

Refugee Applicants and Admissions to the United States: 2004

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Each year, thousands of persons outside their country of origin who fear or face persecution if they return apply for refugee status and come to live in the United States. The number of refugees that may be admitted to the United States is limited by an annual ceiling. This Office of Immigration Statistics *Annual Flow Report* provides information on the number of persons who filed applications for refugee status, were approved for refugee status, or were admitted to the United States as refugees in 2004¹ by their country of origin. Country of origin is used in this report to refer to a person's country of nationality or country of previous residence.

Data on refugee applications were obtained from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Data on refugee admissions were provided by the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) of the U.S. Department of State.

In 2004, a total of 75,536 applications were filed for refugee status, 49,638 applications were approved, and 52,835 persons were admitted as refugees to the United States. The leading countries of origin of refugees admitted were Somalia, Liberia, and Laos.

DEFINING "REFUGEE"

A refugee is an alien outside the United States who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her country of origin 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. This definition of refugee is set forth in 101(a)(42) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), as amended by the Refugee Act of 1980, and generally conforms to the international definition of refugee found in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. In addition, the INA allows the President to designate certain nationalities that may be processed for refugee status within their homelands.

The distinction between refugees and immigrants became firmly established following World War II. The

first refugee legislation in the United States was the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 which brought 400,000 Eastern Europeans to the United States. Other refugee related legislation included the Refugee Relief Act of 1953, the Refugee-Escapee Act of 1957, the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966, and the Indochinese Refugee Adjustment Act of 1977.

The Refugee Act of 1980 provided for the first time systematic procedures for the admission and resettlement of refugees in the United States. Under the Act, refugees entered the United States under a statutory status that met the generally accepted international definition of refugee. The Act made the distinction between refugee and asylee status. (Refugee applicants are outside the United States when seeking admission to the United States; asylum applicants are either in the United States or at a U.S. port or entry). The Act also specified provisions for the adjustment to permanent resident status of refugees who had been physically present in the United States for one year.

Admission Ceilings

At the beginning of each fiscal year, the President, after consultation with Congress, sets a worldwide refugee admissions ceiling. During the year, an unforeseen emergency may require an increase in this overall limit on refugee admissions or changed circumstances may cause a reallocation of the geographic or regional subceilings within the worldwide ceiling. For 2004, as in 2002 and 2003, the final authorized ceiling was 70,000 (see Table 1). The ceiling was greatest for refugees

Table 1.
Final Admission Ceiling for Fiscal Year 2004

Region	Ceiling
Total authorized admissions	70,000
Africa	30,000
East Asia	8,500
Europe	13,000
Latin America/Caribbean	3,500
Near East/South Asia	3,000
Unallocated reserve	12,000

Source: Department of State, "Proposed Refugee Admissions for FY2005 – Report to Congress." See: www.state.gov/documents/organization/36228.pdf

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



Homeland Security

Office of Immigration Statistics
Management Directorate

Table 2.

Leading Country of Origin of Persons Filing Applications for Refugee Status: Fiscal Years 2002 to 2004

2004			2003			2002		
Country of origin	Number	Percent	Country of origin	Number	Percent	Country of origin	Number	Percent
Total	75,536	100.0	Total	42,705	100.0	Total	89,726	100.0
Somalia	17,187	22.8	Ukraine	7,654	17.9	Somalia	24,458	27.3
Laos	14,035	18.6	Cuba	4,963	11.6	Ethiopia	14,585	16.3
Cuba	9,661	12.8	Somalia	3,739	8.8	Liberia	13,823	15.4
Liberia	6,873	9.1	Ethiopia	2,937	6.9	Cuba	6,419	7.2
Ukraine	5,478	7.3	Russia	2,895	6.8	Bosnia and Herzegovina	5,036	5.6
Sudan	4,291	5.7	Moldova	2,606	6.1	Ukraine	3,959	4.4
Russia	4,198	5.6	Sierra Leone	2,237	5.2	Sierra Leone	3,878	4.3
Iran	1,727	2.3	Vietnam	2,032	4.8	Sudan	3,680	4.1
Moldova	1,712	2.3	Bosnia and Herzegovina	1,819	4.3	Iran	2,727	3.0
Ethiopia	1,575	2.1	Iran	1,784	4.2	Vietnam	2,361	2.6
All other countries	8,799	11.6	All other countries	10,039	23.5	All other countries	8,800	9.8

