	2,211	16.5	2,896	20.4
China	1,508	11.7	2,210	16.5	906	6.4
Venezuela	1,085	8.4	955	7.1	1,198	8.4
El Salvador	505	3.9	178	1.3	118	0.8
Guatemala	485	3.8	246	1.8	204	1.4
Ethiopia	429	3.3	463	3.5	751	5.3
Indonesia	429	3.3	95	0.7	104	0.7
Cameroon	229	1.8	382	2.8	593	4.2
Russia	228	1.8	235	1.8	232	1.6
All other countries, including unknown	3,355	26.1	4,161	31.0	5,416	38.1

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

asylum for committing certain crimes, posing a national security threat, or firmly resettling in another country before coming to the United States.

Individuals granted asylum are authorized to work in the United States. In addition, an asylee is entitled to benefits including employment assistance, a social security card, and social services. If an applicant in valid status (e.g. foreign student) fails to establish eligibility for asylum before USCIS, the application will be denied by USCIS and the applicant will remain in valid status. If the applicant is not in valid status and USCIS finds the applicant ineligible for asylum, USCIS places the applicant in removal proceedings before the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) of the Department of Justice. Aliens may also be placed directly in removal proceedings because they are undocumented, in violation

Table 8.**Defensive Asylees by Country of Origin: 2004 to 2006**

(Ranked by 2006 Country of Origin)

Country	2006		2005		2004	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	13,240	100.0	11,737	100.0	13,015	100.0
China, People's Republic	4,060	30.7	3,008	25.6	3,414	26.2
Colombia	775	5.9	1,150	9.8	1,472	11.3
Haiti	570	4.3	653	5.6	535	4.1
Albania	506	3.8	608	5.2	724	5.6
India	450	3.4	310	2.6	452	3.5
Cameroon	358	2.7	263	2.2	273	2.1
Guinea	356	2.7	257	2.2	258	2.0
Ethiopia	342	2.6	264	2.3	260	2.0
Indonesia	314	2.4	374	3.2	426	3.3
Armenia	286	2.2	268	2.3	305	2.3
All other countries, including unknown	5,223	39.4	4,582	39.0	4,896	37.6

Source: Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) of the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ).

Table 9.**Affirmative Asylees by Age, Gender, and Marital Status: 2004 to 2006**

Age	2006		2005		2004	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	12,873	100.0	13,423	100.0	14,203	100.0
0 to 17 years	1,970	15.3	2,041	15.2	2,102	14.8
18 to 24 years	1,709	13.3	1,755	13.1	2,002	14.1
25 to 34 years	3,734	29.0	3,906	29.1	4,317	30.4
35 to 44 years	3,309	25.7	3,676	27.4	3,460	24.4
45 to 54 years	1,560	12.1	1,529	11.4	1,669	11.8
55 to 64 years	452	3.5	372	2.8	434	3.1
65 years and over	139	1.1	144	1.1	219	1.5
Gender						
Male	6,816	52.9	6,955	51.8	7,576	53.3
Female	6,057	47.1	6,468	48.2	6,627	46.7
Marital status						
Single	6,174	48.0	6,020	44.8	6,513	45.9
Married	6,113	47.5	6,847	51.0	6,982	49.2
Other	578	4.5	544	4.1	702	4.9
Unknown	8	0.1	12	0.1	6	–

– Figure rounds to 0.0.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

of their status when apprehended, or caught trying to enter the United States without proper documentation. Cases referred to an immigration court are usually resolved within six months of the application date. The immigration judge may grant asylum or issue a denial and an order of removal. The applicant may appeal the denial to the Board of Immigration Appeals.

Coercive Population Control (CPC)

A special provision exists for adjudicating cases based on resistance to coercive population control (CPC) programs (e.g. forced abortions or involuntary sterilizations). Section 101(a)(42) of the INA specifically incorporates such resistance into the

definition of a refugee. Prior to 2005, there was an annual ceiling of 1,000 for persons who could be granted refugee or asylee status under this provision. Applicants beyond the 1,000 cap who were otherwise approved were given conditional grants of asylum. The Real ID Act of 2005 eliminated the annual cap on asylum approvals based solely on CPC, and conditional grants of asylum are no longer issued.

DATA

The affirmative asylee data presented in this flow report were derived from data on applications for asylum maintained in the Refugee, Asylum, and Parole System (RAPS) of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The defensive asylee data were obtained from the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) of the U.S. Department of Justice.

RESULTS**Trends in Admission**

The total number of persons granted asylum in the United States increased from 25,160 in 2005 to 26,113 in 2006. The number of persons who were granted asylum affirmatively through USCIS decreased from 13,423 in 2005 to 12,873 in 2006 (see Figure 2). Conversely, the number of persons granted asylum defensively through an Immigration Court (EOIR) increased 13 percent from 11,737 in 2005 to 13,240 in 2006.

Country of Origin

The leading countries of origin for persons granted asylum in 2006 were China (21 percent), Haiti (12 percent), Colombia (11 percent), and Venezuela (5.2 percent) (see Table 6). These countries accounted for the origin of nearly 50 percent of asylees.

The top countries of origin for affirmative asylees were Haiti (19 percent), Colombia (17 percent), and China (12 percent) (see Table 7). These three countries

accounted for the origin of nearly 50 percent of all affirmative asylees in 2006. Over 40 percent of defensive asylees were from China (31 percent), Colombia (5.9 percent), or Haiti (4.3 percent) (see Table 8).

Age, Gender, and Marital Status

Demographic information was available only for affirmative asylees. Of the 12,873 persons granted asylum affirmatively in 2006, 80 percent were between the ages of 18 and 54 (see Table 9). Fifteen percent were under 18 years of age, and individuals aged 55 or over accounted for less than 5 percent. In 2006, 53 percent of affirmative asylees were male. Forty eight percent were married and 48 percent were single.

State of Residence

The largest percentages of individuals granted asylum affirmatively were living in Florida (41 percent) and California (24 percent)(see Table 10). Sixty five percent of affirmative asylees were located in one of these two states. Other major receiving states included New York (10 percent), Maryland (4.1 percent), Washington (2.1 percent), Virginia (1.9 percent), and Georgia (1.5 percent).

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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

Table 10.

Affirmative Asylees by State of Residence: 2004 to 2006

(Ranked by 2006 State of Residence)

State	2006		2005		2004	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	12,873	100.0	13,423	100.0	14,203	100.0
Florida	5,329	41.4	5,014	37.4	5,291	37.3
California	3,020	23.5	2,623	19.5	2,583	18.2
New York	1,302	10.1	1,456	10.8	1,025	7.2
Maryland	524	4.1	840	6.3	1,224	8.6
Washington	269	2.1	211	1.6	245	1.7
Virginia	248	1.9	341	2.5	448	3.2
Georgia	191	1.5	358	2.7	185	1.3
Texas	168	1.3	211	1.6	195	1.4
Michigan	153	1.2	180	1.3	212	1.5
Massachusetts	149	1.2	204	1.5	288	2.0
Other	1,520	11.8	1,985	14.8	2,507	17.7

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.