

Refugees and Asylees: 2018

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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. The *2018 Refugee and Asylees Annual Flow Report*, authored by the Office of Immigration Statistics (OIS) in the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), presents information on persons admitted to the United States as refugees and those who entered the U.S. asylum process in 2018.¹

A total of 22,405 persons² were admitted to the United States as refugees during 2018. The leading countries of nationality for refugees admitted during this period were the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burma, and Ukraine. An additional 38,687 individuals were granted asylum during 2018,³ including 25,439 individuals who were granted asylum affirmatively by DHS,⁴ and 13,248 individuals who were granted asylum defensively by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). The leading countries of nationality for persons granted either affirmative or defensive asylum were the People's Republic of China (China), Venezuela, and El Salvador. Travel documents were issued to 6,304 individuals who were approved for derivative asylum, allowing their admission to the United States. In addition to those approved overseas, 3,886 individuals were approved for derivative asylum status while residing in 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 nationality, or of last habitual residence if stateless, and who is unable or unwilling to

avail himself or herself of the protection of that country, 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.⁵ Applicants for refugee status are outside the United States, whereas applicants seeking asylum are either in the United States or arriving at a U.S. port of entry (POE).

To meet the INA's refugee definition, a person must be outside their country of nationality, unless the person has no nationality and or is considered “stateless”, 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 2018, certain nationals of Cuba, Eurasia, and the Baltics were re-designated for in-country processing, as were qualified Iraqis with links to the United States and Iranians belonging to religious minority groups. The program for children from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras (Northern Triangle countries) through the Central American Minors (CAM) program⁶ was phased out in early 2018. 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.

¹ In this report, a year refers to a fiscal year (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 fathered by a U.S. citizen), whereas the DHS reports Amerasians as lawful permanent residents.

³ USCIS asylum grants include principal applicant as well as accompanying spouse and unmarried children under 21 years of age. They do not 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 2018 were retrieved by OIS in January 2019. Data in this report may differ slightly from fiscal year-end 2018 numbers retrieved and reported at different times by DHS's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) Asylum Division.

⁵ 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.

⁶ The CAM Program provided eligible family members from the Northern Triangle countries the ability to apply for refugee status from abroad.



Homeland
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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 could not return. By 1952, the United States had admitted over 400,000 displaced people under the Act. The United States extended 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 over 38,000 Hungarian nationals beginning in 1956 and over a million Indochinese beginning in 1975.

Obligations of the United States 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 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.

Table 1.

Proposed and Actual Refugee Admissions by Regions: 2016 to 2018¹

| Region | 2016 | | 2017 | | 2018 | |
|-----------------------------------|---------|------------|---------|------------|---------|------------|
| | Ceiling | Admissions | Ceiling | Admissions | Ceiling | Admissions |
| Total | 85,000 | 84,988 | 110,000 | 53,691 | 45,000 | 22,405 |
| Africa | 25,000 | 31,624 | 35,000 | 20,232 | 19,000 | 10,459 |
| East Asia | 13,000 | 12,512 | 12,000 | 5,148 | 5,000 | 3,582 |
| Europe/Central Asia | 4,000 | 3,957 | 4,000 | 5,205 | 2,000 | 3,612 |
| Latin America/Caribbean | 3,000 | 1,340 | 5,000 | 1,688 | 1,500 | 955 |
| Near East/South Asia | 34,000 | 35,555 | 40,000 | 21,418 | 17,500 | 3,797 |
| Unallocated Reserve | 6,000 | – | 14,000 | – | – | – |

– Represents zero.

¹ Ceiling and admission numbers reflect revisions made each fiscal year.

Source: U.S. Department of State.

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.⁷ In 2018, the refugee ceiling was decreased to 45,000 of which 22,405 (50 percent) were admitted. This was a 59 percent decrease from the previous year and a 47 percent decrease from the 2016 allocation.

⁷ 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.

The largest regional allocations in 2018 were to the Africa and Near East/South Asia regions (Table 1). These two regions together accounted for more than two-thirds (64 percent) of all refugee admissions to the United States.

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. 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 a principal refugee applicant or an admitted refugee. Any person who has 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 ineligible for refugee status, including as a derivative refugee.

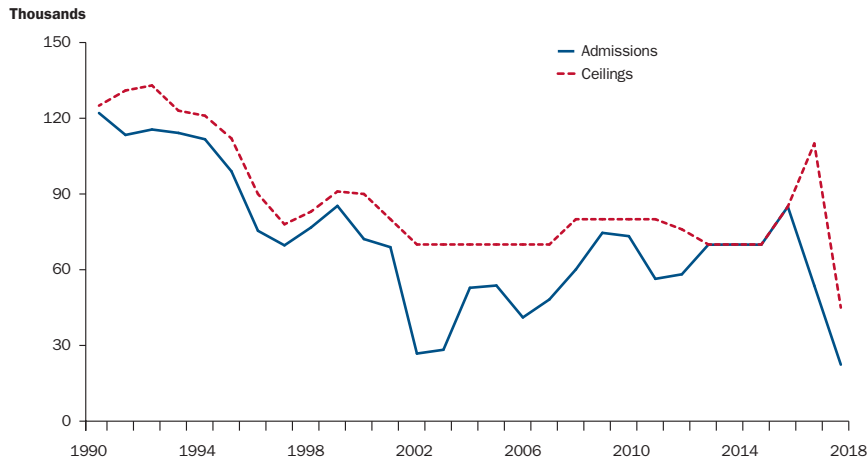
Refugee Application Process

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 Commission on Refugees (UNHCR), a U.S. Embassy, or certain non-governmental organizations (NGO); Priority 2 (P-2)—groups of special humanitarian concern; and Priority 3 (P-3)—family reunification cases. 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 DOS, conducts pre-screening interviews with the applicants. A USCIS officer then interviews applicants and accompanying derivatives to determine eligibility for resettlement in the United States. Multiple security checks must be completed before a request for refugee status is approved. Additionally, applicants must also undergo a medical exam.

