

Refugees and Asylees: 2015

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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 or granted asylum in the United States in 2015.¹

A total of 69,920 persons² were admitted to the United States as refugees during 2015 (see Figure 1). The leading countries of nationality for refugees admitted during this period were Burma, Iraq, and Somalia. During 2015, 26,124 individuals were granted asylum,³ including 17,878 individuals who were granted asylum affirmatively by the Department of Homeland Security⁴ (DHS) and 8,246 individuals who were granted asylum defensively by the Department of Justice (see Figure 2). The leading countries of nationality for persons granted either affirmative or defensive asylum were China, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Travel documents were issued to 7,116 individuals who were approved for derivative asylum, allowing their admission to 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 nationality⁵ 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.⁶ Applicants for refugee status are outside the United States, whereas

⁵ Or, if an applicant is considered "stateless," his or her country of last habitual residence.

⁶ 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. The definition, as established in 1980, excludes those who have ordered, incited, assisted or otherwise participated in the persecution of others.

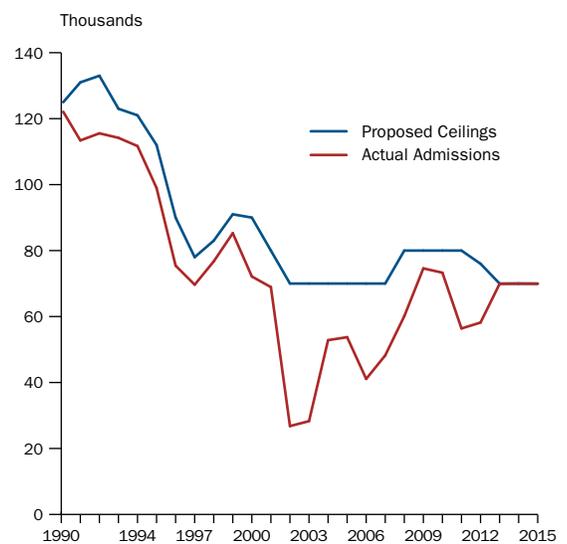
¹ In this report, years refer to fiscal years (October 1 to September 30).

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 have been fathered by a U.S. citizen), whereas the 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, however, 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 2015 were retrieved by the DHS Office of Immigration Statistics (OIS) in January 2016. Data in this report may differ slightly from fiscal year-end 2015 numbers retrieved and reported at different times by DHS's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Asylum Division.

Figure 1.
Refugee Admissions and Proposed Ceilings to the United States: 1990 to 2015



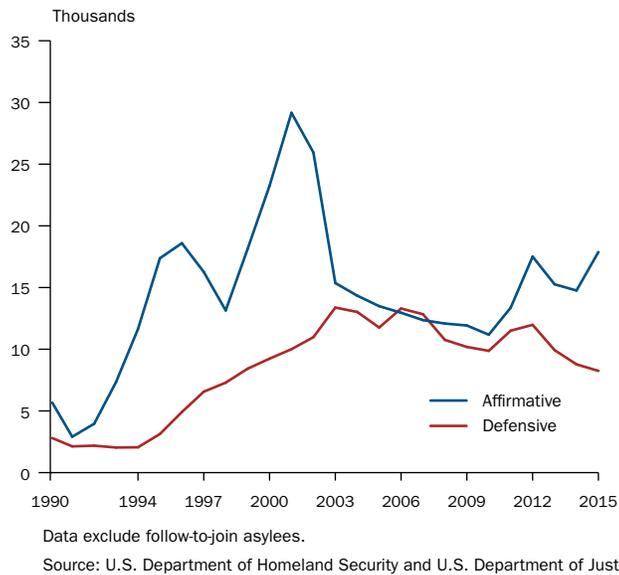
Source: U.S. Department of State.



