
REFUGEES, ASYLEES, FISCAL YEAR 1999

This report will appear as chapters in the forthcoming *1999 Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*. All references to Appendixes, Charts, Tables, and other sections of the *Statistical Yearbook*, as well as detailed table numbers, appear as they will in the final *Yearbook* edition.

II. REFUGEES

This section presents information on persons who are admitted to the United States because of persecution abroad, including the number and characteristics of persons applying, approved, arriving, and adjusting to lawful permanent resident status.

A *refugee is an alien outside the United States who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her country of nationality because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution.* (See Appendix 2, p. A.2-9.) Claims of persecution must be based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Persons within their country of nationality may be treated as refugees, provided that the President, after consultation with Congress, declares that they are of special humanitarian concern to the United States. The definition of refugee set forth in the Immigration and Nationality Act, as amended by the Refugee Act of 1980, conforms to the 1967 United Nations Protocol on Refugees.

U.S. Refugee Program

The United States first recognized refugees for entry into the country in fiscal year 1946. After that time many different refugee programs were enacted on an ad hoc basis, including the Displaced Persons Act and the Cuban and Indochinese Refugee Adjustment Acts. During the first decade of refugee programs, virtually all refugees entered the United States as immigrants. Since 1957, most refugees either have been paroled into the United States under special authority granted to the Attorney General by the Immigration and Nationality Act, or have entered in a statutory refugee status. Each of these refugees may be adjusted to lawful permanent resident status at a later date.

Chart C depicts initial refugee admissions and adjustments to lawful permanent resident status for the period 1946-99. This graph demonstrates the time lag between initial admission and adjustment to immigrant status. At the onset of parole programs there generally were no mechanisms for adjustment to permanent status, thus creating a recurring need for special legislation. The Refugee Act of 1980 addressed this situation by allowing refugees to adjust status one year after arrival. Some refugees do not adjust status for several years and some refugees never adjust status.

Admission ceilings

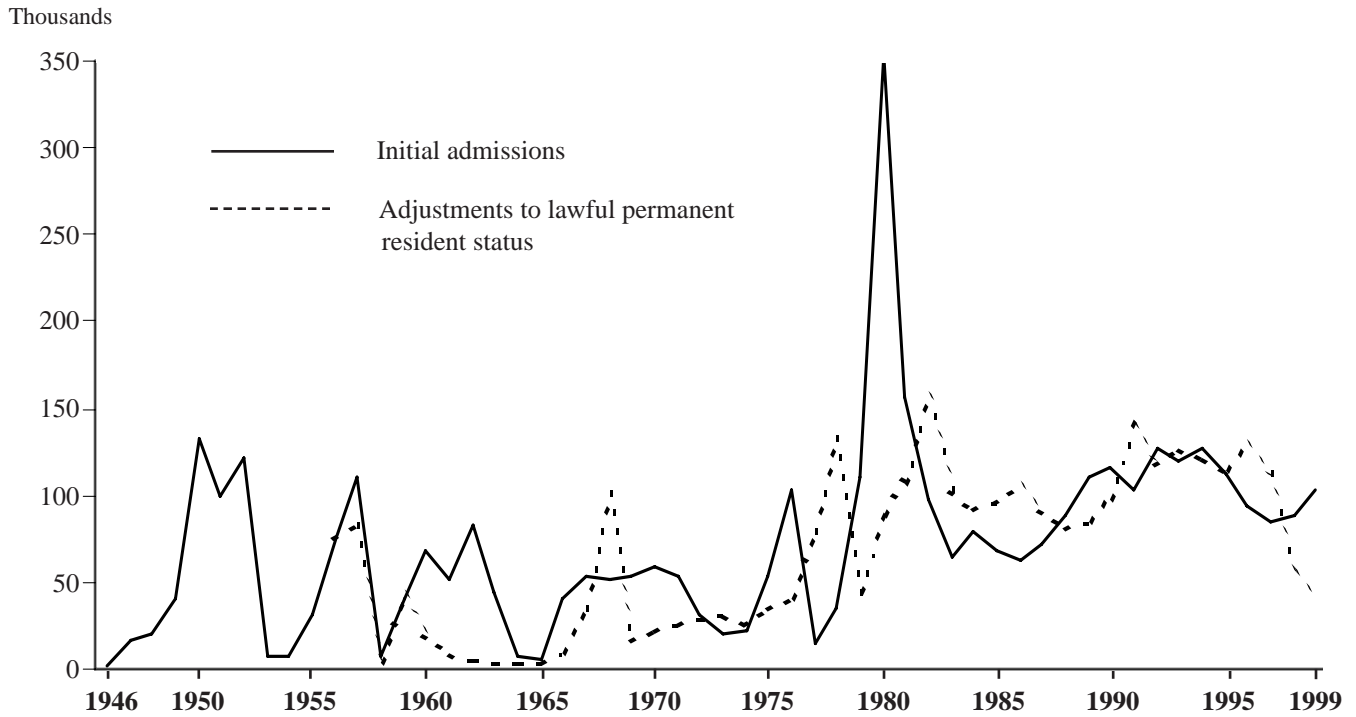
At the beginning of each fiscal year, the President, after consultation with Congress to review the worldwide refugee situation, determines the number of refugees in need of resettlement who are of special humanitarian concern to the United States. The President then establishes the authorized number of admissions for that fiscal year. During the year, changes in the need for resettlement may require revisions in the overall limit on refugee admissions or reallocation among areas of the world. The admission ceiling of 78,000 for 1999 was established and later raised and reallocated among geographic regions as follows:

Geographic region of origin	Initial ceiling	Final ceiling
Total	78,000	91,000
Africa	12,000	13,000
East Asia	9,000	10,500
Europe	48,000	61,000
Latin America / Caribbean	3,000	2,250
Near East / South Asia	4,000	4,250
Unallocated, funded	2,000	-

- Represents zero.

The authorized admission levels set the maximum number of refugees allowed to enter the United States in a fiscal year from each of the geographic areas of chargeability. The authorized ceiling was decreased from 83,000 in 1998 to 78,000 in 1999, resuming a downward trend since the peak of 142,000 in 1992. An unallocated funded reserve of 2,000 was placed in the 1999 ceiling to allow for small increases in one or more areas as needed without subtracting refugee authorized admissions from other areas. However, the need to resettle more Kosovar refugees during 1999 caused the President to raise the limit for Europe to 61,000 and the overall limit to 91,000.

Chart C
Refugee and Asylee Initial Admissions and Adjustments to Lawful Permanent Resident Status: Fiscal Years 1946-99



Major refugee programs

1949-53	Displaced Persons Act	1978-84	Indochinese Refugee Adjustment Act	3/75-3/80	Indochinese refugees paroled
1954-57	Refugee Relief Act	2/70-3/80	Refugee-Parolees admitted	1980	Refugee-Parolee adjustments began
11/56-7/58	Hungarians paroled	1/59-3/80	Cubans paroled	4/80	Refugee Act admissions began
1959	Hungarian adjustments began	1967	Cuban adjustments began	1981	Refugee Act adjustments began
1966-80	Refugee conditional entrants			4/80-10/80	Marinel boatlift
				1985-87	Marinel adjustments

NOTE: For the period 1946-56, admissions to lawful permanent resident status and initial admissions were the same. See Glossary for fiscal year definitions. Source: Tables 23, 24, 27, and 32.

The ceiling for East Asia includes certain Vietnamese Amerasians, who enter the United States with immigrant visas. Although these aliens are immigrants rather than refugees, they are included in the refugee ceiling since they are eligible for refugee benefits in the United States. Only 241 Amerasians, including their family members, entered the United States in 1999. They are included in the immigrant rather than the refugee tables in the *Statistical Yearbook*. The Amerasian program is ending, since most of the eligible persons have already been identified and entered the United States.

Criteria for refugee status

During 1999, refugees were interviewed and approved for admission to the United States by officers in 15 of the Service's 39 overseas offices. To qualify for admission to the United States as a refugee, each applicant must meet all

of the following criteria: be a refugee as set forth in the Refugee Act of 1980; be among the types of refugees determined to be of special humanitarian concern to the United States; be admissible under the Immigration and Nationality Act; and not be firmly resettled in any foreign country. Spouses and minor children of qualifying refugees also enter the United States as refugees, either accompanying or following to join the principal refugee. Occasionally these family members gain refugee status after arriving in the United States; this was the case with 109 people in 1999.