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.

Figure 1.

Refugee Admissions and Proposed Ceilings to the United States: FY 1990 to 2018



Source: U.S. Department of State.

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 DOS.

TRENDS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF REFUGEES

In 2018, the United States admitted 22,405 refugees, a 58 percent decrease from the previous year. Refugee admissions under the current legal framework peaked at 122,066 in 1990 and then declined during the 1990s, as the refugee program’s focus shifted to more diverse populations 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 74,602 in 2009. After a brief decrease from 2009 to 2011, refugee admissions began to increase sharply again in 2012, reaching another peak of 84,988 in 2016, the highest in 17 years, reflecting increased staffing and improved synchronization of security and medical checks for refugee families (Figure 1).

The spouse and unmarried children under the age of 21 of a principal refugee may obtain refugee status as an accompanying derivative.⁸ Accompanying derivatives may enter the United States with the principal refugee or within four months after the principal refugee’s admission.⁹ A spouse or child who joins the principal refugee more than four months after admission to the United States is a follow-to-join derivative. Principal refugees may petition for follow-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*,¹⁰ for each qualifying follow-to-join derivative family member. These beneficiaries are not required to demonstrate an independent refugee claim. Once a 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.

Category of Admission

In 2018, the majority of refugees were admitted under P-1 processing (54 percent)—individuals referred by the UNHCR, a U.S. Embassy, or certain NGOs—and P-2 processing (43 percent)—groups of special humanitarian concern (Table 2). P-3 processing (family reunification cases) constituted 0.4 percent of refugees admitted. Principal refugees accounted for 9,000 (40 percent) of the 22,405 refugees admitted to the

Table 2.

Refugee Arrivals by Relationship to Principal Applicant and Case Priority: FY 2016 to 2018

| Category of admission and case priority | 2016 | | 2017 | | 2018 | |
|--|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|
| | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| RELATIONSHIP TO PRINCIPAL APPLICANT | | | | | | |
| Total | 84,988 | 100.0 | 53,691 | 100.0 | 22,405 | 100.0 |
| Principal Applicant | 31,563 | 37.1 | 21,507 | 40.1 | 9,000 | 40.2 |
| Dependents | 53,425 | 62.9 | 32,184 | 59.9 | 13,405 | 59.8 |
| Spouse | 12,525 | 14.7 | 7,506 | 14.0 | 2,842 | 12.7 |
| Child | 40,900 | 48.1 | 24,678 | 46.0 | 10,563 | 47.1 |
| CASE PRIORITY | | | | | | |
| Total | 84,988 | 100.0 | 53,691 | 100.0 | 22,405 | 100.0 |
| Priority 1 | 54,047 | 63.6 | 33,291 | 62.0 | 12,001 | 53.6 |
| Priority 2 | 28,901 | 34.0 | 18,477 | 34.4 | 9,592 | 42.8 |
| Priority 3 | 459 | 0.5 | 244 | 0.5 | 95 | 0.4 |
| Follow-to-join beneficiaries | 1,582 | 1.9 | 1,679 | 3.1 | 717 | 3.2 |

Source: U.S. Department of State.

⁸ 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). A derivative child must remain unmarried until the time of admission to qualify.

⁹ In practice, the vast majority of accompanying derivative refugees enter the United States with the principal refugee.

¹⁰ The petition is used to file for relatives of refugees and asylees. The USRAP program handles only refugee follow-to-join petitions, which are counted within the annual refugee ceiling. Asylum follow-to-join petitions are processed by USCIS and are not counted in the annual admission ceilings.

United States in 2018. Accompanying spouses and dependent children represented 13 and 47 percent, respectively, of refugee admissions. There were 717 follow-to-join refugee beneficiaries (about three percent of total refugee admissions).

Country of Nationality

In 2018, the leading countries of nationality for individuals admitted as refugees were the Democratic Republic of the Congo (35 percent), Burma (16 percent), Ukraine (12 percent), Bhutan (10 percent), and Eritrea (six percent) (Table 3). These top five countries made up 78 percent of total refugee admissions.