Homeland Security

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Figure 2.
Annual Flow of Affirmative and Defensive Asylees:
1990 to 2015



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

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 2015 certain nationals of Iraq, Cuba, Eurasia, and the Baltics were re-designated for in-country processing. In addition, in-country refugee processing was established for the first time for qualified children in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.⁷ 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.

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

⁷ The program is open to certain qualifying individuals lawfully present in the United States to file for their unmarried minor relatives who still reside in their home countries. According to the State Department, nearly 3,000 applications have been submitted as of August 2015. However, because most of the applications were received later in the fiscal year, few children have been admitted to the United States in 2015 under this new program.

could not return. By 1952, over 400,000 displaced people had been admitted to the United States under the Act. The United States redoubled 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 waves of Hungarian nationals beginning in 1956, and hundreds of thousands of Indochinese parolees in the 1970s.

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 more likely than not 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.⁸ The refugee ceiling was set at 70,000 in 2015⁹ unchanged from the previous two years, during which time nearly 100 percent of the annual allocation has been exhausted (see Figure 1). The largest regional allocation in 2015 was to the Near East/South Asia region followed by Africa to continue accommodating vulnerable Burmese, Iraqi, Somali, Congolese, and other refugees (see Table 1). These two regions are hosts to more than 8 and 4 million UNHCR-registered refugees respectively, and together they accounted for two thirds of U.S. refugee admissions.

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.

⁸ 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.

⁹ In September 2015, the Administration proposed an increase in the overall refugee ceiling to 85,000 in 2016. Close to 1,700 Syrian refugees were admitted in 2015, and the Administration committed to admitting at least 10,000 Syrian refugees in 2016.

Table 1.

Proposed and Actual Refugee Admissions by Regions: 2013 to 2015¹

Region	2015		2014		2013	
	Ceiling	Admissions	Ceiling	Admissions	Ceiling	Admissions
Total	70,000	69,920	70,000	69,975	70,000	69,909
Africa	17,000	22,472	15,000	17,476	12,000	15,980
East Asia	13,000	18,456	14,000	14,772	17,000	16,520
Europe/Central Asia	1,000	2,363	1,000	959	2,000	580
Latin America/Caribbean	4,000	2,050	5,000	4,318	5,000	4,439
Near East/South Asia	33,000	24,579	33,000	32,450	31,000	32,390
Unallocated Reserve	2,000	-	2,000	-	3,000	-

¹ Ceiling numbers reflect revisions made each fiscal year.

Source: U.S. Department of State.

Any person who 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 not included in the INA's refugee definition.

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 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 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), a U.S. Embassy, or certain non-governmental organizations; Priority 2 (P-2)—groups of special humanitarian concern; and Priority 3 (P-3)—family reunification cases.¹⁰ 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, conducts pre-screening interviews with the applicants. A USCIS officer then interviews the applicants to determine eligibility for resettlement in the United States. Multiple security checks must be completed before applications are approved. Upon approval, the refugee applicants must also submit to a medical exam.¹¹

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.

The spouse and unmarried children under the age of 21 of a principal refugee may obtain refugee status as an accompanying derivative.¹² Accompanying derivatives may enter the United States with the principal refugee or within four months after the principal refugee's admission.¹³ A spouse or child who joins the principal refugee

¹⁰ Priority 3 processing was suspended in October 2008 due to high level of fraud uncovered via DNA testing but resumed in October 2012 with the introduction of the new form DS-7656, Affidavit of Relationship (AOR).

¹¹ The purpose of the medical examination is to identify individuals with inadmissible health-related conditions. For a list of health-related grounds for inadmissibility, please refer to <http://www.cdc.gov/immigrantrefugeehealth/exams/medical-examination.html>.

¹² 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).

¹³ In practice, the vast majority of accompanying derivative refugees enter the United States with the principal refugee.

more than four months after admission to the United States is a following-to-join derivative. Principal refugees may petition for following-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*,¹⁴ for each qualifying derivative family member. Unlike P-3 applicants, these beneficiaries are not required to demonstrate an independent refugee claim. Once an 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.

