



Affirmative Asylum Application Statistics and Decisions Annual Report

June 20, 2016

Fiscal Year 2016 Report to Congress



Homeland
Security

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

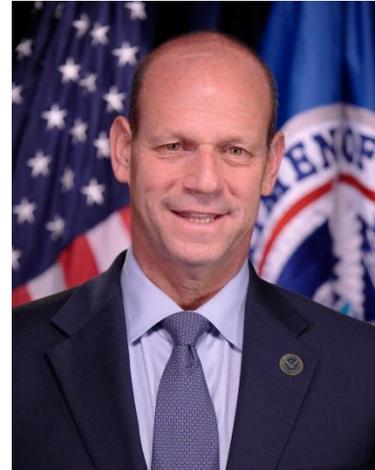
Message from the Director

June 20, 2016

I am pleased to present the following report, “Affirmative Asylum Application Statistics and Decisions Annual Report,” which has been prepared by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

This report was compiled pursuant to language set forth in Senate Report 114-68 accompanying the *Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act* (P.L. 114-113).

This report covers FY 2015 adjudications of affirmative asylum applications by USCIS asylum officers for the stated period.



Pursuant to congressional requirements, this report is being provided to the following Members of Congress:

The Honorable John R. Carter
Chairman, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

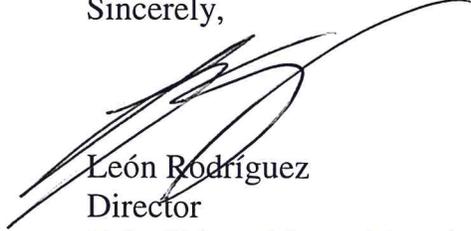
The Honorable Lucille Roybal-Allard
Ranking Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

The Honorable John Hoeven
Chairman, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

I am pleased to respond to any questions you may have. Please do not hesitate to contact me at (202) 272-1000 or the Department's Deputy Under Secretary for Management and Chief Financial Officer, Chip Fulghum, at (202) 447-5751.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'León Rodríguez', written over the printed name.

León Rodríguez
Director

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide the annual statistics on affirmative asylum applications and asylum officers' decisions on those applications.

USCIS has received an increasing number of affirmative asylum applications in recent years. In FY 2015, USCIS saw 48 percent more applications than in FY 2014, and the number of pending affirmative asylum applications grew by 77 percent. During the same period, USCIS increased Asylum Division staffing levels by 23 percent and opened three new offices. From FY 2014 to FY 2015, USCIS was able to complete 31 percent more applications. USCIS continues to address increased workload and a projected increase in receipts by expanding staffing and opening new offices. USCIS monitors trends in all caseloads and adjusts resource allocation and planning as necessary to meet program priorities.



Affirmative Asylum Application Statistics and Decisions Annual Report

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I. Legislative Language

Senate Report 114-68, accompanying the *Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Appropriations Act (P.L. 114-113)*, includes the following requirement:

GAO ASYLUM REPORTS

In fiscal year 2015, the Committee directed GAO to update two reports related to the asylum process: “Agencies Have Taken Actions to Help Ensure Quality in the Asylum Adjudication Process but Challenges Remain” (GAO–08–935) and “The U.S. Asylum System: Significant Variation Existed in Asylum Outcomes across Immigration Courts and Judges” (GAO–08–940). In order to provide continuing data streams for additional analysis by this Committee and others, the Committee directs USCIS to report annual statistics on affirmative asylum applications and asylum officers’ decisions on the applications.

II. Background

Asylum is the legal protection afforded by the United States Government to persons in the United States who can demonstrate persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution in their home country because of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. These determinations are made by an asylum officer after an applicant files an affirmative asylum application, is interviewed, and clears required security and background checks.

This report provides information on affirmative asylum receipts and related case adjudication volumes processed during FY 2015 pursuant to Section 451(b) of the *Homeland Security Act of 2002*, P.L. 107-296. The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Asylum Division is the primary entity responsible for the adjudication of affirmative asylum determinations in the United States.

The information provided in this report has been collected from the Refugees, Asylum and Parole System (RAPS), the case management system that supports the Asylum Division's case processing. This system is used by USCIS staff to record new affirmative asylum case filings, to help manage the adjudication process, and to record asylum determinations.