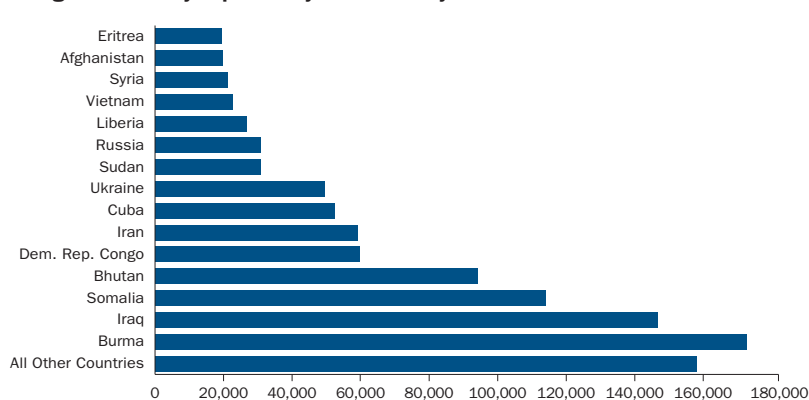
Since the inception of the refugee program, the number and nationalities of refugees admitted to the United States changed as U.S. policies evolved and new conflicts around the world arose. Since 2000 (the earliest year for which we have microdata), the United States has admitted more than a million refugees (1,085,483) from around the world. Sixteen percent (173,735) have been from Burma, 14 percent (147,786) from Iraq, and 11 percent (114,719) from Somalia (Figure 2).

Table 3.
Refugee Arrivals by Country of Nationality: FY 2016 to 2018
(Ranked by 2018 country of nationality)

| Country of nationality | 2016 | | 2017 | | 2018 | |
|---|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|
| | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| Total | 84,988 | 100.0 | 53,691 | 100.0 | 22,405 | 100.0 |
| Dem. Rep. Congo | 16,370 | 19.3 | 9,377 | 17.5 | 7,878 | 35.2 |
| Burma | 12,347 | 14.5 | 5,078 | 9.5 | 3,555 | 15.9 |
| Ukraine | 2,543 | 3.0 | 4,264 | 7.9 | 2,635 | 11.8 |
| Bhutan | 5,817 | 6.8 | 3,550 | 6.6 | 2,228 | 9.9 |
| Eritrea | 1,949 | 2.3 | 1,917 | 3.6 | 1,269 | 5.7 |
| Afghanistan | 2,737 | 3.2 | 1,311 | 2.4 | 805 | 3.6 |
| El Salvador | 364 | 0.4 | 1,124 | 2.1 | 725 | 3.2 |
| Pakistan | 545 | 0.6 | 346 | 0.6 | 441 | 2.0 |
| Russia | 462 | 0.5 | 377 | 0.7 | 437 | 2.0 |
| Ethiopia | 1,131 | 1.3 | 766 | 1.4 | 376 | 1.7 |
| All other countries, including unknown. | 40,723 | 47.9 | 25,581 | 47.6 | 2,056 | 9.2 |

Source: U.S. Department of State.

Figure 2.
Refugee Arrivals by Top Country of Nationality: Fiscal Years 2000 to 2018



Source: U.S. Department of State.

Age, Sex, and Marital Status

More than three-quarters of refugees admitted to the United States in 2018 were under 35 years of age, and three out of seven were children (Table 4). Refugees tend to be relatively younger than the native-born population, with a median age of 20 years for those arriving in 2018, compared to a median age of 38 years for the native-born population.¹¹ Refugee median age varies widely by region and country of birth: refugees from Africa had the lowest median age of 17 years, while those from the Near East/South Asia had the highest median age of 25. Roughly an equal number of male and female refugees were admitted in 2018, and 31 percent of adults were married at arrival.

State of Initial Resettlement

In 2018, more than half of admitted refugees (53 percent) were resettled in the top ten resettling states (Table 5). Texas, Washington, and Ohio resettled the most refugees (seven, seven, and six percent of admitted refugees, respectively) while North and South Dakota, and Vermont resettled the most refugees per capita (Figure 3). Iraqi and Somali refugees were among the top nationalities resettled in all three states, while Ukrainian refugees were the top nationality resettled in Washington.

Lawful Permanent Residence and Naturalization of Refugees

One year after being admitted to the United States, refugees are statutorily required to apply for lawful permanent resident (LPR) status. Of those arriving between 2000 and 2016, 96 percent gained LPR status by the end of 2018.¹² Refugees granted LPR status may apply for naturalization five years after their admission as refugees. Refugees have some of the highest naturalization rates of all immigrants: of the adult refugees who obtained LPR status between 2000 and 2010, 60 percent naturalized within six years and 73 within ten years.¹³ For comparison, non-refugee immigrants who obtained LPR status between 2000 and 2010 had six- and ten-year naturalization rates of 29 and 49 percent, respectively.

¹¹ Calculated from the March 2017 Current Population Survey public use microdata file from the U.S. Census Bureau.

¹² Although the majority of refugees apply for LPR status one year after admission, due to operational and other factors, processing time can vary widely for those who apply.

¹³ The data were restricted to immigrants who were 18 years of age and older when LPR status was obtained. More recent cohorts, with less time spent in LPR status, tend to have lower cumulative naturalization rates.

Table 4.