¹⁴ The petition is used to file for relatives of refugees and asylees. The USRAP program handles only refugee following-to-join petitions, which are counted within the annual refugee ceiling. Asylum following-to-join petitions are processed by USCIS and are not counted in the annual admission ceilings.

Table 2.

Refugee Arrivals by Relationship to Principal Applicant and Case Priority: Fiscal Years 2013 to 2015

Category of admission and case priority	2015		2014		2013	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
RELATIONSHIP TO PRINCIPAL APPLICANT						
Total	69,920	100.0	69,975	100.0	69,909	100.0
Principal Applicant	28,400	40.6	30,477	43.6	31,698	45.3
Dependents	41,520	59.4	39,498	56.4	38,211	54.7
Spouse	10,792	15.4	11,379	16.3	11,278	16.1
Child	30,728	43.9	28,119	40.2	26,933	38.5
CASE PRIORITY						
Total	69,920	100.0	69,975	100.0	69,909	100.0
Priority 1	34,559	49.4	29,847	42.7	30,659	43.9
Priority 2	33,230	47.5	38,319	54.8	37,516	53.7
Priority 3	96	0.1	22	0.0	93	0.1
Following-to-join beneficiaries	2,035	2.9	1,787	2.6	1,641	2.3

Source: U.S. Department of State.

Table 3.

Refugee Arrivals by Country of Nationality: Fiscal Years 2013 to 2015
(Ranked by 2015 country of nationality)

Country of nationality	2015		2014		2013	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	69,920	100.0	69,975	100.0	69,909	100.0
Burma	18,386	26.3	14,598	20.9	16,299	23.3
Iraq	12,676	18.1	19,769	28.3	19,487	27.9
Somalia	8,858	12.7	9,000	12.9	7,608	10.9
Dem. Rep. Congo	7,876	11.3	4,540	6.5	2,563	3.7
Bhutan	5,775	8.3	8,434	12.1	9,134	13.1
Iran	3,109	4.4	2,846	4.1	2,579	3.7
Syria	1,682	2.4	105	0.2	36	0.1
Eritrea	1,596	2.3	1,488	2.1	1,824	2.6
Sudan	1,578	2.3	1,315	1.9	2,160	3.1
Cuba	1,527	2.2	4,062	5.8	4,205	6.0
All other countries, including unknown	6,857	9.8	3,818	5.5	4,014	5.7

Source: U.S. Department of State.

Table 4.

Refugee Arrivals by Age, Sex, and Marital Status: Fiscal Years 2013 to 2015

Characteristic	2015		2014		2013	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
AGE						
Total	69,920	100.0	69,975	100.0	69,909	100.0
0 to 17 years	27,681	39.6	24,647	35.2	23,647	33.8
18 to 24 years	9,624	13.8	10,143	14.5	10,399	14.9
25 to 34 years	14,198	20.3	14,608	20.9	15,328	21.9
35 to 44 years	9,072	13.0	9,223	13.2	9,543	13.7
45 to 54 years	4,916	7.0	5,612	8.0	5,504	7.9
55 to 64 years	2,564	3.7	3,192	4.6	3,098	4.4
65 years and over	1,865	2.7	2,550	3.6	2,390	3.4
SEX						
Total	69,920	100.0	69,975	100.0	69,909	100.0
Female	33,335	47.7	33,208	47.5	32,117	45.9
Male	36,584	52.3	36,767	52.5	37,792	54.1
Unknown	1	0.0	-	-	-	-
MARITAL STATUS						
Total	69,920	100.0	69,975	100.0	69,909	100.0
Married	25,063	35.8	26,168	37.4	26,789	38.3
Single	41,105	58.8	39,739	56.8	39,392	56.3
Other*	3,752	5.4	4,068	5.8	3,728	5.3

* 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: Fiscal Years 2013 to 2015