Special program for applicants from the former Soviet Union

Beginning in 1990, the administrative processing of refugee applicants residing in the Soviet Union was shifted to the United States. Applicants from the former Soviet

Table B
Refugee-Status Applications Filed and Approved, and Refugees Admitted, by Selected Nationality: Fiscal Year 1999

Nationality	Refugee applications filed	Refugee applications approved	Refugee arrivals
All nationalities	111,576	85,592	85,076
Bosnia-Herzegovina	30,190	24,766	22,699
Yugoslavia ¹	18,415	17,970	14,280
Soviet Union ²	16,882	11,696	16,962
Vietnam	8,856	6,253	9,622
Cuba	7,339	2,701	2,018
Somalia	6,722	5,668	4,320
Liberia	4,640	2,122	2,495
Iran	3,696	2,252	1,750
Sudan	3,262	2,858	2,393
Iraq	2,906	1,861	1,955
Ethiopia	1,863	2,581	1,873
Croatia	1,681	1,215	1,660
Sierra Leone	814	633	675
Togo	758	629	93
Afghanistan	699	586	365
Nigeria	676	661	625
Other	2,177	1,140	1,291

¹ Data exclude republics of the former Yugoslavia. Refugee applications filed include 18,261 from Kosovo; applications approved, 17,831; and refugee arrivals, 14,161. ² Data are for republics of the former Soviet Union. Source: Tables 22 and 24.

Union are now required to submit an initial questionnaire to the State Department's Washington Processing Center (WPC) in Rosslyn, Virginia. The WPC establishes interview priority for applications based on information supplied on the initial questionnaires and schedules interviews in Moscow. On the day of their interview, applicants submit completed refugee applications to Service officers in Moscow. Since 1990, those applications have been counted as filed on the interview date.

Applicants from the former Soviet Union who were in other countries at the start of fiscal year 1990 are still allowed to submit applications for refugee status directly to other INS refugee processing posts. Only 10 Soviet applications were filed outside of Moscow in 1999, including 4 spouses and children who received refugee status in the United States.

Data Overview

Applications (Tables B, 21-22)

The number of applications for refugee status filed with the INS decreased from 1998 (124,777) to 1999 (111,576) (Table 21). The leading countries of chargeability of the applicants were Bosnia-Herzegovina with 27 percent of the

applications, Yugoslavia (17—principally Kosovars), the former Soviet Union (15), Vietnam (8), Cuba (7), and Somalia (6) (Table B and Table 22). Among those countries of chargeability from which at least 1,000 applications were filed in 1999, the largest percentage increases over 1998 were in applications filed by nationals from Yugoslavia (from 3 to 18,415), Somalia (from 2,638 to 6,722, 154.8 percent), Iran (1,691 to 3,696, 118.6 percent), and Liberia (4,228 to 4,640, 9.7 percent); the largest percentage decreases were in applications filed by nationals of the former Soviet Union (from 35,008 to 16,882, -51.8 percent), Vietnam (17,240 to 8,856, -48.6 percent), and Croatia (3,111 to 1,681, -46.0 percent). Overall, among the five geographic regions of chargeability from which applications for refugee status were filed in 1999, applications filed by nationals from the Near East/South Asia and Africa increased about 53 and 34 percent, respectively, while those filed by nationals from the East Asia, Europe, and Latin America/Caribbean geographic regions decreased 46, 15, and 8 percent, respectively, over 1998.

Approvals (Tables B, 21-23)

The total number of refugees approved for admission to the United States was 17 percent higher in 1999 (85,592) than in 1998 (73,198) (Table 23). The leading countries of

chargeability were Bosnia-Herzegovina with 24,766 approvals, Yugoslavia (17,970—principally Kosovars), the former Soviet Union (11,696), Vietnam (6,253), Somalia (5,668), Sudan (2,858), Cuba (2,701), and Ethiopia (2,581) (Table B and Table 22). These eight countries accounted for 87 percent of all approvals in 1999. The number approved from the former Soviet Union decreased 38 percent from 1998, reflecting a downward trend in applications in the past seven years. The numbers of refugees approved from the Latin America, Africa, the Near East, and Europe regions increased by 131, 84, 20, and 19 percent, respectively, in 1999. The significant increase in the Latin America geographic region was attributed to a large increase (131 percent) in the number of refugees approved from Cuba. Refugee approvals for Vietnam decreased more than 50 percent. All Vietnamese refugee processing centers outside Vietnam were closed by the end of 1997. Residents of former refugee camps were asked to return to Vietnam. Their cases are processed through a special program called the Resettlement Opportunity for Vietnamese Returnees (ROVR) in Vietnam. The ROVR program adjudicated 4,073 cases and approved 3,684 cases in 1999.

