
II. REFUGEES

This section presents information on persons who come to the United States to seek refuge from persecution abroad, including the number and characteristics of applications, approvals, arrivals, and adjustments 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.* Claims of persecution must be based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.¹ 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

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 90,000 for 1996 was allocated among geographic regions as follows:

Geographic region of origin	Ceilings
Africa	7,000
East Asia	25,000
Eastern Europe / Soviet Union	45,000
Latin America / Caribbean	6,000
Near East / South Asia	4,000
Unallocated, funded	3,000

¹ The Illegal Immigration Reform and Individual Responsibility Act of 1996, enacted September 30, 1996, Sec. 601, stipulates that a person qualifies as a refugee or asylee prosecuted for political opinion if forced to undergo, has a well-founded fear of being compelled to undergo, or resists a coercive population-control procedure. Also, the Act set a combined annual ceiling of 1,000 persons who may be granted refugee or asylee status under this provision.

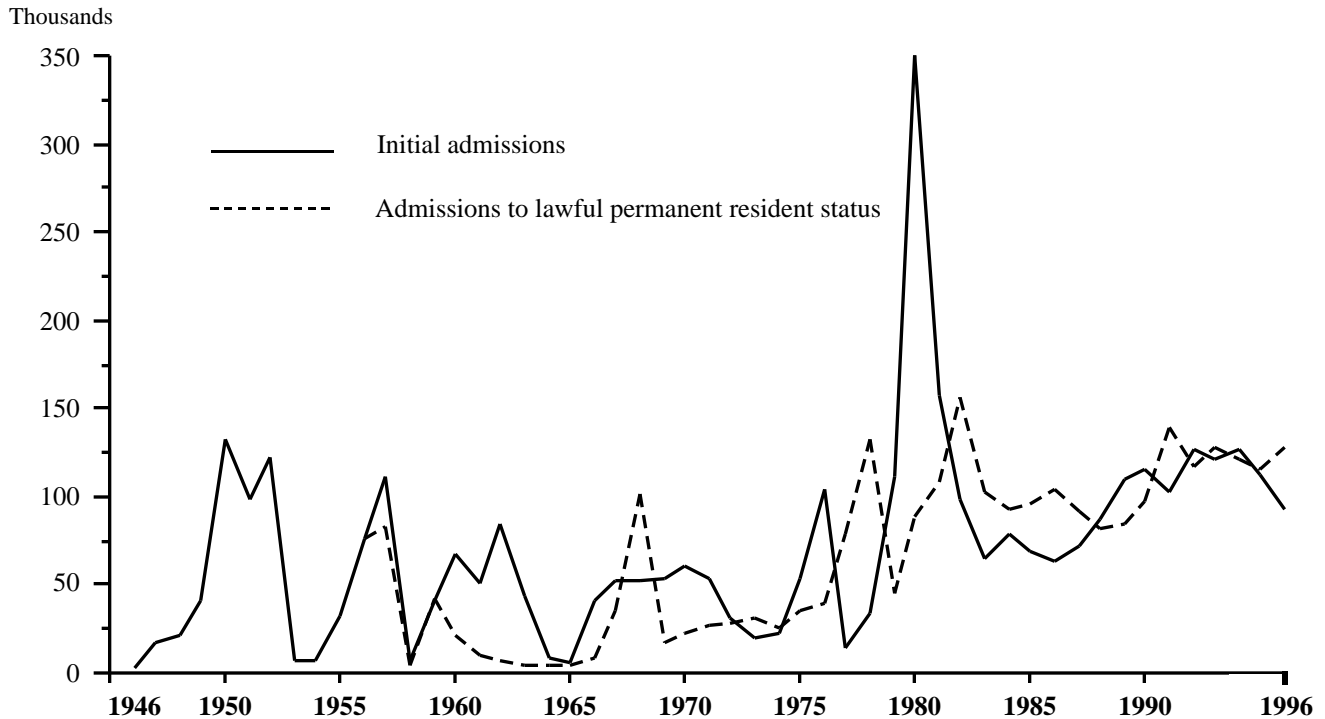
The authorized admission levels set the maximum number of refugees allowed to enter the United States in a fiscal year from each of the geographic areas of chargeability. The authorized ceiling was lowered from 112,000 in 1995 to 90,000 in 1996, continuing a downward trend since the peak of 142,000 in 1992. An unallocated funded reserve of 3,000 was placed in the 1996 ceiling to allow for small increases in one or more areas as needed without subtracting refugee numbers from other areas.