(Ranked by 2015 state of residence)

State of residence	2015		2014		2013	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	69,920	100.0	69,975	100.0	69,909	100.0
Texas	7,479	10.7	7,209	10.3	7,466	10.7
California	5,718	8.2	6,108	8.7	6,379	9.1
New York	4,052	5.8	4,082	5.8	3,965	5.7
Arizona	3,133	4.5	2,964	4.2	3,052	4.4
Michigan	3,012	4.3	4,006	5.7	4,651	6.7
Ohio	2,989	4.3	2,815	4.0	2,788	4.0
Georgia	2,889	4.1	2,694	3.8	2,710	3.9
Pennsylvania	2,764	4.0	2,739	3.9	2,507	3.6
Illinois	2,658	3.8	2,578	3.7	2,452	3.5
Washington	2,621	3.7	2,483	3.5	2,414	3.5
Other	32,605	46.6	32,297	46.2	31,525	45.1

Source: U.S. Department of State.

Lawful Permanent Residence and Citizenship

One year after being admitted to the United States, refugees are required by statute to apply for lawful permanent resident (LPR) status. Refugees granted LPR status may apply for naturalization five years after their admission date as a refugee.

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 the U.S. Department of State. Please see footnote 2 for an explanation of differences in reported numbers.

TRENDS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF REFUGEES

In 2015, 69,920 refugees were admitted to the United States, virtually unchanged from the previous year. Annual refugee arrivals declined during the 1990s, and the refugee program's focus shifted to more diverse populations from 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 76,600 in 2009. After a brief decrease from 2009 to 2011, refugee admissions began to increase sharply again in 2012, reflecting staffing increases and improvements in the synchronization of security and medical checks for refugee families.

Category of Admission

In 2015, the majority of refugees were admitted under P-1 processing (49 percent)—individuals referred by the UNHCR, a U.S. Embassy, or certain NGOs—and P-2 processing (48 percent)—groups of special humanitarian concern (see Table 2). P-3 processing (family reunification cases) constituted less than half a percent of refugees admitted due to a four-year moratorium. Principal refugees accounted for 28,400 (41 percent) of the 69,920 refugees admitted to the United States in 2015.¹⁵ Dependent children and spouses represented 44 percent and 15 percent, respectively, of refugee admissions. There were 2,035 following-to-join refugee beneficiaries (2.9 percent of total refugees).

Country of Nationality

In 2015, the leading countries of nationality for individuals admitted as refugees were Burma (26 percent), Iraq (18 percent), Somalia (13 percent), the Democratic Republic of Congo (11 percent), and Bhutan (8.3 percent—see Table 3). These top

five countries made up more than three-quarters (77 percent) of total refugee admissions. Other leading countries included Iran (4.4 percent) and Syria (2.4 percent).

Between 2006 and 2015, more than 250,000 refugees have been admitted to the United States from the Near East/South Asia region, accounting for close to 40 percent of all refugee admissions during this time period. Most have come from Iraq (126,000), Bhutan (84,550), and Iran (34,800). The region continues to be the leading source of refugees (35 percent during this period) despite a 25 percent decrease in admission in the past

¹⁵ As of January 2016.

year. The second leading region for refugee admission was Africa, at 32 percent of all admissions during this period. In fact, 2015 marked the highest admission year from Africa in over 10 years at 22,472. Most have been from Somalia (62,500), Democratic Republic of Congo (24,000), and Eritrea (14,000) over this time period.

Age, Sex, and Marital Status

Seventy-four percent of refugees admitted to the United States in 2015 were under 35 years of age (see Table 4).

Refugees are younger than the U.S. native-born population on average, with a median age at arrival of 23 years, compared to a median age for the native-born population of 37 years in 2015.¹⁶ Refugee median age varies widely by region of birth: Africa leads with the lowest median age of 18 years, while Latin America and the Caribbean has the highest median age of 36. Overall, a slight majority of refugees were male (52 percent), and 60 percent of adults were married.