III. Statistics on Affirmative Asylum Applications

Statistics on Affirmative Asylum Applications FY 2015	
Applications Pending end of FY 2014	61,525
Applications Filed	84,182
Applications Received	83,197
Applications Reopened	985
Cases Completed	40,062
Approved	15,999
Denied	458
Interviewed Referred	17,943
Un-interviewed Referred	2,439
Administratively Closed	3,223
Approval Rate (of interviewed cases)	47%
Applications Pending end of FY 2015	108,749 ¹

¹End-of-year pending is greater than the sum of beginning pending and applications filed less case completions; this is due to within-year system changes related to case corrections, family filing separations, or cases requiring a second adjudication.

Key - Statistics on Affirmative Asylum Applications FY 2015	
Applications Filed:	The total number of new asylum cases received and reopened cases.
Applications Received	The number of new asylum cases USCIS received during the fiscal year.
Applications Re-opened	The total number of previously administratively closed asylum cases that were reopened.
Cases Completed:	The total number of cases approved, denied, interviewed referred, un-interviewed referred, and administratively closed.
Approved	The number of cases that USCIS approved for asylum status during the fiscal year.
Denied	The number of cases USCIS interviewed and found ineligible for asylum status while in lawful immigration status.
Interviewed Referred	The number of cases USCIS interviewed, found ineligible for asylum status, and referred to the Immigration Judge because the applicant was not in lawful immigration status. Included is the number of referrals following termination of approved asylum applications.
Un-interviewed Referred	The number of cases USCIS referred to the Immigration Judge because the applicant failed to appear for interview or withdrew his or her asylum application and were not in lawful immigration status.
Administratively Closed	The number of cases USCIS administratively closed for lack of jurisdiction, withdrawn by an applicant who is a lawful permanent resident, or found ineligible due to status as a U.S. Citizen, outside the US/abandoned, or denied for failure to appear.
Approval Rate (of interviewed cases)	$[\text{Approved}/(\text{approved} + \text{denied} + \text{interviewed referred})] \times 100.$
Pending end of year	The number of cases pending with USCIS at the end of the fiscal year (September 30).

The data was compiled using standard workload reports from the USCIS Asylum Division's RAPS, which is the official case management system for affirmative asylum cases.

NOTE: Cases completed in any fiscal year could have been filed, received, or reopened in previous fiscal years. Cases may include more than one individual (e.g., an applicant and a spouse and/or children).

IV. Analysis/Discussion

- In FY 2015, 84,182 total affirmative asylum applications were received by USCIS, an increase of 48 percent over FY 2014 when USCIS received 56,898 affirmative asylum applications.
- USCIS completed 40,062 affirmative asylum cases in FY 2015, including 15,999 approvals for asylum. The number of affirmative asylum completions increased by 31 percent over the FY 2014 total of 30,620 completions.
- Following FY 2015 affirmative asylum case processing, 20,382 cases were referred by USCIS to the Immigration Judge for removal proceedings. Of those cases, 17,943 were found to be ineligible for asylum following an interview. The remaining 2,439 cases were referred to immigration court after the applicant failed to appear for an interview or following a withdrawal of the affirmative asylum application.
- During the reporting period, there was a significant increase in pending affirmative asylum cases. The number of pending affirmative asylum applications rose from 61,525 at the end of FY 2014 to 108,749 pending cases at the end of FY 2015, a growth of 77 percent.
- In FY 2015, USCIS increased the Asylum Division's approved staffing level by 196 positions, or 23 percent, to address increased pending workloads and a projected rise in receipts. USCIS also opened three new offices, including the Boston Asylum Sub-Office in January 2015 and the New Orleans Asylum Sub-Office and the Asylum Processing Center in November 2015.
- In FY 2015, onboard asylum officer staffing rose from 337 officers to 344 officers, an increase of 2 percent. Further staffing growth is underway, and onboard asylum officer staffing is expected reach 480 by the end of FY 2016.

V. Conclusion

The USCIS Asylum Division's affirmative asylum caseload is growing, both in terms of new receipts and pending cases. In response, USCIS has significantly increased program funding to expand staffing and facilities for the Asylum Division. USCIS continues to monitor trends in all caseloads and adjusts resource allocations and planning as necessary to meet program priorities.