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 956 Amerasians, including their family members, entered the United States in 1996. 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.

During 1996, refugees were interviewed and approved for admission to the United States by officers in twelve of the Service's eighteen 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 122 people in 1996.

Under the Refugee Act of 1980, refugees are eligible to adjust to lawful permanent resident status, exempt from the worldwide annual limitation, after 1 year of residence in the United States. When they adjust status, their date of admission is recorded as their date of entry as refugees, so

Chart F
Refugee and Asylee Initial Admissions and Admissions to Lawful Permanent Resident Status: Fiscal Years 1946-96



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			1980	Refugee-Parolee adjustments began
11/56-7/58	Hungarians paroled	2/70-3/80	Refugee-Parolees admitted	4/80	Refugee Act admissions began
1959	Hungarian adjustments began	1/59-3/80	Cubans paroled	1981	Refugee Act adjustments began
1966-80	Refugee conditional entrants	1967	Cuban adjustments began	4/80-10/80	Mariel boatlift
				1985-87	Mariel 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 24, 28, and 31.

that the length of time spent in refugee status is counted toward the residency requirement for naturalization.

Beginning in 1990, the administrative processing of refugee applicants residing in the Soviet Union was shifted to the United States. The resulting change in the application procedure created a discontinuity with prior INS data on refugee applications. Applicants from the former Soviet 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. The 45,825 applications pending in Moscow at the end of fiscal year 1989 were administratively closed and forwarded to the WPC to receive a priority and interview date; therefore, the count of pending applications declined by this number between 1989 and 1990. The 45,825 applications were added to the pool of initial questionnaires submitted to the WPC beginning in 1990.

The number of initial questionnaires received at the WPC provides only a rough indication of the potential number of applications, because a questionnaire may include more than one person, and some potential applicants submit duplicate questionnaires. Some questionnaires never result in formal applications for refugee status, because they may exceed the yearly admissions allocated for the former Soviet Union. During fiscal year 1996, the WPC received

Table E
Refugee Status Applications Filed and Approved, and Refugees Admitted, by Selected Nationality: Fiscal Year 1996

Nationality	Refugee applications filed	Refugee applications approved	Refugee arrivals
Total	155,868	74,491	74,791
Vietnam	69,802	8,566	16,130
Soviet Union (former)	38,959	32,906	29,536
Bosnia-Herzegovina	19,242	14,654	12,030
Somalia	14,383	8,175	6,436
Iraq	4,145	2,672	2,528
Laos	3,385	3,324	2,201
Iran	2,225	1,528	1,256
Cuba	1,566	978	3,498
Sudan	498	406	575
Liberia	310	200	46
Other	1,323	1,082	555

Source: Tables 23 and 25.

32,166 questionnaires and scheduled 54,090 persons for Moscow interviews. About 24 percent of these potential applicants did not appear for their interviews. 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 21 Soviet applications were filed outside of Moscow in 1996, including 6 spouses and children who received refugee status in the United States.

Data Overview

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, to be adjusted to lawful permanent resident status at a later date.

Chart F depicts initial refugee admissions and admissions to lawful permanent resident status for the period 1946-96. 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 providing for routine adjustment of status by refugees one year after arrival.

The number of applications for refugee status filed with INS increased by 9 percent from 1995 (143,223) to 1996 (155,868). The leading countries of chargeability of the applicants were Vietnam with 45 percent of the applications, the former Soviet Union (25 percent), Bosnia-Herzegovina (12 percent), and Somalia (9 percent). In 1996 the number of applications filed by Somalis and Bosnians increased by 87 and 17 percent over the 1995 levels, respectively, while the number filed by Vietnamese was almost unchanged (Table E). Applications by former Soviet citizens also increased by 7 percent. The number of refugees approved for admission to the United States declined from 78,936 in 1995 to 74,491 in 1996. The leading countries of chargeability were the former Soviet Union with 32,906 approvals, Bosnia-Herzegovina (14,654), Vietnam (8,566), and Somalia (8,175) (Table E). These four countries accounted for 86 percent of all approvals in 1996. The number approved from the former Soviet Union dropped for the fourth straight year, following the downward trend in applications. The number of refugees approved from Vietnam declined by 62 percent in 1996, reflecting a substantial drop in the proportion of successful applications.