State of Initial Resettlement

In 2015, 53 percent of admitted refugees were resettled in 10 states. The leading resettlement states were Texas (11 percent) and California (8.2 percent) (see Table 5). Resettlement numbers in 2015 represented a slight increase in Texas (up 4 percent since 2014) and a slight decrease in California (down 6 percent). Michigan continued to experience the largest percentage decline of the top 10 resettlement destination states (a 25 percent decline since 2014 and a 35 percent decline since 2013) while, Georgia experienced the largest percentage increase of the top 10 refugee resettlement destination states, up 7.2 percent since 2014.

ASYLEES

Filing of Claims

Generally, any foreign national present in the United States or arriving at a port of entry 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 the Department of Justice 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 21¹⁷ 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 following-to-join benefits¹⁸ for qualifying derivatives up to two years after he or she was

¹⁶ Calculated from the March 2015 Current Population Survey public use microdata file from the U.S. Census Bureau.

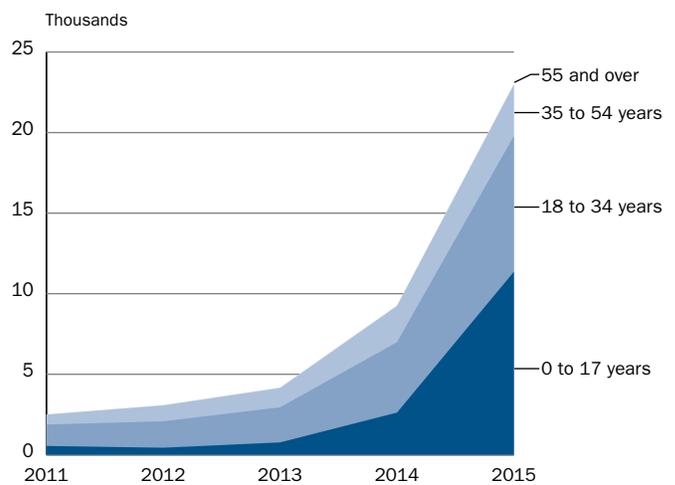
¹⁷ See reference to Child Status Protection Act, n. 11, *supra*.

¹⁸ In practice, the vast majority of derivative asylum status beneficiaries receive following-to-join benefits.

Trends in Application Volume: An estimated 83,000 affirmative asylum applications were filed with USCIS in 2015, 47 percent more than the year before. This is the sixth consecutive annual increase and the highest level since 1996. China remained the main country of origin for affirmative asylum applications at 14,000 in 2015 followed by Mexico at 9,000. More individuals sought affirmative asylum from the Northern Triangle Countries (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras) in the last three years than the prior 15 years combined. The number of children seeking asylum rose sharply to reach 26,600, the highest on record (a 112 percent increase from 2014 and a 236 percent increase from 2013). Guatemala and El Salvador were the main drivers of affirmative asylum applications for children from the region (4,325 and 3,671 respectively) (see Figure 3).

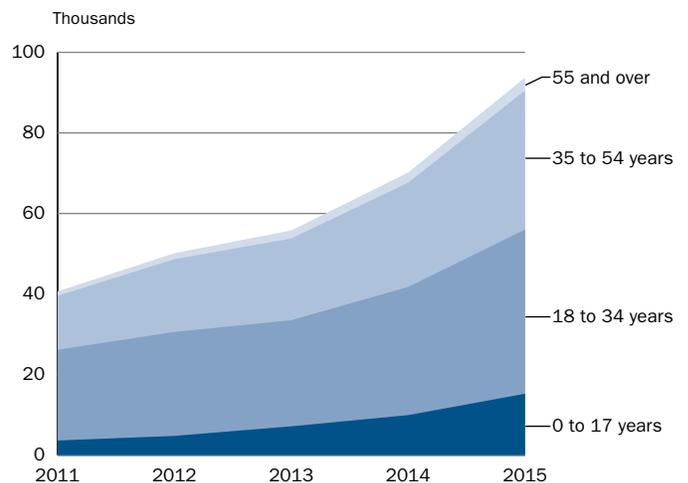
Figure 3.