Refugee Arrivals by Age, Sex, and Marital Status: FY 2016 to 2018

| Characteristic | 2016 | | 2017 | | 2018 | |
|--------------------------------|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|
| | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| AGE | | | | | | |
| Total | 84,988 | 100.0 | 53,691 | 100.0 | 22,405 | 100.0 |
| 0 to 17 years . . | 37,710 | 44.4 | 22,884 | 42.6 | 9,722 | 43.4 |
| 18 to 24 years . | 11,335 | 13.3 | 7,874 | 14.7 | 3,465 | 15.5 |
| 25 to 34 years . | 15,550 | 18.3 | 9,570 | 17.8 | 3,862 | 17.2 |
| 35 to 44 years . | 10,315 | 12.1 | 6,290 | 11.7 | 2,491 | 11.1 |
| 45 to 54 years . | 5,365 | 6.3 | 3,663 | 6.8 | 1,493 | 6.7 |
| 55 to 64 years . | 2,807 | 3.3 | 2,058 | 3.8 | 781 | 3.5 |
| 65 years and over | 1,906 | 2.2 | 1,352 | 2.5 | 591 | 2.6 |
| SEX | | | | | | |
| Total | 84,988 | 100.0 | 53,691 | 100.0 | 22,405 | 100.0 |
| Female | 41,727 | 49.1 | 26,979 | 50.2 | 11,099 | 49.5 |
| Male | 43,261 | 50.9 | 26,712 | 49.8 | 11,306 | 50.5 |
| MARITAL STATUS | | | | | | |
| Total | 84,988 | 100.0 | 53,691 | 100.0 | 22,405 | 100.0 |
| Married ¹ | 28,241 | 33.2 | 17,525 | 32.6 | 6,891 | 30.8 |
| Single ² | 52,578 | 61.9 | 33,241 | 61.9 | 14,405 | 64.3 |
| Other ³ | 4,169 | 4.9 | 2,925 | 5.4 | 1,109 | 4.9 |

¹ Includes persons in common law marriage.
² Includes persons who were engaged and not yet married.
³ Includes persons who were divorced, separated, widowed, or of unknown marital status.
 Source: U.S. Department of State.

Table 5.

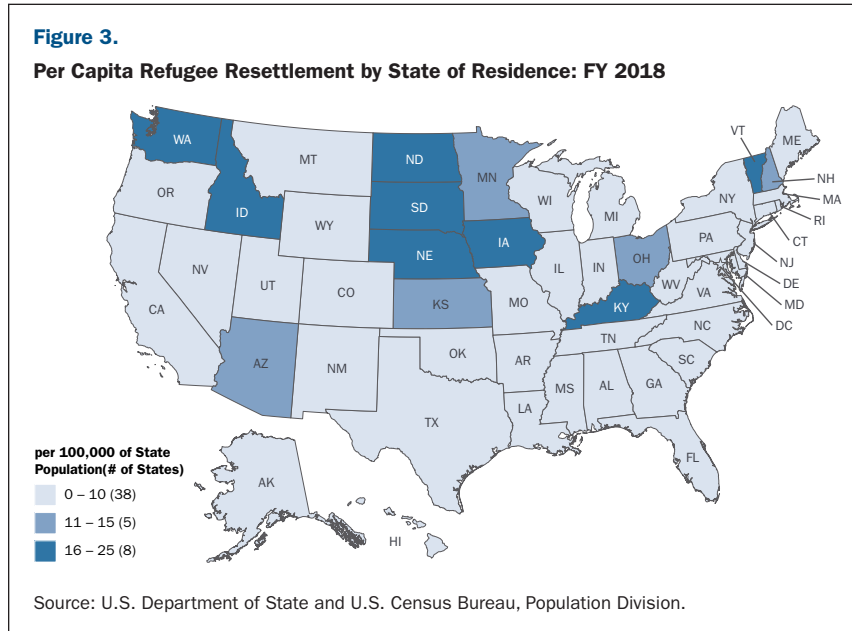
Refugee Arrivals by State of Residence: FY 2016 to 2018
 (Ranked by 2018 state of residence)

| State of residence | 2016 | | 2017 | | 2018 | |
|----------------------|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|
| | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| Total | 84,988 | 100.0 | 53,691 | 100.0 | 22,405 | 100.0 |
| Texas | 7,802 | 9.2 | 4,765 | 8.9 | 1,669 | 7.4 |
| Washington | 3,230 | 3.8 | 2,920 | 5.4 | 1,537 | 6.9 |
| Ohio | 4,194 | 4.9 | 2,867 | 5.3 | 1,408 | 6.3 |
| California | 7,909 | 9.3 | 5,160 | 9.6 | 1,362 | 6.1 |
| New York | 5,026 | 5.9 | 3,098 | 5.8 | 1,281 | 5.7 |
| Arizona | 4,107 | 4.8 | 2,249 | 4.2 | 998 | 4.5 |
| North Carolina . . | 3,342 | 3.9 | 1,916 | 3.6 | 934 | 4.2 |
| Pennsylvania . . . | 3,219 | 3.8 | 2,147 | 4.0 | 906 | 4.0 |
| Kentucky | 2,405 | 2.8 | 1,618 | 3.0 | 896 | 4.0 |
| Georgia | 3,017 | 3.5 | 1,869 | 3.5 | 833 | 3.7 |
| Other | 40,737 | 47.9 | 25,082 | 46.7 | 10,581 | 47.2 |

Source: U.S. Department of State.

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 DOJ’s 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 21¹⁴ 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 follow-to-join benefits for qualifying derivatives up to two years after he or she was granted asylum, as long as the relationship between principal spouse and/or child existed on the date the principal was granted asylum.¹⁵ 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.