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 Eastern Europe in fiscal year 1996 other than from Bosnia-Herzegovina was family reunification cases, and most of the caseload from Afghanistan and Ethiopia also falls into this category. Overall, 1.9 percent of the applications and 2.5 percent of the approvals were family reunification cases.

Nearly 75,000 refugees arrived in the United States during 1996.

Refugee arrivals into the United States declined to 74,791 in 1996 from 98,520 in 1995.² The decline is largely attributed to the decrease of Vietnamese refugee arrivals. The Vietnamese refugee processing center in Hong Kong will be closed as Hong Kong reverts to Chinese rule in July 1997. The former Soviet Union, Vietnam, and Bosnia-Herzegovina are the leading countries for refugee arrivals in 1996, comprising 77 percent of the total. The time lag between approval of a refugee application and the refugee's arrival in the United States may be 6 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 (Table E).

The Nonimmigrant Information System of the Immigration and Naturalization Service has been the source of refugee arrival data for past editions of the *Statistical Yearbook*. However, arrival data shown in this edition are from the Bureau for Refugee Programs, Department of State (see Understanding the Data). Any comparison of refugee arrival data from this and any previous edition of the *Yearbook* must be made with caution.

The number of refugees adjusting to lawful permanent resident status increased by 11 percent from 1995 (106,827) to 1996 (118,528). The leading countries of birth for these refugees were: the former Soviet Union (41,482), the majority of whom were from the republics of the Ukraine (16,401), Russia (9,348), Uzbekistan (4,123),

² Refugee arrival data are from the Bureau for Refugee Programs, Department of State. See Data Collection section.

and Belarus (3,452); Vietnam (29,692); Cuba (22,134); the former Yugoslavia (7,208), most of whom were from Bosnia-Herzegovina (6,120); and Iraq (3,642). These countries accounted for 88 percent of all refugee adjustments. The number of refugees adjusting status from both Cuba and the former Yugoslavia increased significantly from 1995, 84 percent and 67 percent, respectively. Adjustments also increased slightly for refugees from the former Soviet Union (5 percent) and Vietnam (4 percent).

In order to adjust to lawful permanent resident status, a refugee must reside in the United States for 1 year in refugee status. For all refugees who adjusted status in 1996, the median length of residence in the United States was about 2 years. This analysis and others indicate that refugees tend to adjust soon after they become eligible. Nearly 80 percent of the 1996 refugee adjustment cohort entered the United States in 1994-95.

The leading states of residence for refugees (and asylees) adjusting status in 1996 were New York (24,625), Florida (23,535), California (20,233), Texas (6,415), Washington (5,271), and Illinois (5,040). These six states accounted for 66 percent of all refugee and asylee adjustments. Nearly 19 percent of all refugees and asylees who adjusted status in 1996 live in New York and about 18 percent in Florida. The leading metropolitan areas of residence for these refugees and asylees were New York (21,945), Miami (19,259), Chicago (4,832), and Los Angeles-Long Beach (4,439).

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.

Since 1987, data on refugee arrivals have been collected in the INS' Nonimmigrant Information System. The system compiles refugee arrival data by country of citizenship on a monthly basis from INS Form I-94, Arrival/Departure Record (see Nonimmigrants section).

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 the agency responsible for arranging 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 Immigrant Data Capture System (IMDAC). 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

The pending number of cases at the beginning of fiscal year 1996 shown here differ slightly from those reported at the close of fiscal year 1995. This is due to some reporting offices amending their reported numbers after the release of data for the past fiscal year.

In past editions of the *Statistical Yearbook*, refugee arrival data were derived from the Nonimmigrant Information System of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. However, refugee arrival data from this system did not meet statistical standards for fiscal year 1996. Therefore, arrival data for all years shown in this *Yearbook* were replaced with data from the Bureau for Refugee Programs, Department of State. This data series maintains statistical consistency for the time periods presented. Any comparison of refugee arrival data from this and any previous edition of the *Yearbook* must be made with caution.