Applications for Affirmative Asylum by Individuals from the Northern Triangle Countries* by Age: 2011 to 2015



*Include Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.

Applications for Affirmative Asylum by Individuals from All Other Countries by Age: 2011 to 2015



granted asylum, as long as the relationship between principal spouse and/or child exists on the date the principal was granted asylum. 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.

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 undocumented, are in violation of their status when apprehended, or were apprehended while attempting entry into the United States without proper documentation. Defensive

Table 6.

Individuals Granted Asylum Affirmatively or Defensively by Country of Nationality: Fiscal Years 2013 to 2015

(Ranked by 2015 country of nationality)

Country of nationality	2015		2014		2013	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	26,124	100.0	23,374	100.0	25,151	100.0
China, People's Republic	6,192	23.7	7,884	33.7	8,585	34.1
El Salvador	2,173	8.3	369	1.6	252	1.0
Guatemala	2,082	8.0	486	2.1	384	1.5
Egypt	1,666	6.4	2,842	12.2	3,376	13.4
Honduras	1,416	5.4	242	1.0	199	0.8
Syria	974	3.7	914	3.9	798	3.2
Ethiopia	879	3.4	833	3.6	890	3.5
Mexico	870	3.3	592	2.5	357	1.4
Iraq	766	2.9	617	2.6	466	1.9
Iran	674	2.6	631	2.7	675	2.7
All other countries, including unknown	8,432	32.3	7,964	34.1	9,169	36.5

Note: Data exclude follow-to-join asylees.

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

Table 7.

Individuals Granted Asylum Affirmatively by Country of Nationality: Fiscal Years 2013 to 2015

(Ranked by 2015 country of nationality)

Country of nationality	2015		2014		2013	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	17,878	100.0	14,583	100.0	15,205	100.0
China, People's Republic	2,582	14.4	3,904	26.8	4,050	26.6
El Salvador	1,870	10.5	185	1.3	71	0.5
Guatemala	1,713	9.6	310	2.1	232	1.5
Egypt	1,517	8.5	2,579	17.7	3,070	20.2
Honduras	1,109	6.2	89	0.6	107	0.7
Syria	873	4.9	850	5.8	750	4.9
Iraq	711	4.0	538	3.7	412	2.7
Mexico	667	3.7	468	3.2	202	1.3
Iran	640	3.6	572	3.9	612	4.0
Ethiopia	624	3.5	508	3.5	489	3.2
All other countries, including unknown	5,572	31.2	4,580	31.4	5,210	34.3

Note: Data exclude follow-to-join asylees.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Table 8.

Individuals Granted Asylum Defensively by Country of Nationality: Fiscal Years 2013 to 2015

(Ranked by 2015 country of nationality)

Country of nationality	2015		2014		2013	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	8,246	100.0	8,791	100.0	9,946	100.0
China, People's Republic	3,610	43.8	3,980	45.3	4,535	45.6
Guatemala	369	4.5	176	2.0	152	1.5
Honduras	307	3.7	153	1.7	92	0.9
El Salvador	303	3.7	184	2.1	181	1.8
India	303	3.7	372	4.2	322	3.2
Ethiopia	255	3.1	325	3.7	401	4.0
Nepal	253	3.1	298	3.4	380	3.8
Mexico	203	2.5	124	1.4	155	1.6
Soviet Union	176	2.1	185	2.1	252	2.5
Somalia	166	2.0	122	1.4	86	0.9
All other countries, including unknown	2,301	27.9	2,872	32.7	3,390	34.1

Note: Data exclude follow-to-join asylees.