Dependents

Refugee figures include spouses and children who are cleared to join principal refugees already in the United States, and they count against the annual ceiling. Because of these family reunification cases, the data continue to show refugees being approved and arriving for some time after active refugee processing has ended for nationals of certain countries. Most of the refugee flow from Europe in fiscal year 1999, other than from the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, was family reunification cases. Overall, 2.0 percent of the applications and 2.1 percent of the approvals were family reunification cases. In comparison with the number of applications filed and refugees approved within each geographic region, the Africa region had the highest percentage of family reunification cases among applications, 4.8 percent. The Near East region had the highest percentage among approvals, 5.3 percent.

More than 85,000 refugees arrived in the United States during 1999.

Arrivals (Tables 23, 24)

Refugee arrivals into the United States increased to 85,076 in 1999 from 76,181 in 1998 (Tables B, 23, and 24).¹ The

¹ Refugee arrival data are from the Bureau for Refugee Programs, Department of State. See Data Collection section.

increase was largely attributed to the increase in refugee arrivals from Yugoslavia, Croatia, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, and Liberia. Bosnia-Herzegovina (22,699), Yugoslavia (14,280), Vietnam (9,622), Ukraine (8,649), Somalia (4,320), and Russia (4,386) were the leading countries for refugee arrivals in 1999, comprising 75 percent of the total. The time lag between approval of a refugee application and the refugee's arrival in the United States may be several months or more. After approval, refugees must undergo health and security clearances, have sponsorship and placement arranged, and in some cases go through orientation and English language training. This time lag accounts for the discrepancies between approval and arrival figures in any given year.

Understanding the Data

Data Collection

The Immigration and Naturalization Service collects data on refugees at three points during processing: when they apply for refugee status abroad; when they are admitted to the United States; and when they adjust to lawful permanent resident status. The INS overseas offices collect data on applicants for refugee status. Each office completes INS Form G-319, Report of Applicants for Refugee Status under Section 207, which reports refugee casework by the country to which each applicant is chargeable.

Both the Bureau for Refugee Programs (Department of State) and the Office of Refugee Resettlement (Department of Health and Human Services) collect data on refugees admitted to the United States. The Bureau for Refugee Programs collects data through the Intergovernmental Organization for Migration, which is a nongovernmental organization that arranges the transportation of refugees to the United States. The Office of Refugee Resettlement, responsible for the disbursement of funds for refugee benefits, collects detailed data on the characteristics of refugees at the time they are initially admitted to the United States.

The Immigration and Naturalization Service collects data on refugees adjusting to lawful permanent resident status as part of its immigrant data series gathered by the Computer Linked Application Information Management Systems (CLAIMS). The data collected include demographic variables as well as immigration-oriented variables (see Immigrants section). This is the only stage in the refugee process where the INS collects detailed information about the characteristics of refugees.

Limitations of Data

After careful consideration of the reporting requirements and limitations of data collected by the INS, it was decided that the *Statistical Yearbook* would present refugee arrival statistics from the Bureau for Refugee Programs, Department of State. This source counts the actual number of refugees arriving in the United States in each fiscal year. Comparison of refugee arrival data from editions of the *Yearbook* prior to 1996 with the present

edition must be made with caution. From 1987 to 1995 refugee arrival data presented in the *Yearbook* were derived from the INS's Nonimmigrant Information System (NIIS). This system compiled refugee arrival data by country of citizenship on a monthly basis from INS Form I-94, Arrival/Departure Record (see Nonimmigrants section). However, since this system records each entry of a person with nonimmigrant status, a refugee traveling abroad and returning to the United States may be counted more than once during a fiscal year.

Refugee detailed tables are located at the end of the Asylees text section.

III. ASYLEES

This section presents information on persons who come to the United States to seek asylum from persecution abroad, including the number and characteristics of persons who filed, were granted asylum, and adjusted to lawful permanent resident status.