ASYLEES

Filing of Claims

Generally, any foreign national present in the United States or arriving at a POE 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

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,

¹⁴ See reference to Child Status Protection Act, n. 8, *supra*.
¹⁵ In practice, the vast majority of derivative asylum status beneficiaries receive follow-to-join benefits.

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 illegally present, are in violation of their status when apprehended, or were apprehended while attempting to illegally enter into the United States. Defensive 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 U.S. Supreme Court.

Asylum follow-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 abroad at the time of petition are granted derivative asylum when admitted into the United States at a POE.

Lawful Permanent Residence and Citizenship

One year after being granted asylum, asylees are eligible to apply for LPR status along with qualifying family members who meet 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.¹⁶

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. Follow-to-join asylum derivative data for people residing outside the United States at the time of their admission were obtained from the Case and Activity Management

¹⁶ 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.

for International Operations (CAMINO) system of USCIS and the Consular Consolidated Database (CCD) of DOS. These data reflect travel documents issued, not admissions. Follow-to-join data for people residing within the United States at the time of the approval of their I-730 petition were obtained from the Computer-Linked Application Information Management System (CLAIMS) of USCIS.

TRENDS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF ASYLEES

Asylum Filings

Affirmative asylum filings with USCIS decreased by 25 percent from an estimated 139,800 applications in 2017 to 105,500 in 2018.¹⁷ Venezuelan applications continued to rise making up a quarter of total applications in 2018, while applications from Chinese nationals decreased sharply by 52 percent (Table 6a).¹⁸ The number of affirmative asylum applications filed by individuals from Central America's Northern Triangle countries (El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras) fell by 19 percent in 2018 from a record high of 31,100 applications in 2017. Unaccompanied children continue to make up the majority of affirmative asylum applications from the Northern Triangle countries, making up 56 percent in both 2016 and 2017 and 60 percent in 2018.

Total number of defensive asylum applications filed with EOIR increased for the fourth consecutive year, from 47,137 applications in 2014 to 159,473 in 2018. Similar to last year, the largest numbers of applications filed with the courts were from citizens of the Northern Triangle countries (78,762) and Mexico (24,412) (Table 6b). These four countries made up over a third (65 percent) of all defensive asylum applications filed with EOIR.

¹⁷ These include principal applicants only. There were an additional 55,089 dependents.

¹⁸ Venezuelan applications exceeded Chinese applications by 251 percent; with the exceptions of 2017 and 2018, China has been the top country of origin for affirmative asylum seekers in the United States for each of the last 13 years.

Table 6a.

Affirmative Asylum Cases Filed (USCIS) by Country of Nationality: FY 2016 to 2018
(Ranked by 2018 country of nationality)

| Country | 2016 | | 2017 | | 2018 | |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| Total | 115,356 | 100.0 | 139,777 | 100.0 | 105,472 | 100.0 |
| Venezuela | 14,795 | 12.8 | 27,587 | 19.7 | 28,401 | 26.9 |
| Guatemala | 10,722 | 9.3 | 12,178 | 8.7 | 10,119 | 9.6 |
| El Salvador | 9,447 | 8.2 | 11,922 | 8.5 | 9,096 | 8.6 |
| China, Peoples Republic | 16,512 | 14.3 | 16,781 | 12.0 | 8,101 | 7.7 |
| Mexico | 14,651 | 12.7 | 11,941 | 8.5 | 6,598 | 6.3 |
| Honduras | 5,699 | 4.9 | 6,989 | 5.0 | 6,111 | 5.8 |
| Nigeria | 919 | 0.8 | 2,243 | 1.6 | 3,328 | 3.2 |
| Haiti | 3,004 | 2.6 | 3,864 | 2.8 | 2,942 | 2.8 |
| India | 3,227 | 2.8 | 4,053 | 2.9 | 2,891 | 2.7 |
| Colombia | 1,394 | 1.2 | 2,657 | 1.9 | 2,556 | 2.4 |
| All Other Nations | 34,986 | 30.3 | 39,562 | 28.3 | 25,329 | 24.0 |

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Asylum Grants

The total number of persons granted asylum in the United States increased 46 percent from 26,509 in 2017 to 38,687 in 2018. The number of persons granted asylum affirmatively through USCIS increased by 61 percent while the number of persons granted asylum defensively by an immigration judge increased by 24 percent (Figure 4).

Country of Nationality

In 2018, the three leading countries of nationality of persons granted either affirmative or defensive asylum were China (18 percent), Venezuela (16 percent), and El Salvador (7.7 percent) (Table 7). Nationals of these countries accounted for 41 percent of all persons granted asylum. Venezuela experienced the largest increase, eleven fold since 2017 and 18 fold since 2016, driven mainly by affirmative asylum grants (Table 8).

Table 6b.

Defensive Asylum Cases (EOIR) Received by Country of Nationality: FY 2016 to 2018

(Ranked by 2018 country of nationality)

| Country | 2016 | | 2017 | | 2018 | |
|--|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| Total | 81,730 | 100.0 | 142,971 | 100.0 | 159,473 | 100.0 |
| El Salvador | 19,521 | 23.9 | 37,489 | 26.2 | 31,371 | 19.7 |
| Guatemala | 13,024 | 15.9 | 23,511 | 16.4 | 26,055 | 16.3 |
| Mexico | 15,673 | 19.2 | 22,340 | 15.6 | 24,412 | 15.3 |
| Honduras | 11,883 | 14.5 | 20,974 | 14.7 | 21,336 | 13.4 |
| China, People's Republic | 3,912 | 4.8 | 6,272 | 4.4 | 8,028 | 5.0 |
| India | 2,572 | 3.1 | 4,705 | 3.3 | 7,717 | 4.8 |
| Venezuela | 253 | 0.3 | 412 | 0.3 | 5,043 | 3.2 |
| Ecuador | 2,148 | 2.6 | 3,977 | 2.8 | 3,975 | 2.5 |
| Haiti | 542 | 0.7 | 4,136 | 2.9 | 2,572 | 1.6 |
| Brazil | 494 | 0.6 | 1,492 | 1.0 | 2,282 | 1.4 |
| All other countries, including unknown | 11,708 | 14.3 | 17,663 | 12.4 | 26,682 | 16.7 |

Source: U.S. Department of Justice.

The number of persons granted asylum defensively by an EOIR immigration judge increased 24 percent from 10,663 in 2017 to 13,248 in 2018. The leading countries of nationality for persons granted defensive asylum were China (23 percent), El Salvador (14 percent), and Honduras and Guatemala (9.0 and 7.7 percent, respectively) (Table 9). Fifty-three percent of those granted asylum defensively in 2018 were nationals of these countries.

The leading countries of nationality for follow-to-join asylees authorized for travel to the United States in 2018 were China (26 percent), India (8.9 percent), Nepal (7.5 percent), and Ethiopia (6.5 percent) (Table 10). Nationals of these four countries accounted for almost half of all follow-to-join derivative relatives issued travel documents prior to their admission into the United States. Additionally, 3,886 individuals were approved for derivative asylum status while residing in the United States.

Age, Sex, and Marital Status

In 2018, 63 percent of persons granted affirmative asylum were between the ages of 18 and 44 (Table 11). Like refugees, affirmative asylees are, on average, younger than the native-born U.S. population: the median age of persons granted affirmative asylum in 2018 was 29 years, compared to 38 for the native-born population. Fifty-one percent were male, and 52 percent of adults were married. More than half of follow-to-join beneficiaries were under the age of 18 (52 percent). The median age of follow-to-join beneficiaries was 18 years (Table 12). Data on marital status are not available for this group.

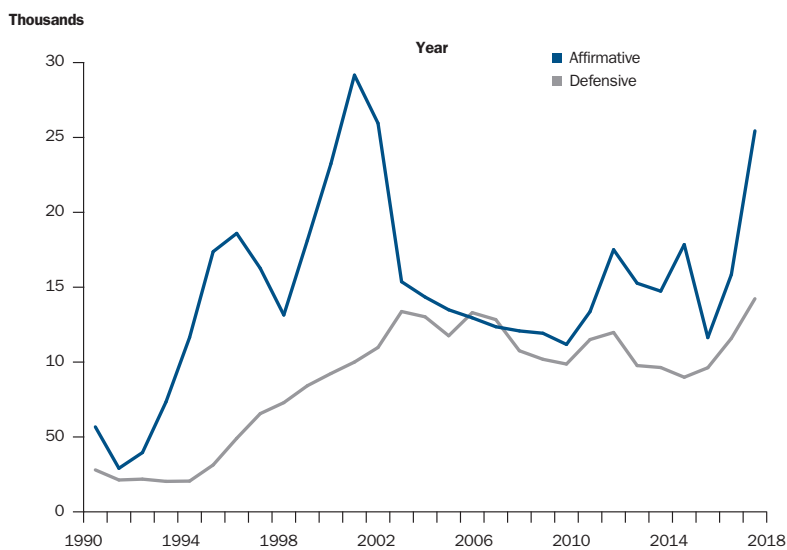
State of Residence

Leading states of residence for individuals granted asylum affirmatively were California (33 percent), Florida (13 percent), and New York (8.2 percent) (Table 13). More than half (54 percent) of individuals granted affirmative asylum in 2018 resided in these three states. Per capita, the leading areas include California, Hawaii, and the District of Columbia, with 19, 12, and 10 recipients per 100,000 residents, respectively.

State of residence data are not available for defensive or follow-to-join asylees.

Figure 4.

Annual Grants of Affirmative and Defensive Asylum: FY 1990 to 2018



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 or Defensively by Country of Nationality: FY 2016 to 2018**

(Ranked by 2018 country of nationality)

| Country | 2016 | | 2017 | | 2018 | |
|--|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|
| | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| Total | 20,362 | 100.0 | 26,509 | 100.0 | 38,687 | 100.0 |
| China, People's Republic | 4,495 | 22.1 | 5,615 | 21.2 | 6,905 | 17.8 |
| Venezuela | 343 | 1.7 | 549 | 2.1 | 6,087 | 15.7 |
| El Salvador | 2,144 | 10.5 | 3,476 | 13.1 | 2,963 | 7.7 |
| Guatemala | 1,921 | 9.4 | 2,949 | 11.1 | 2,358 | 6.1 |
| Honduras | 1,474 | 7.2 | 2,045 | 7.7 | 2,029 | 5.2 |
| Egypt | 827 | 4.1 | 1,161 | 4.4 | 1,591 | 4.1 |
| Mexico | 904 | 4.4 | 1,042 | 3.9 | 1,361 | 3.5 |
| India | 479 | 2.4 | 685 | 2.6 | 1,327 | 3.4 |
| Russia | 284 | 1.4 | 344 | 1.3 | 906 | 2.3 |
| Syria | 724 | 3.6 | 758 | 2.9 | 714 | 1.8 |
| All other countries, including unknown | 6,767 | 33.2 | 7,885 | 29.7 | 12,446 | 32.2 |

Note: Data exclude follow-to-join asylees.

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

Table 8.**Individuals Granted Asylum Affirmatively by Country of Nationality: FY 2016 to 2018**

(Ranked by 2018 country of nationality)

| Country | 2016 | | 2017 | | 2018 | |
|--|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|
| | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| Total | 11,634 | 100.0 | 15,846 | 100.0 | 25,439 | 100.0 |
| Venezuela | 316 | 2.7 | 482 | 3.0 | 5,966 | 23.5 |
| China, People's Republic | 1,387 | 11.9 | 2,820 | 17.8 | 3,844 | 15.1 |
| Egypt | 679 | 5.8 | 1,020 | 6.4 | 1,427 | 5.6 |
| Guatemala | 1,285 | 11.0 | 1,996 | 12.6 | 1,337 | 5.3 |
| El Salvador | 1,380 | 11.9 | 2,121 | 13.4 | 1,177 | 4.6 |
| Honduras | 856 | 7.4 | 1,089 | 6.9 | 841 | 3.3 |
| Russia | 204 | 1.8 | 286 | 1.8 | 787 | 3.1 |
| Mexico | 449 | 3.9 | 485 | 3.1 | 732 | 2.9 |
| Syria | 646 | 5.6 | 614 | 3.9 | 558 | 2.2 |
| Turkey | 11 | 0.1 | 17 | 0.1 | 501 | 2.0 |
| All other countries, including unknown | 4,421 | 38.0 | 4,916 | 31.0 | 8,269 | 32.5 |

Note: Data exclude follow-to-join asylees.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Table 9.**Individuals Granted Asylum Defensively by Country of Nationality: FY 2016 to 2018**

(Ranked by 2018 country of nationality)

| Country | 2016 | | 2017 | | 2018 | |
|--|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|
| | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| Total | 8,728 | 100.0 | 10,663 | 100.0 | 13,248 | 100.0 |
| China, People's Republic | 3,108 | 35.6 | 2,795 | 26.2 | 3,061 | 23.1 |
| El Salvador | 764 | 8.8 | 1,355 | 12.7 | 1,786 | 13.5 |
| Honduras | 618 | 7.1 | 956 | 9.0 | 1,188 | 9.0 |
| Guatemala | 636 | 7.3 | 953 | 8.9 | 1,021 | 7.7 |
| India | 315 | 3.6 | 470 | 4.4 | 956 | 7.2 |
| Mexico | 455 | 5.2 | 557 | 5.2 | 629 | 4.7 |
| Nepal | 262 | 3.0 | 292 | 2.7 | 468 | 3.5 |
| Cameroon | 114 | 1.3 | 221 | 2.1 | 316 | 2.4 |
| Bangladesh | 91 | 1.0 | 119 | 1.1 | 289 | 2.2 |
| Eritrea | 149 | 1.7 | 239 | 2.2 | 272 | 2.1 |
| All other countries, including unknown | 2,216 | 25.4 | 2,706 | 25.4 | 3,262 | 24.6 |

Note: Data exclude follow-to-join asylees.

Source: U.S. Department of Justice.

Naturalization of Asylees

Ninety-two percent of those granted affirmative asylum between 2000 and 2016 gained LPR status by the end of 2018. Similar to refugees, asylees have some of the highest naturalization rates of all immigrants. Of the adults granted asylum (affirmative and defensive) who gained LPR status between 2000 and 2010, 58 percent naturalized within six years and 73 percent within ten years.¹⁹

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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

¹⁹ See Supplemental Table: Asylum Workload by Top Twenty Nationalities: 2018, available in the OIS reading room (<https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/readingroom>) for more details.

Table 10.

**Follow-to-join Asylee Travel Documents Issued by Country of Nationality:
FY 2016 to 2018**

(Ranked by 2018 country of nationality)

| Country | 2016 | | 2017 | | 2018 | |
|--|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|
| | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| Total | 9,684 | 100.0 | 7,896 | 100.0 | 6,304 | 100.0 |
| China, People's Republic | 3,209 | 33.1 | 1,895 | 24.0 | 1,657 | 26.3 |
| India | 641 | 6.6 | 725 | 9.2 | 560 | 8.9 |
| Nepal | 467 | 4.8 | 514 | 6.5 | 472 | 7.5 |
| Ethiopia | 592 | 6.1 | 445 | 5.6 | 409 | 6.5 |
| Guatemala | 452 | 4.7 | 458 | 5.8 | 392 | 6.2 |
| El Salvador | 271 | 2.8 | 393 | 5.0 | 336 | 5.3 |
| Haiti | 666 | 6.9 | 593 | 7.5 | 268 | 4.3 |
| Cameroon | 340 | 3.5 | 260 | 3.3 | 172 | 2.7 |
| Pakistan | 212 | 2.2 | 182 | 2.3 | 136 | 2.2 |
| Egypt | 305 | 3.1 | 184 | 2.3 | 132 | 2.1 |
| Eritrea | 54 | 0.6 | 70 | 0.9 | 103 | 1.6 |
| All other countries, including unknown | 2,475 | 25.6 | 2,177 | 27.6 | 1,667 | 26.4 |

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

Table 11.

**Individuals Granted Asylum Affirmatively by Age, Sex, and Marital Status:
FY 2016 to 2018**

| Characteristic | 2016 | | 2017 | | 2018 | |
|-----------------------------|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|
| | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| AGE | | | | | | |
| Total | 11,634 | 100.0 | 15,846 | 100.0 | 25,439 | 100.0 |
| 0 to 17 years | 3,656 | 31.5 | 4,940 | 31.2 | 5,977 | 23.5 |
| 18 to 24 years | 2,076 | 17.7 | 3,099 | 19.5 | 4,037 | 15.9 |
| 25 to 34 years | 2,718 | 23.4 | 3,458 | 21.7 | 6,626 | 26.0 |
| 35 to 44 years | 1,860 | 16.0 | 2,624 | 16.6 | 5,406 | 21.3 |
| 45 to 54 years | 865 | 7.5 | 1,209 | 7.7 | 2,375 | 9.3 |
| 55 to 64 years | 295 | 2.5 | 362 | 2.3 | 742 | 2.9 |
| 65 years and over | 164 | 1.4 | 154 | 1.0 | 276 | 1.1 |
| SEX | | | | | | |
| Total | 11,634 | 100.0 | 15,846 | 100.0 | 25,439 | 100.0 |
| Female | 5,407 | 46.4 | 7,541 | 47.6 | 12,483 | 49.1 |
| Male | 6,227 | 53.6 | 8,305 | 52.4 | 12,956 | 50.9 |
| MARITAL STATUS | | | | | | |
| Total | 11,634 | 100.0 | 15,846 | 100.0 | 25,439 | 100.0 |
| Married | 7,370 | 63.3 | 10,059 | 63.4 | 14,154 | 55.6 |
| Single | 3,870 | 33.3 | 5,225 | 33.1 | 10,142 | 39.9 |
| Other* | 394 | 3.4 | 562 | 3.5 | 1,143 | 4.5 |

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

Note: Data exclude follow-to-join asylees.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Table 12.**Follow-to-join Asylee Travel Documents Issued by Age and Sex: FY 2016 to 2018**

| Characteristic | 2016 | | 2017 | | 2018 | |
|-----------------------------|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|
| | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| AGE | | | | | | |
| Total | 9,684 | 100.0 | 7,896 | 100.0 | 6,304 | 100.0 |
| 0 to 17 years | 4,916 | 50.8 | 4,056 | 51.4 | 3,246 | 51.5 |
| 18 to 24 years | 1,752 | 18.1 | 1,596 | 20.2 | 1,198 | 19.0 |
| 25 to 34 years | 1,057 | 10.9 | 807 | 10.2 | 672 | 10.7 |
| 35 to 44 years | 1,112 | 11.5 | 790 | 10.0 | 628 | 10.0 |
| 45 to 54 years | 636 | 6.6 | 477 | 6.0 | 409 | 6.5 |
| 55 to 64 years | 184 | 1.9 | 144 | 1.8 | 133 | 2.1 |
| 65 years and over | 27 | 0.3 | 26 | 0.3 | 18 | 0.3 |
| SEX | | | | | | |
| Total | 9,684 | 100.0 | 7,896 | 100.0 | 6,304 | 100.0 |
| Female | 5,296 | 54.7 | 4,219 | 53.4 | 3,453 | 54.8 |
| Male | 4,226 | 43.6 | 3,540 | 44.8 | 2,833 | 44.9 |
| Unknown | 162 | 1.7 | 137 | 1.7 | 18 | 0.3 |

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

Table 13.**Individuals Granted Asylum Affirmatively by State of Residence: FY 2016 to 2018**

(Ranked by 2018 state of residence)

| State of residence | 2016 | | 2017 | | 2018 | |
|------------------------|--------|---------|--------|---------|--------|---------|
| | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| Total | 11,634 | 100.0 | 15,846 | 100.0 | 25,439 | 100.0 |
| California | 5,112 | 43.9 | 7,301 | 46.1 | 8,348 | 32.8 |
| Florida | 883 | 7.6 | 579 | 3.7 | 3,178 | 12.5 |
| New York | 1,271 | 10.9 | 1,487 | 9.4 | 2,083 | 8.2 |
| Texas | 478 | 4.1 | 604 | 3.8 | 1,624 | 6.4 |
| New Jersey | 640 | 5.5 | 771 | 4.9 | 1,438 | 5.7 |
| Tennessee | 57 | 0.5 | 444 | 2.8 | 1,332 | 5.2 |
| Illinois | 190 | 1.6 | 404 | 2.5 | 953 | 3.7 |
| Pennsylvania | 179 | 1.5 | 294 | 1.9 | 604 | 2.4 |
| Louisiana | 149 | 1.3 | 326 | 2.1 | 511 | 2.0 |
| Washington | 220 | 1.9 | 332 | 2.1 | 418 | 1.6 |
| Other | 2,455 | 21.1 | 3,304 | 20.9 | 4,950 | 19.5 |

Note: Data exclude follow-to-join asylees.

Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security.