Source: U.S. Department of Justice.

Table 9.

Follow-to-join Asylee Travel Documents Issued by Country of Nationality: Fiscal Years 2013 to 2015

(Ranked by 2015 country of nationality)

Country	2015		2014		2012	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	7,116	100.0	8,654	100.0	10,509	100.0
China, People's Republic	3,281	46.1	3,448	39.8	4,802	45.7
Nepal	488	6.9	635	7.3	683	6.5
Haiti	384	5.4	556	6.4	551	5.2
India	288	4.0	226	2.6	362	3.4
Egypt	231	3.2	733	8.5	633	6.0
Guatemala	205	2.9	171	2.0	160	1.5
Syria	111	1.6	137	1.6	98	0.9
El Salvador	110	1.5	106	1.2	49	0.5
Kenya	104	1.5	113	1.3	144	1.4
Burma	103	1.4	85	1.0	131	1.2
All other countries, including unknown	1,811	25.4	2,444	28.2	2,896	27.6

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

Table 10.

Individuals Granted Asylum Affirmatively by Age, Sex, and Marital Status: Fiscal Years 2013 to 2015

Characteristic	2015		2014		2013	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
AGE						
Total	17,878	100.0	14,583	100.0	15,205	100.0
0 to 17 years	5,273	29.5	2,669	18.3	2,499	16.4
18 to 24 years	3,205	17.9	2,022	13.9	2,382	15.7
25 to 34 years	4,501	25.2	4,716	32.3	5,022	33.0
35 to 44 years	3,047	17.0	3,126	21.4	3,143	20.7
45 to 54 years	1,234	6.9	1,346	9.2	1,497	9.8
55 to 64 years	395	2.2	459	3.1	433	2.8
65 and over	223	1.2	245	1.7	229	1.5
SEX						
Total	17,878	100.0	14,583	100.0	15,205	100.0
Female	8,455	47.3	7,133	48.9	7,501	49.3
Male	9,423	52.7	7,450	51.1	7,704	50.7
MARITAL STATUS						
Total	17,878	100.0	14,583	100.0	15,205	100.0
Married	10,991	61.5	7,039	48.3	7,171	47.2
Single	6,187	34.6	6,762	46.4	7,226	47.5
Other*	700	3.9	782	5.4	808	5.3

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

Note: Data exclude follow-to-join asylees.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

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 following-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 who were abroad at the time of application are granted derivative asylum when admitted into the United States at a port of entry.

Lawful Permanent Residence and Citizenship

One year after being granted asylum, asylees are eligible to apply for LPR status along with qualifying family members after meeting 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.¹⁹

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. Most following-to-join asylum derivative data were obtained from the Case and Activity Management for International Operations (CAMINO) system of USCIS and the Consular Consolidated Database (CCD) of the Department of State. These following-to-join data represent only those I-730 beneficiaries who were outside of the United States at the time of application and reflect travel documents issued, not admissions. In 2012, OIS began receiving data on the number of individuals approved for following-to-join status who were residing in the United States at the time of the approval of their I-730 petition. These data were obtained from the Computer-Linked Application Information Management System (CLAIMS) of USCIS.

TRENDS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF ASYLEES

Overall, grants of asylum increased by 12 percent from 23,374 in 2014 to 26,124 in 2015, driven primarily by affirmative cases which increased 23 percent from 14,583 in 2014 to 17,878 in 2015 (see Figure 2). Both China and Egypt (top asylum grant countries) have seen large decreases in affirmative asylum cases (34 and 41 percent respectively—see Table 7). The number of persons granted asylum defensively by an immigration judge or the Board of Immigration Appeals of EOIR decreased, on the other hand, by 6 percent, from 8,791 in 2014 to 8,246 in 2015. The number of persons authorized for travel from abroad to the United States as following-to-join derivatives continued to decline (19 percent) from 8,654 in 2014 to 7,116 in 2015.