Source: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Department of Homeland Security

from African countries (30,000) followed by European countries (13,000) and East Asian countries (8,500)

Qualifications for Refugee Status

During 2004, refugees were interviewed and approved for admission to the United States by officers stationed overseas and by asylum officers temporarily assigned overseas. 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 section 101(a)(42) of the INA; be of special humanitarian concern to the United States; be admissible under the INA; and not be firmly resettled in any foreign country. Spouses and minor children of qualifying refugees may derive status and also enter the United States as refugees, either accompanying or following to join the principal refugee.

DATA

The data presented in this report consist of counts of persons by refugee-applicant status and country of origin. Data on refugee applications filed and approved come from Form G-319, Report of Applicants for Refugee Status Under Section 207, of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Form G-319 is a monthly compilation of casework from the overseas offices of USCIS. Data on refugee admissions come from the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) of the U.S. Department of State. PRM obtains the data from the Interna-

tional Organization for Migration (IOM), a nongovernmental organization that arranges transportation for refugees to the United States.

The data shown in this report represent stages in an application process that may take several years or more to complete. As a consequence, applications filed in one year may not represent the same persons whose applications were approved during that year. Similarly, refugee admissions during a given year may be linked to applications filed and approved in previous years.

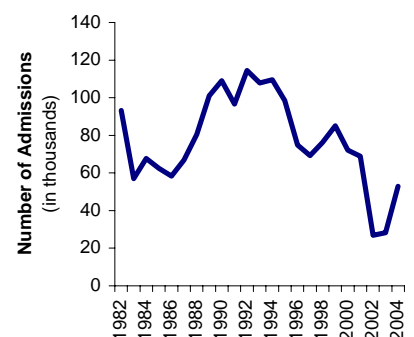
Detailed data on the characteristics of refugees at the time they are initially admitted to the United States are collected by the Office of Refugee Resettlement of the Department of Health and Human Services, which is responsible for the disbursement of funds for refugee benefits. Demographic data on refugees who adjust status to lawful permanent residence are collected by USCIS and included in OIS reports and publications on legal permanent residents.

HIGHLIGHTS

Applications Filed

The number of applications filed for refugee status increased to 75,536 in 2004 from 42,705 in 2003 (see Table 2). However, the annual average number of refugee applications filed since 2000 was 81,000 compared to an average of 132,000 during the 1990s and 107,000 during the 1980s.

Figure 1.
Refugee Admissions to the United States: Fiscal Year 1982 to 2004



Note: Refugee admissions as defined by in the Refugee Act of 1980.

The leading countries of origin of refugee applicants in 2004 were Somalia, Laos and Cuba. The majority (54 percent) of refugee applicants were from these three countries. Other leading countries of origin included Liberia, Ukraine, Sudan, Russia, Iran, Moldova, and Ethiopia. These ten countries represented 89 percent of all applicants for refugee status in 2004.

Applications Approved

There were 49,638 applications for refugee status approved in 2004 (see Table 3). This number is much higher than the number of applications approved in 2003 (25,329) and 2002 (18,652), but much lower than the number approved in 2001

Table 3.