An asylee is an alien in the United States who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her country of nationality because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution. (See Appendix 2, p. A.2-2.) An asylee must meet the same criteria as a refugee; the only difference is the location of the person upon application—the potential asylee is in the United States or applying for admission at a port of entry, and the potential refugee is outside the United States. The Immigration and Nationality Act, as amended by the Refugee Act of 1980, regulates U.S. asylum policy as well as governing refugee procedures. The Act, for the first time, established a statutory basis for granting asylum in the United States consistent with the 1967 United Nations Protocol on Refugees.

U.S. Asylum Program

Filing of claims

Any alien physically present in the United States or at a port of entry may request asylum in the United States. According to the Refugee Act, current immigration status, whether legal or illegal, is not relevant to an applicant's asylum claim. Aliens may apply for asylum in one of two ways: with an INS asylum officer; or, if apprehended, with an immigration judge as part of a removal hearing. Traditionally, aliens who appeared at ports of entry without proper documents and requested asylum were referred for exclusion hearings; however, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996 made major revisions to the procedure, effective on April 1, 1997. Under the new law, such aliens are referred to asylum officers for credible fear interviews. These interviews are not formal asylum hearings. The purpose of the interviews is to determine whether aliens have credible fear of persecution and are thus eligible to apply for asylum before an immigration judge. In credible fear interviews, aliens only need to show that there is a significant possibility that they might qualify for asylum. To be granted asylum, aliens must show they have been persecuted in the past or have a well-founded fear of persecution. An alien may request that an immigration judge review a negative determination by the INS on a credible fear claim. The data reported in this section pertain only to asylum cases filed with INS asylum

officers. Aliens denied asylum by the INS may renew asylum claims with an immigration judge.

Adjudication of claims

On April 2, 1991, the Asylum Officer Corps (AOC) assumed responsibility within INS for the adjudication of asylum claims that were filed with the INS. Before that date, such claims had been heard by examiners in INS district offices. During fiscal year 1999, asylum officers worked from eight sites in the United States—Arlington, VA, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Miami, New York City, Newark, NJ, and San Francisco. Applicants who did not live near these locations were interviewed by asylum officers who traveled to other INS offices.

In March 1994, the INS published proposed regulations designed to streamline the asylum decision process, discourage the filing of frivolous claims, and in cases of claims that do not appear to meet the standards for granting asylum, integrate the work of asylum officers with the work of the immigration judges in the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR), an independent Justice Department agency. The final asylum reform regulations were published in December 1994, and took effect on January 4, 1995.

Under asylum reform, the INS standard is to conduct the asylum interview within 43 days after the claim is filed, and to identify and grant those cases that have merit (generally in 60 days from the date of filing the application). If the INS asylum officer does not find the claim to be grantable, the applicant is referred immediately for removal proceedings before EOIR (unless the alien is still in a legal status). The immigration judge may grant the claim or may issue a denial and an order of removal. Under this system, INS asylum officers issue relatively few denials, but an interview followed by a referral to EOIR represents the asylum officer's judgment that the application is not readily grantable. The INS will issue a denial (and cannot refer the case) when the applicant is still in a legal status. An applicant who fails without good cause to keep a scheduled appointment for an asylum interview is referred immediately to EOIR for removal proceedings; this is considered to be one type of case closure.

Beginning in 1997, the AOC also began conducting credible fear interviews as required by IIRIRA and interviewing applicants for refugee status at INS overseas locations.

More than 42,200 asylum applications were filed in the United States during 1999.

Data Overview

Applications filed (Chart D, Tables 25, 27)

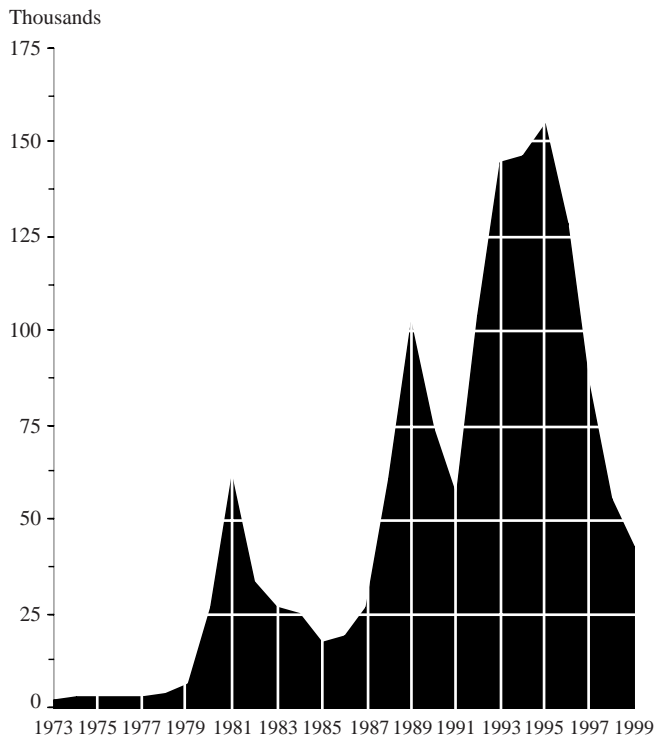
The annual number of asylum applications filed with the INS has fluctuated greatly since the effective date of the Refugee Act of 1980, as shown in Chart D. In fiscal year 1999, 42,207 asylum cases were filed or reopened. These cases involved 60,781 individuals. The number of cases declined 18 percent from the 51,176 cases filed in 1998 (Table 25). The decline in 1999 was largely due to decreases in claims filed or reopened by nationals of Guatemala, El Salvador, India, and Mexico. However, there were large increases in claims by nationals of Indonesia and Somalia.

In 1999, 32,711 new claims for asylum were filed with the INS. The People’s Republic of China, with 4,209 new claims, ranked first, followed by Somalia (3,125), Haiti (2,492), Indonesia (2,330), Mexico (2,251), and El Salvador (2,008) (Table 27). Individuals from the republics of the former Soviet Union filed 2,343 new claims; two-thirds were from Russia and Armenia. A male was the principal applicant in 62 percent (20,172) of the new claims filed. About 56 percent of all individuals involved in new claims are male.

Nearly 9,500 asylum cases were reopened in 1999, which accounted for 22 percent of the applications received (Table 27). The leading countries of nationality of the reopened cases were Guatemala (1,681), El Salvador (1,046), the People’s Republic of China (1,027), and Haiti (548). The republics of the former Soviet Union had 730 cases.

The number of reopened cases in 1999 was less than one-half of the cases reopened in 1998. An automatic function triggers the reopening of cases that were administratively closed when aliens apply for renewal of their employment authorization. Those cases were administratively closed due to a failure to appear for the asylum interview or an invalid mailing address. This function also automatically reschedules an interview. Some of these reopened cases may qualify under the terms of the American Baptist Churches (ABC) vs. Thornburgh settlement.

Chart D
Asylum Applications Filed with the INS:
Fiscal Years 1973-99



NOTE: See Glossary for fiscal year definitions. Source: Table 27.

Trends in asylum applications filed by nationals from Central America (Tables C, 27)

For over a decade, nationals from Central America dominated the annual number of asylum applications filed in the United States. From 1986 to 1992, about half of all asylum applications were filed by Central Americans. By 1993 and 1994, that percentage had fallen somewhat, but it remained at about 40 percent of the total applications filed. Then, the number of applicants from Central America surged to a new height in the next two years, well over half of all asylum applicants. A sharp decline in cases filed by Nicaraguans was later offset by a sharp increase in cases filed by Guatemalans and Salvadorans. Beginning in 1997, the numbers started a sharp decline largely due to the termination of the filing period under the terms of the American Baptist Churches (ABC) vs. Thornburgh settlement. As a result, Central Americans accounted for about 10 percent of the new claims and 16 percent of the total filed and reopened in 1999. The trend in claims from Central America is shown in Table C.

During the 1990s, the trend in asylum claims filed or reopened by nationals from Central America has been driven in large part by ABC cases. Under the terms of this

Table C
Asylum Applications Filed with the INS by Central Americans: Fiscal Years 1993-99

Area of citizenship	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Central America	54,898	62,310	104,228	83,410	21,599	13,904	6,581
El Salvador	14,616	18,600	75,860	65,588	8,156	6,345	3,054
Guatemala	34,198	34,433	23,202	13,892	9,811	5,896	2,788
Nicaragua	3,180	4,682	1,908	2,034	1,674	819	344
Honduras	2,805	4,385	3,163	1,836	1,851	809	319
Other	99	209	95	60	107	35	76

Source: Table 27; applications received and reopened during year.

1991 class action lawsuit settlement, many nationals of El Salvador and Guatemala were allowed to file or renew their claims for asylum. Nationals of Guatemala had a filing deadline of March 31, 1992, which was the peak year for claims from this country. The 187,000 Salvadorans who had registered for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) in 1991 became eligible to file for asylum at the expiration of their TPS period in 1992. They were later granted additional time under deferred enforced departure periods which extended until December 1994, and they ultimately had until January 31, 1996 to apply for asylum under the ABC agreement. The number of ABC claims filed by Salvadorans surged during fiscal year 1996 before the filing deadline. These claims are heard under the pre-reform regulations. Applications filed after the ABC filing deadline were processed as reform filings, except those ABC cases that were closed by the EOIR or federal courts and were not previously filed with the INS. Under the settlement, once the latter cases are identified by the INS, they are treated as ABC filings instead of reform filings. During 1999, 2,498 cases were identified as either filed or reopened as ABC cases.

On November 19, 1997, the Nicaraguan Adjustment and Central American Relief Act (NACARA) was signed into law. Section 203 of the NACARA permits certain Guatemalans, Salvadorans and nationals of former Soviet bloc countries to apply for suspension of deportation or special rule cancellation of removal under the more generous standards in effect before the 1996 immigration law. Individuals granted relief under NACARA are permitted to remain in the United States as lawful permanent resident aliens. All ABC class members, who are eligible for ABC benefits and have asylum applications pending with the INS, also are eligible to apply for the NACARA benefits with the INS Asylum Program.

Cases completed (Tables 25, 27, 28)

During fiscal year 1999, the Asylum Officer Corps completed work on 55,196 claims and adjudicated about 63 percent (34,544) of them (Table 25). The number of cases granted in 1999 was 13,241, representing 38.3 percent of the cases adjudicated compared to the 23.3 percent approval rate in fiscal year 1998. The 13,241 granted cases included 17,800 individuals—principals, spouses, and children (Tables 27 and 28). The leading countries of nationality were Somalia with 2,108 granted cases, Indonesia (1,120), the People’s Republic of China (940), and Ethiopia (914) (Table 27).

There are special procedures for adjudicating cases based on coercive population control. Section 601 of the IIRIRA stipulates that a person qualifies as a refugee or asylee persecuted for political opinion if forced to undergo, has a well founded fear of being compelled to undergo, or resists a coercive population-control procedure. It sets a combined annual ceiling of 1,000 persons who may be granted refugee or asylee status under this provision. Both the INS and the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) grant conditional asylee status to qualified applicants each year under this provision—status that is not subject to the 1,000 annual ceiling (currently, there are more than 1,000 conditional grants in a year). At the beginning of a new fiscal year, the INS Asylum Office issues 1,000 final grants—counted toward the annual ceiling of the previous year—to those who have received a conditional asylee status from either agency in previous fiscal years. The selection criterion for final grants is the date of the conditional grants. Those who received their conditional grants earlier would receive their final grants first. At the beginning of fiscal year 2000, the INS issued the 1,000 fiscal year 1999 final grants for asylum status to 168 individuals who received their conditional grants from the INS, 810 whose conditional grants were made by

immigration judges, and 22 whose conditional grants were made by the Board of Immigration Appeals. China was the country of origin of all grants. No one was granted refugee status in fiscal year 1999 based on coercive population-control measures.

Cases pending (Tables 27, 28)

The number of asylum cases pending for adjudication decreased about 4 percent, from 358,255 in 1998 to 342,485 in 1999. Cases filed by nationals of El Salvador (178,868), Guatemala (100,379), Haiti (15,180), and Nicaragua (13,708), accounted for about 90 percent of the pending cases. The ABC cases, which also can be handled under the NACARA provisions, comprised 90 percent of the Salvadoran and Guatemalan cases filed, and 79 percent of all pending cases. A large number of Nicaraguan and Haitian pending cases also will be eligible for the NACARA benefits.

Credible fear interviews

During fiscal year 1999, about 6,503 aliens appeared at ports of entry without proper documents and requested asylum. Most of these aliens were subsequently referred to asylum officers for credible fear interviews. Nationals of the People's Republic of China submitted the most applications (2,150), followed by Haiti (1,004) and Sri Lanka (728). These three countries accounted for almost 60 percent of all applications in 1999. Some applicants change their mind and decide to withdraw their asylum applications before a credible fear interview takes place. The Asylum Officer Corps made 5,829 credible fear determinations in 1999. The total approval rate for the cases not withdrawn was 97.9 percent.

Understanding the Data

Data Collection

Prior to April 1, 1991, data on asylum applicants reflect cases filed with INS district directors and, subsequently, cases filed with INS asylum officers on Form I-589 (Request for Asylum in the United States). A centralized, automated data system (Refugee, Asylum, and Parole System—RAPS) supports the processing of the existing caseload and new asylum applications. The system supports case tracking, schedules and controls interviews, and generates management and statistical reports. The system reports asylum casework by nationality and other characteristics of asylum applicants. Data can be reported by case or by the number of persons covered, since a case may include more than one person. Data on asylum applicants have been collected by the INS for selected nationalities since July 1980, and for all nationalities since June 1983.

As with refugees, the Immigration and Naturalization Service collects data on asylees adjusting to lawful permanent resident status in the Computer Linked Application Information Management Systems (CLAIMS) (see Immigrants section). Adjustment to immigrant status was the only point at which detailed characteristics of asylees were collected prior to 1992. The RAPS system provides data on selected characteristics of asylum seekers and asylees at an earlier time.

The number of asylum applications filed is defined here as the sum of new applications received and applications reopened during the year. Tables 27 and 28 show the number of applications that were reopened during the year. Most of these are cases that had been closed earlier without a decision. The tabulations also show the number of cases referred to immigration judges, with and without an interview. A referral due to failure to keep an appointment for an interview without good cause is considered comparable, for statistical purposes, to a closed case. The approval rate is calculated as the number of cases granted/approved divided by the number of cases adjudicated, which is defined as the cases granted/approved, denied, and referred to EOIR following an interview.

Limitations of Data

The figures shown here for fiscal year 1999 differ slightly from preliminary statistics released by the Asylum Division in November 1999. The data presented here were tabulated from the RAPS system three months after the close of the fiscal year and incorporate late additions and corrections to the database. Cases entered into the RAPS system during fiscal year 1999 with filing dates in previous fiscal years were treated as new cases in these tabulations. Other corrections resulted in a decrease from 360,247 to 358,255 in the pending caseload as reported in the 1998 *Statistical Yearbook* and at the beginning of fiscal year 1999 in this edition. Another change between 1998 and 1999 concerns the identification of applicants from the former Soviet Union. Due to improvements in data collection, only 1 new filing in 1999 was assigned to an unspecified republic.

It is possible for an asylum case to have more than one action during a year, particularly if the claimant fails to pursue a claim and later reopens it. Therefore, some claims may be double-counted as received and reopened, or closed and denied or granted. For this reason, and due to recent growth in the number of reopened claims, the pending caseload at the end of the year can no longer be calculated by taking the pending caseload at the beginning of the year, adding claims filed, and subtracting claims completed.

Data on applicants for asylum collected by the Immigration and Naturalization Service historically have covered only cases filed with the INS. Information has not been available on cases filed by aliens after the INS has placed the alien in removal proceedings before an immigration judge in the Executive Office for Immigration Review. The two agencies are working to integrate their data systems to provide these data in the future. Asylum was granted by EOIR to approximately 8,400 individuals in 1999; therefore, the total number of individuals granted asylum by both agencies was more than 26,000.

Principal applicants whose asylum applications are successful can apply for their spouses and minor children, whether they are in the United States or abroad, and these

relatives also receive status as asylees. The RAPS system collects information on the spouses and children of asylum applicants only if they are included on the principal's application. Information regarding relatives whose principals petition for them after receiving asylum is collected by the CLAIMS and is not included in any table in this publication. The total number of relatives approved for asylum after the initial appeal of their sponsors is unknown; however, approximately 1,850 relatives in the United States were granted asylee status in 1999. The data collected by the INS at the time asylees adjust to permanent resident status include all aliens who adjust regardless of whether they were granted asylum by the INS, immigration judges, or the Board of Immigration Appeals. Adjustment data also include all spouses and children of persons granted asylum.