¹⁹ 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.

Table 11.**Follow-to-join Asylee Travel Documents Issued by Age and Sex: Fiscal Years 2013 to 2015**

Characteristic	2015		2014		2013	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
AGE						
Total	7,116	100.0	8,654	100.0	10,509	100.0
0 to 17 years	3,352	47.1	4,052	46.8	5,001	47.6
18 to 24 years	1,260	17.7	1,609	18.6	1,876	17.9
25 to 34 years	845	11.9	970	11.2	1,232	11.7
35 to 44 years	914	12.8	1,118	12.9	1,440	13.7
45 to 54 years	561	7.9	697	8.1	743	7.1
55 to 64 years	162	2.3	186	2.1	197	1.9
65 and over	22	0.3	22	0.3	20	0.2
SEX						
Total	7,116	100.0	8,654	100.0	10,509	100.0
Female	3,760	52.8	4,386	50.7	5,492	52.3
Male	3,149	44.3	3,950	45.6	4,662	44.4
Unknown	207	2.9	318	3.7	355	3.4

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

Table 12.**Individuals Granted Asylum Affirmatively by State of Residence: Fiscal Years 2013 to 2015**

(Ranked by 2015 state of residence)

State of residence	2015		2014		2013	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	17,878	100.0	14,583	100.0	15,205	100.0
California	7,595	42.5	6,825	46.8	6,374	41.9
New York	2,229	12.5	1,955	13.4	2,002	13.2
Florida	1,490	8.3	1,092	7.5	1,839	12.1
New Jersey	850	4.8	727	5.0	481	3.2
Texas	730	4.1	480	3.3	463	3.0
Virginia	716	4.0	609	4.2	760	5.0
Maryland	576	3.2	476	3.3	546	3.6
Washington	382	2.1	126	0.9	191	1.3
Massachusetts	380	2.1	127	0.9	91	0.6
Illinois	276	1.5	248	1.7	525	3.5
Other	2,654	14.8	1,918	13.2	1,933	12.7

Note: Data exclude follow-to-join asylees.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Country of Nationality

In 2015, the three leading countries of nationality of persons granted either affirmative or defensive asylum were China (24 percent), El Salvador (8.3 percent), and Guatemala (8.0 percent) (see Table 6). Nationals of these countries accounted for 40 percent of all persons granted asylum. The same countries were the leading countries of nationality for affirmative asylum in 2015 and accounted for 35 percent of all persons granted affirmative asylum. The leading countries of nationality for persons granted defensive asylum were China (44 percent) and Guatemala (4.5 percent), followed by El Salvador, Honduras, and India (3.7 percent each) (see Table 8). Fifty-nine percent of all defensive asylees in 2015 were nationals of these countries.

The leading countries of nationality for following-to-join asylees authorized for travel to the United States in 2015 were China (46 percent), Nepal (6.9 percent), and Haiti (5.4 percent) (see Table 9). Nationals of these three countries accounted for 58 percent of all following-to-join derivative relatives issued travel documents prior to their admission into the United States.

Age, Sex, and Marital Status

In 2015, 60 percent of persons granted affirmative asylum were between the ages of 18 and 44, inclusive (see Table 10). Like refugees, affirmative asylees are, on average, younger than the native-born U.S. population: the median age of persons granted affirmative asylum in 2015 was 26 years. Fifty-three percent were male, and 49 percent of adults were married.

In 2015, the median age of following-to-join beneficiaries was 18 years. More than half (53 percent) of following-to-join beneficiaries were identified as female (see Table 11). Data on marital status are not available for this group and are not included in this report.

State of Residence

In 2015, the leading states of residence for individuals granted asylum affirmatively were California (43 percent) and New York (13 percent) (see Table 12). More than half (55 percent) of individuals granted affirmative asylum resided in these two states.

State of residence data were not available for either defensive or following-to-join asylees.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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