Leading Country of Origin of Persons Approved for Refugee Status: Fiscal Years 2002 to 2004

2004			2003			2002		
Country of origin	Number	Percent	Country of origin	Number	Percent	Country of origin	Number	Percent
Total	49,638	100.0	Total	25,329	100.0	Total	18,652	100.0
Laos	14,035	28.3	Ukraine	4,612	18.2	Bosnia and Herzegovina	3,874	20.8
Somalia	6,616	13.3	Russia	1,894	7.5	Cuba	2,534	13.6
Cuba	5,671	11.4	Vietnam	1,772	7.0	Iran	2,000	10.7
Liberia	4,918	9.9	Iran	1,755	6.9	Afghanistan	1,635	8.8
Ukraine	3,317	6.7	Sudan	1,609	6.4	Ukraine	1,618	8.7
Sudan	3,249	6.5	Cuba	1,599	6.3	Sudan	1,054	5.7
Russia	1,973	4.0	Moldova	1,575	6.2	Liberia	982	5.3
Iran	1,561	3.1	Sierra Leone	1,430	5.6	Vietnam	774	4.1
Burma	1,398	2.8	Somalia	1,331	5.3	Russia	731	3.9
Moldova	1,176	2.4	Ethiopia	1,311	5.2	Iraq	592	3.2
All other countries	5,724	11.5	All other countries	6,441	25.4	All other countries	2,858	15.3

Source: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Department of Homeland Security

(66,198). Refugee application processing during 2004 was affected by continued safety concerns at some overseas locations and enhanced security procedures for applicants instituted after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States.

The leading countries of origin of persons approved for refugee status in 2004 included Laos, Somalia, and Cuba. These three countries represented 53 percent of all refugee approvals. The top ten countries accounted for 88 percent of all approved applications.

Refugee Admissions

There were 52,835 refugees admitted to the United States in 2004 (see Table 4). This is roughly double the number admitted during 2002 (26,839) and 2003 (28,306) but less than the number admitted during preceding years (see Figure 1).

In 2004, 50 percent of refugees admitted to the United States were from Somalia, Liberia, or Laos. Other leading countries of origin in 2004 included Sudan, Ukraine, Cuba, Ethiopia, Iran, Moldova, and Russia. These ten countries represented 83 percent of all refugee admissions in 2004.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit the Office of Immigration Statistics Web page at uscis.gov/graphics/shared/statistics/index.htm.

Table 4.

Refugee Admitted to the United States by Country of Origin: Fiscal Years 2002 to 2004

(Ranked by 2004 Admissions)

Region/Country	2004		2003		2002	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total	52,835	100.0	28,306	100.0	26,839	100.0
Somalia	13,331	25.2	1,993	7.0	238	0.9
Liberia	7,140	13.5	2,957	10.4	559	2.1
Laos	6,005	11.4	13	--	18	0.1
Sudan	3,500	6.6	2,140	7.6	895	3.3
Ukraine	3,482	6.6	5,065	17.9	5,219	19.5
Cuba	2,959	5.6	303	1.1	1,925	7.2
Ethiopia	2,710	5.1	1,704	6.0	329	1.2
Iran	1,787	3.4	2,471	8.7	1,525	5.7
Moldova	1,711	3.2	616	2.2	1,021	3.8
Russia	1,446	2.7	1,394	4.9	2,100	7.8
Sierra Leone	1,084	2.1	1,378	4.9	176	0.7
Burma	1,056	2.0	203	0.7	128	0.5
Vietnam	974	1.8	1,356	4.8	3,081	11.5
Afghanistan	959	1.8	1,453	5.1	1,677	6.3
Belarus	659	1.2	702	2.5	680	2.5
Colombia	577	1.1	149	0.5	8	--
Congo, Democratic Republic	569	1.1	251	0.9	105	0.4
Uzbekistan	426	0.8	166	0.6	394	1.5
Azerbaijan	407	0.8	406	1.4	115	0.4
Kazakhstan	312	0.6	118	0.4	222	0.8
Other	1,741	3.3	3,468	12.3	6,414	23.9

-- Figure rounds to 0.0. Source: U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration