

CRS Report for Congress

Immigration Legislation and Issues in the 110th Congress

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Andorra Bruno, Coordinator,
Ruth Ellen Wasem, Alison Siskin, Blas Nuñez-Neto,
and Chad C. Haddal
Domestic Social Policy Division



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Summary

Comprehensive immigration reform was the subject of much discussion at the start of the 110th Congress. In the spring of 2007, the Senate considered several broad immigration reform measures aimed at addressing a host of perceived problems with the U.S. immigration system. These measures combined border security and interior enforcement provisions with provisions on temporary workers, permanent admissions, and unauthorized aliens. In June 2007, the Senate voted on a motion to invoke cloture on one of these measures (S. 1639), which, if approved, would have ultimately brought the bill to a vote. The motion failed, however, and the bill was subsequently pulled from the Senate floor.

It is unclear whether the 110th Congress will again take up comprehensive immigration reform legislation. Regardless, it may consider more discrete immigration proposals, whether as stand-alone bills or as parts of other measures. Proposals on foreign workers — particularly agricultural workers (including H-2A workers) and skilled and professional workers (including H-1B workers) — and on unauthorized alien students may receive action. Versions of bills on agricultural workers and unauthorized students, known respectively as AgJOBS and the DREAM Act, were incorporated into the measures considered in the Senate. Border security proposals may again be considered. Among the other immigration-related issues that the 110th Congress may address are state and local enforcement of immigration laws, employment eligibility verification and worksite enforcement, Iraqi refugees, and documentary requirements for admission.

At the same time, the 110th Congress has enacted some immigration-related provisions. Among them are refugee-related provisions included in the FY2007 Revised Continuing Appropriations Resolution (P.L. 110-5); the U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Care, Katrina Recovery, and Iraq Accountability Appropriations Act (P.L. 110-28); and a measure to increase the number of Iraqi and Afghani translators and interpreters who may be admitted to the United States as special immigrants (P.L. 110-36). The 110th Congress also has enacted provisions on border security and the Visa Waiver Program as part of a law providing for the implementation of the recommendations of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (P.L. 110-53).

This report discusses these and other immigration-related issues that have seen legislative action or are of significant congressional interest. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) appropriations are addressed in CRS Report RL34004, *Homeland Security Department: FY2008 Appropriations*, by Jennifer E. Lake and Blas Nuñez-Neto, Coordinators, and, for the most part, are not covered here. This report will be updated as legislative developments occur.

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Introduction

Comprehensive immigration reform was the subject of much discussion at the start of the 110th Congress.¹ In the 109th Congress, both the House and Senate passed major immigration bills, but they were never reconciled.² During the first session of the 110th Congress, a bipartisan group of Senators developed broad immigration reform legislation with the active involvement of the Bush Administration. Aimed at addressing a host of perceived problems with the U.S. immigration system, this legislation combined border security and interior enforcement provisions with provisions on temporary workers, permanent admissions, and unauthorized aliens. The Senate considered several immigration reform measures (S. 1348, S.Amdt.1150 to S. 1348, S. 1639) in May and June of 2007. On June 28, 2007, the Senate voted on a motion to invoke cloture on S. 1639, which, if approved, would have ultimately brought the bill to a vote. The cloture motion failed, however, on a vote of 46 to 53, and the Senate Majority Leader pulled the bill from the Senate floor.

It is unclear whether the 110th Congress will again take up comprehensive immigration reform legislation. Regardless, it may consider more discrete immigration proposals, whether as stand-alone bills or as parts of other measures. Proposals on foreign workers — particularly agricultural workers and skilled and professional workers — and on unauthorized alien students may receive action. Versions of bills on agricultural workers and unauthorized students, known respectively as AgJOBS and the DREAM Act, were incorporated into the measures considered in the Senate. Border security proposals may again be considered. Among the other immigration-related issues that the 110th Congress may consider are state and local enforcement of immigration laws, documentary requirements for admission, employment eligibility verification and worksite enforcement, and Iraqi refugees.

At the same time, the 110th Congress has enacted some immigration-related provisions. Among them are refugee-related provisions included in P.L. 110-5, P.L. 110-28, and P.L. 110-36. It also has enacted provisions on border security and the Visa Waiver Program as part of P.L. 110-53.

¹ For an overview of immigration reform issues before the 110th Congress, see CRS Report RS22574, *Immigration Reform: Brief Synthesis of Issue*, by Ruth Ellen Wasem.

² See CRS Report RL33125, *Immigration Legislation and Issues in the 109th Congress*, coordinated by Andorra Bruno.

This report discusses immigration-related issues that have seen legislative action or are of significant congressional interest. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) appropriations are addressed in a separate report and, for the most part, are not covered here.³ The final section of this report lists enacted legislation and selected bills receiving action.

Foreign Workers and Students

The Immigration and Nationality Act (INA)⁴ provides for the temporary and permanent admission to the United States of various categories of foreign workers and business personnel. It also provides for the temporary admission of foreign students. Temporary visitors, including workers, business personnel, and students, enter as nonimmigrants. As such, they are admitted for a temporary period of time and a specific purpose. Foreign workers and others who are admitted permanently enter as legal permanent residents (LPRs).

Foreign Workers

The main nonimmigrant category for temporary workers is the H visa, which includes visa classifications for agricultural workers (H-2A visa), nonagricultural workers (H-2B visa), and professional specialty workers (H-1B visa), among others. In addition, certain temporary workers and business personnel enter under other visa categories.⁵ Issuances of temporary employment-based visas have risen steadily over the past decade, reaching 1.1 million in FY2005.⁶ Among the various temporary worker visas, the H-2A and H-1B visas are of particular congressional interest, as discussed below.

With respect to permanent admissions of foreign workers and business personnel, the current annual limitation on employment-based LPR admissions is 140,000 (plus any unused family preference visas from the prior year). Most legislative attention thus far has been directed at the first three of the five employment-based preference categories: (1) priority workers (that is, persons of

³ See CRS Report RL34004, *Homeland Security Department: FY2008 Request for Appropriations*, coordinated by Jennifer E. Lake and Blas Nuñez-Neto.

⁴ Act of June 27, 1952, ch. 477; 66 Stat. 163; codified as amended at 8 U.S.C. §§ 1101 *et seq.* The INA is the basis of current immigration law.

⁵ For example, intracompany transferees (individuals who perform services that are executive or managerial or that involve specialized knowledge and who are employed with an international firm or corporation) are admitted on L visas. Aliens who are treaty traders enter on E-1 visas, while those who are treaty investors use E-2 visas. Temporary professional workers from Canada and Mexico may enter according to terms set by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) on TN visas. For a full discussion and analysis of nonimmigrant visas, see CRS Report RL31381, *U.S. Immigration Policy on Temporary Admissions*, by Ruth Ellen Wasem and Chad C. Haddal.

⁶ See CRS Report RL33977, *Immigration of Foreign Workers: Labor Market Tests and Protections*, by Ruth Ellen Wasem.

extraordinary ability in the arts, sciences, education, business, or athletics; outstanding professors and researchers; and certain multinational executives and managers); (2) members of the professions holding advanced degrees or persons of exceptional ability; and (3) skilled workers with at least two years of training; professionals with baccalaureate degrees; and unskilled workers.⁷

Agricultural Workers. The H-2A nonimmigrant visa allows for the temporary admission of foreign workers to the United States to perform agricultural work of a seasonal or temporary nature, provided that U.S. workers are not available. Employers who want to import H-2A workers must first apply to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) for a certification that (1) there are not sufficient U.S. workers who are qualified and available to perform the work, and (2) the employment of foreign workers will not adversely affect the wages and working conditions of U.S. workers who are similarly employed. Employers must pay their H-2A workers and similarly employed U.S. workers the highest of the federal or applicable state minimum wage, the prevailing wage rate, or the adverse effect wage rate (AEWR).⁸ They also must provide workers with housing, transportation, and other benefits, including workers' compensation insurance.⁹

Various bills have been introduced in the 110th Congress that address foreign temporary agricultural workers.¹⁰ Some of these bills, including H.R. 371/S. 237/S. 340 (all identical and known as AgJOBS) and H.R. 1792, propose a complete overhaul of the H-2A program. Both AgJOBS and H.R. 1792 would streamline the process of importing H-2A workers and would make changes to existing H-2A requirements regarding minimum benefits, wages, and working conditions. The streamlining and other changes proposed by the measures are different, however. For example, both AgJOBS and H.R. 1792 would make changes to existing H-2A wage requirements. AgJOBS would freeze the AEWR at the January 2003 level for three years after the date of enactment, while, under H.R. 1792, H-2A employers would no longer be subject to the AEWR. S. 1639, which was considered in the Senate, and H.R. 1645 (known as the STRIVE Act), which was the subject of a hearing by the House Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, Refugees, Border Security, and International Law, include H-2A reform provisions like those in AgJOBS. H.R. 2954 contains H-2A reform provisions similar to those in H.R. 1792.

⁷ For additional background information, see CRS Report RL32235, *U.S. Immigration Policy on Permanent Admissions*, by Ruth Ellen Wasem (hereafter cited as CRS Report RL32235).

⁸ The prevailing wage rate is the average wage paid to similarly employed workers in the occupation in the area of intended employment. The AEWR is an hourly wage rate set by DOL for each state or region, based upon data gathered by the Department of Agriculture in quarterly wage surveys. See CRS Report RL32861, *Farm Labor: The Adverse Effect Wage Rate (AEWR)*, by William G. Whittaker.

⁹ For further information about the H-2A program, see CRS Report RL32044, *Policy Considerations for Guest Worker Programs*, by Andorra Bruno (hereafter cited as CRS Report RL32044). This report also discusses the main nonagricultural guest worker program (the H-2B program).

¹⁰ For a more detailed discussion of these bills, see *Ibid.*

Instead of reforming the H-2A program, some measures before the 110th Congress would establish new agricultural worker programs. H.R. 2413 would direct the Secretary of Agriculture to establish a new W seasonal agricultural worker program. Unlike the H-2A program, which is not subject to a numerical cap, the new program would include monthly and annual numerical limitations. S. 330 also proposes to establish a new W temporary worker program, but it would cover both agricultural and nonagricultural work.

In addition to its H-2A reform provisions, AgJOBS proposes a legalization program for agricultural workers. Under the program, the Secretary of DHS would grant a temporary resident status (termed “blue card status”) to an alien worker who had performed a requisite amount of agricultural employment in the United States during the 24-month period ending on December 31, 2006, and meets other requirements. No more than 1.5 million blue cards could be issued during the five-year period beginning on the date of enactment. To be eligible to adjust to LPR status, the alien in blue card status would have to meet additional work and other requirements. Existing numerical limits under the INA would not apply to adjustments of status under the bill. Similar provisions are included in H.R. 1645.¹¹ By contrast, neither H.R. 1792 nor H.R. 2413 would establish a legalization program for unauthorized agricultural workers. For its part, S. 330 would provide for unauthorized workers who meet specified requirements to participate in its new temporary worker program, but would not provide a mechanism for them to obtain LPR status.

Temporary Workers in Specialty Occupations. The largest classification of H visas is the H-1B visa for workers in specialty occupations.¹² An employer wishing to bring in an H-1B nonimmigrant must attest in a labor certification application (LCA) to DOL that the employer will pay the nonimmigrant the greater of the actual wages paid to other employees in the same job or the prevailing wages for that occupation; the employer will provide working conditions for the nonimmigrant that do not cause the working conditions of the other employees to be adversely affected; and there is no strike or lockout. The employer also must post at the workplace the application to hire nonimmigrants. Firms categorized as H-1B dependent (generally if at least 15% of the employees are H-1B workers) must also attest that they have attempted to recruit U.S. workers and that they have not laid off U.S. workers 90 days prior to or after hiring any H-1B nonimmigrants.

Although most employment-based nonimmigrant visas are not numerically limited, the H-1B visa is subject to an annual cap of 65,000. For the past few years, the H-1B visa limit has been reached before the beginning of the fiscal year. DHS’s

¹¹ While, as noted above, S. 1639 contains H-2A provisions similar to those in AgJOBS, the agricultural worker legalization program proposed in S. 1639 includes some notably different provisions than AgJOBS. For further information, see discussion of S. 1639 in CRS Report RL32044.

¹² For additional information on the H-1B visa, see CRS Report RL30498, *Immigration: Legislative Issues on Nonimmigrant Professional Specialty (H-1B) Workers*, by Ruth Ellen Wasem.

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) announced that the FY2008 H-1B cap was reached within the first two days it accepted petitions.¹³ At the same time, current law exempts some H-1B workers from the annual cap. For example, up to 20,000 aliens holding a master's or higher degree are exempt from the H-1B cap each year. This 20,000 limit is quickly met.

Multiple bills on the H-1B visa have been introduced in the 110th Congress. A variety of constituencies are advocating substantial increases in H-1B admissions. Among the bills to increase admissions, S. 1038/H.R. 1930 would amend the INA to exempt from the annual H-1B visa cap an alien who has earned a master's or higher degree from an accredited U.S. university; or has been awarded a medical specialty certification based on post-doctoral training and experience in the United States. S. 1038/H.R. 1930 further would increase the annual H-1B cap, with an escalator clause that would provide a 20% increase for the following year if the previous year's ceiling is reached. S. 1092 would amend the INA to increase the annual H-1B cap to 115,000 in FY2007 and 195,000 in FY2008. It also would eliminate the 20,000 annual cap on aliens with masters' or higher degrees who can enter the United States without being subject to H-1B visa limits. H.R. 1758 would amend the INA to provide an additional 65,000 H-1B visas in each fiscal year from FY2008 through FY2012 for persons who have a master's or Ph.D. degree and meet the requirements for such status. Under this bill, the employers of these workers would be required to make scholarship payments to institutions of higher education.

A second set of bills, including S. 1035, S. 31, and H.R. 2538, focuses on strengthening H-1B requirements and expanding enforcement. S. 1035 aims to enhance labor market protections pertaining to H-1B visas. Specifically, this bill would require that employers seeking to hire an H-1B visa holder pledge that they have made a good-faith effort to hire U.S. workers first and that the H-1B visa holder will not displace a U.S. worker. S. 1035 also would prohibit employers from hiring H-1B employees who are then outsourced to other companies, and would prohibit companies from hiring H-1B employees if they employ more than 50 people and more than 50% of their employees are H-1B visa holders. Another bill — S. 31 — would increase penalties on employers for violating the LCA, provide H-1B aliens with whistle-blower protections, and require USCIS to submit to Congress a fraud risk assessment of the H-1B visa program. H.R. 2538 would alter the LCA process by requiring H-1B employers to use whichever of its three proposed wage determination methods results in the highest wages. It also would prohibit employers from outsourcing or otherwise contracting for the placement of an H-1B nonimmigrant with another employer. In addition, H.R. 2538 would eliminate the exemption from the H-1B cap for certain aliens with a U.S. master's or higher degree.

A third set of bills includes provisions to both increase admissions and expand enforcement. Among the bills of this type, S. 1351 would increase the H-1B cap to 150,000 in FY2008 with an escalator clause for subsequent years. It also would strengthen labor market protections for U.S. workers competing with potential H-1B workers and would expand the investigative and enforcement authority of DOL. S.

¹³ The days were April 2-3, 2007. See *Ibid*.

1397 would exempt from the H-1B ceilings any alien who has: earned a master's or higher degree in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics from an institution of higher education in the United States; or been awarded a medical specialty certification based on post-doctoral training and experience in the United States. Up to 20,000 aliens who have earned a master's or higher degree in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics from an institution of higher education outside the United States would also be exempted. S. 1397 would raise the annual H-1B limit to 115,000 for FY2007 and rely on a market-based calculation to potentially escalate the limit above 115,000 for each subsequent fiscal year. S. 1397 also includes enforcement provisions on application fraud and misrepresentation, employer penalties, and DOL investigations. S. 1639 includes a variety of revisions to the H-1B provisions in the INA. Among other things, it would raise the FY2008 cap to 115,000 and provide that in subsequent years DHS may issue additional H-1B visas up to a 180,000 cap. It also would require the submission of Internal Revenue Service W-2 forms as part of the H-1B renewal petition. S. 1639 draws on the labor market protections proposed in S. 1035.

Employment-Based LPRs. As mentioned above, congressional attention in the area of employment-based permanent admissions is focused primarily on the first three preference categories. These categories encompass aliens of extraordinary ability as well as unskilled workers. LPR admissions under these categories have exceeded the ceilings in recent years, fueling pressure to revise admissions levels in the law upward.¹⁴ Replacing or supplementing the current employment-based preference system with a "merit-based" point system is also garnering considerable interest for the first time in over a decade.¹⁵ Another recurring option is to no longer count the derivative family members (i.e., spouses and minor children) of employment-based LPRs as part of the numerical ceiling.

The effort to increase levels of employment-based immigration is complicated by the backlogs in *family-based* immigration due to the sheer volume of aliens eligible to immigrate to the United States. Citizens and LPRs often wait years for their relatives' petitions to be processed and visa numbers to become available, raising questions about the advisability of increasing employment-based immigration before resolving the family-based backlogs. Meanwhile, others question whether the United States can accommodate higher levels of immigration and frequently cite the costs borne by local communities faced with increases in educational expenses, medical care, human services, and infrastructure expansion, which are sparked by population growth.

Title V of S. 1639, the immigration bill considered in the Senate in June, would substantially revise legal permanent admissions. In terms of employment-based immigration, the first three preference categories, as described above, would be eliminated and replaced with a point system. This proposed point system would be multi-tiered, with a tier for "merit-based" immigrants. The merit point tier would be

¹⁴ For an explanation of these trends, see CRS Report RL32235.

¹⁵ See CRS Report RL34030, *Point Systems for Immigrant Selection: Options and Issues*, by Ruth Ellen Wasem and Chad C. Haddal.

based on a total of 100 points divided between four factors: employment, education, English and civics, and family relationships.¹⁶

Among the other pending bills on employment-based LPRs is H.R. 1645 (STRIVE Act). It would increase the annual number of employment-based LPRs from 140,000 to 290,000 and would no longer count the derivative family members of employment-based LPRs as part of the numerical ceiling. At the same time, it would cap the total number of employment-based LPRs and their derivatives at 800,000 annually.¹⁷

S. 1038/H.R. 1930, the SKIL Act of 2007, would expand employment-based immigration by exempting aliens with advanced degrees and specialized occupations from the worldwide numerical limits. Moreover, S. 1038/H.R. 1930 would no longer count the derivative family members of employment-based LPRs as part of the numerical ceiling. S. 1397 would likewise no longer count the derivative family members of employment-based LPRs as part of the numerical ceiling, and also would exempt from the ceiling certain aliens who have earned advanced degrees in science, technology, engineering, or math and have been working in these fields in the United States for three years prior.

“STEM” Students

Alongside pending proposals to increase temporary and permanent immigration of high-skilled workers are related proposals for student visa reform for foreign students intending to pursue studies in a field related to science, technology, engineering, or math (STEM). S. 1639 and H.R. 1645 (STRIVE Act) would create a new F nonimmigrant visa category specifically designed for students in STEM fields of study. Students obtaining the newly created visa would not need to demonstrate an intent to depart the United States upon completion of their studies. Students in this category could also pursue optional practical training periods of up to 24 months after completing their degree. Furthermore, under these bills, foreign students on any F-class nonimmigrant visas would be allowed to pursue off-campus work provided that the employer attempted to first hire a similarly qualified U.S. citizen for a period of 21 days prior to employment. Employers would be required to pay foreign students the higher of the average or prevailing wage in the field of employment.

In addition to establishing a new F visa category for STEM students, the STRIVE Act would add a provision to INA §201(b) for foreign nationals who obtain (or have obtained) a master’s degree or higher at a U.S. accredited university. These foreign nationals would be exempted from the worldwide numerical limits on permanent admissions. Another provision in the act proposes to exempt from the numerical limits aliens who have earned a master’s degree or higher in a STEM field and have been working in a related field in the United States in a nonimmigrant status during the three-year period preceding their application for an

¹⁶ For further discussion of the point system proposed in S. 1639, see *Ibid.*

¹⁷ See CRS Report RL32235, *U.S. Immigration Policy on Permanent Admissions.*

employment-based immigrant visa.¹⁸ These exemptions from the LPR numerical limits would apply not only to current and future students, but also would apply retroactively to foreign nationals who received degrees from U.S. universities prior to the enactment of the legislation. S. 1639 has no similar provision.

Unauthorized Alien Students

Unauthorized alien students comprise a subpopulation of the larger unauthorized alien population in the United States. They are distinct from foreign students. Although they are foreign nationals, unauthorized alien students, unlike foreign students, are not in the United States legally on nonimmigrant visas to study at U.S. institutions. Instead, by definition, they are in the country illegally. Unauthorized alien students are eligible for free public elementary and secondary education, but many of them who want to attend college face various obstacles. Among these obstacles, a provision enacted in 1996 as part of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA)¹⁹ discourages states and localities from granting unauthorized aliens certain “postsecondary education benefits,” widely interpreted to refer to “in-state” residency status for tuition purposes. Under the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965, as amended, unauthorized aliens are also ineligible for federal student financial aid. More broadly, as unauthorized aliens, they are unable to work legally and are subject to removal from the United States.

Bills have been introduced in recent Congresses to provide relief to unauthorized alien students by repealing the 1996 provision and enabling certain unauthorized alien students to adjust to LPR status in the United States.²⁰ These bills are commonly referred to as the DREAM Act (whether or not they carry that name).

In the 110th Congress, DREAM Act legislation has been introduced both in stand-alone bills and as part of larger comprehensive immigration reform measures. S. 774 and H.R. 1275 are similar, but not identical, stand-alone DREAM Act bills before the 110th Congress. They would repeal the IIRIRA provision and thereby eliminate the restriction on state provision of postsecondary educational benefits to unauthorized aliens. Both bills also would enable eligible unauthorized students to adjust to LPR status in the United States through an immigration procedure known as *cancellation of removal*. Cancellation of removal is a discretionary form of relief authorized by the INA that an alien can apply for while in removal proceedings

¹⁸ From the language of the STRIVE Act, CRS could not ascertain whether the provision would require that only the employment occur in the United States, or whether the advanced degree must also be from a U.S. higher education institution.

¹⁹ IIRIRA is Division C of P.L. 104-208, September 30, 1996. The provision is §505.

²⁰ For a discussion of bills introduced in the 109th and 110th Congress, see CRS Report RL33863, *Unauthorized Alien Students: Issues and “DREAM Act” Legislation*, by Andorra Bruno (hereafter cited as CRS Report RL33863). For a discussion of bills introduced in earlier Congresses, see CRS Report RL31365, *Unauthorized Alien Students: Legislation in the 107th and 108th Congresses*, by Andorra Bruno and Jeffrey J. Kuenzi.

before an immigration judge. Aliens granted cancellation of removal have their status adjusted to LPR status.

Under S. 774 and H.R. 1275, aliens could affirmatively apply for cancellation of removal without being placed in removal proceedings. To be eligible for cancellation of removal/adjustment of status under these bills, the alien would have to demonstrate that he or she had been physically present in the United States for a continuous period of not less than five years immediately preceding the date of enactment and had not yet reached age 16 at the time of initial entry. Both bills also would require the alien to demonstrate that he or she had been admitted to an institution of higher education in the United States, or had earned a high school diploma or the equivalent in the United States.

There would be no limit on the number of aliens who could be granted cancellation of removal/adjustment of status under S. 774 and H.R. 1275. An alien granted cancellation of removal under these bills would be adjusted initially to *conditional* permanent resident status. Such conditional status would be valid for six years and would be subject to termination. To have the condition removed and become a full-fledged LPR, the alien would have to submit an application during a specified period and meet additional requirements, including acquisition of a college degree (or completion at least two years in a bachelor's or higher degree program) or service in the uniformed services for at least two years.²¹

In addition to these free-standing bills, DREAM Act provisions have been included in larger comprehensive immigration reform bills. H.R. 1645 (STRIVE Act) contains a DREAM Act subtitle in Title VI that is nearly identical to S. 774, as discussed above. A version of the DREAM Act also was included in S. 1639, the immigration bill that the Senate considered but failed to invoke cloture on in June 2007. The S. 1639 version of the DREAM Act is substantially different than the other DREAM Act bills in the 110th Congress. S. 1639's DREAM Act provisions are tied to other provisions in the bill to enable certain unauthorized aliens in the United States to obtain legal status under a new "Z" nonimmigrant visa category.²² S. 1639's DREAM Act title would establish a special adjustment of status mechanism for aliens who are determined to be eligible for, or who have been issued, Z visas or probationary Z benefits, and who meet other requirements, including being under age 30 on the date of enactment, being under age 16 at the time of initial entry into the United States, and having either acquired a college degree (or completed at least two years in a bachelor's or higher degree program) or served in the uniformed services for at least two years. Unlike under the other DREAM Act bills discussed above, DREAM Act beneficiaries under S. 1639 would not be adjusted initially to conditional permanent resident status.

S. 1639, like the other DREAM Act bills, would couple adjustment of status provisions for unauthorized students with language addressing the IIRIRA provision

²¹ For a discussion of the differences between S. 774 and H.R. 1275, see CRS Report RL33863.

²² For further information on the Z visa category proposed by S. 1639, see CRS Report RL32044.

that places restrictions on state provision of educational benefits to unauthorized aliens. Unlike the other DREAM Act bills, however, S. 1639 would not completely repeal the IIRIRA provision. Instead, §616(a) of S. 1639 would make the provision inapplicable with respect to aliens with probationary Z or Z status.

Document Security

Two federal agencies issue most immigration-related identity documents. The Department of State (DOS) is responsible for issuing visas to foreign nationals and passports to U.S. citizens. Among other uses, these documents are used by persons seeking admission to the United States, as all must demonstrate that they are either a foreign national with valid documents or a U.S. citizen. DHS issues most other immigration documents, which foreign nationals need for various purposes within the United States. For example, the INA requires employers — when hiring citizens and foreign nationals alike — to examine specified documents presented by the employee, which may include immigration documents, to verify employment eligibility and establish identity.

For well over a decade, the security of immigration documents has been an issue. Initially, the emphasis was on issuing documents that were tamper-resistant and difficult to counterfeit in order to impede document fraud and unauthorized employment. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the policy priorities have centered on preventing identity fraud, with a sharp focus on intercepting terrorist travel and other security threats.

There is a consensus that immigration documents should include biometric identifiers (e.g., digitized photos or finger scans) but determining what type of biometric identifier to use poses a variety of technical issues. Congress imposed a statutory requirement in 1996 for DOS's Bureau of Consular Affairs to issue a biometric border crossing card, known today as a laser visa. In 2001 and 2002, Congress added requirements that all visas be biometric visas. Since October 2004, the Bureau of Consular Affairs has been issuing machine-readable visas that use biometric identifiers in addition to the photograph that has been collected for some time.²³ Immigration documents issued by USCIS in DHS likewise include biometric identifiers. The permanent resident card, commonly called a "green card," is the document LPRs use to establish their status. According to USCIS, approximately 14.6 million biometric "green cards" were issued in FY1998-FY2006. Aliens who are temporarily in the United States and eligible to work file a request for an employment authorization document (EAD). Over 8.3 million biometric EADs were issued in FY1998-FY2006, according to USCIS.

The United States does not require its citizens to have legal documents that verify their citizenship and identity (i.e., national identification cards). The INA, however, does require all U.S. citizens to present a valid passport when entering and

²³ § 414 of the USA Patriot Act (PL. 107-56) and § 303 of the Enhanced Border Security and Visa Reform Act (P.L. 107-173) require that visas and other travel documents contain a biometric identifier and are tamper-resistant.

departing the United States, but gives the President the authority to waive this requirement. P.L. 108-458, while not directly amending the President's passport waiver authority, does require the Secretary of Homeland Security, in consultation with the Secretary of State, to develop and implement a plan that requires a document that denotes identity and citizenship for all entries into the United States. This statutory directive, discussed in a separate section below, is known as the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI).

Striking a balance among the facilitation of legitimate travel and trade, the integrity of immigration documents, the security of personal identification documents, the protection of personal privacy and civil liberties, and the deterrence of foreign security threats remains a challenge for Congress. The recently enacted Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007 (P.L. 110-53) requires DHS, in conjunction with the Director of National Intelligence and the heads of other relevant federal agencies, to submit a report to Congress outlining the actions the U.S. government has taken to collaborate with international partners to increase border security, enhance document security, and exchange information about terrorists.

A number of bills before the 110th Congress include provisions aimed at improving document security. Provisions that would require that immigration documents comply with specified authentication, documentation, and machine readable standards are included in H.R. 1645, H.R. 2954, S. 330, and S. 1348. Provisions to expand document fraud training for DHS officers are included in H.R. 2954, S. 1348, and S. 1984. For its part, S. 276 would revise the criminal penalties for immigration and visa fraud, including trafficking in counterfeit immigration documents.

Visa Waiver Program

The Visa Waiver Program (VWP) allows nationals from certain countries to enter the United States as temporary visitors (nonimmigrants) for business or pleasure without first obtaining a visa from a U.S. consulate abroad.²⁴ The VWP constitutes one of the few exceptions under the INA in which foreign nationals are admitted into the United States without a valid visa.

To qualify for the VWP, the INA specifies that a country must meet certain requirements. For example, the country must offer reciprocal privileges to U.S. citizens and must issue its nationals machine-readable passports that incorporate biometric identifiers; and that the country's inclusion in the VWP must not compromise the law enforcement or security interests of the United States. Among

²⁴ For more information on the Visa Waiver Program, see CRS Report RL32221, *Visa Waiver Program*, by Alison Siskin.

the other requirements for VWP participation, the country must have a low nonimmigrant refusal rate²⁵ (normally less than 3%).

P.L. 110-53 modifies the VWP by adding criteria to qualify as a VWP country. Among other new requirements, P.L. 110-53 mandates that the Secretary of DHS, in consultation with the Secretary of State, develop and implement an electronic travel authorization system, through which each alien would electronically provide, in advance of travel, the biographical information necessary to determine whether the alien is eligible to travel to the United States and enter under the VWP. P.L. 110-53 also requires that, by August 3, 2008, the Secretary of DHS establish an exit system that records the departure of every alien who enters under the VWP and leaves the United States by air.

Finally, the act allows the Secretary of DHS, in consultation with the Secretary of State, to waive the nonimmigrant refusal rate requirement for admission to the VWP on the date on which the Secretary of DHS certifies to Congress that an air exit system is in place that can verify the departure of not less than 97% of all foreign nationals who exit through U.S. airports. This waiver authority is also contingent on the Secretary of DHS certifying to Congress that the electronic travel authorization system discussed above is operational. In addition, after June 30, 2009, the air exit system would have to incorporate biometric identifiers and be able to match an alien's biometric information with relevant watch lists and manifest information. Otherwise, the Secretary of DHS's authority to waive the nonimmigrant refusal rate would be suspended until the air exit system had the specified biometric capacity. In order to participate in the VWP, a country receiving a nonimmigrant visa refusal rate waiver could not have a refusal rate above 10% and would have to meet other requirements.

Border Security

DHS is charged with protecting U.S. borders from weapons of mass destruction, terrorists, smugglers, and unauthorized aliens. Border security involves securing the many means by which people and things can enter the country. Operationally, this means controlling the official ports of entry (POE) through which legitimate travelers and commerce enter the country, and patrolling the nation's land and maritime borders to safeguard against and interdict illegal entries.

Border security has been a key immigration issue for the 110th Congress. There has been much debate about whether DHS has sufficient resources to fulfill its border security mission, and a number of bills have been considered that would add resources to the border, including personnel, infrastructure, and technology. Other bills would institute new, or modify existing, programs within the Department.

²⁵ The nonimmigrant refusal rate is the percentage of all nonimmigrant visa applications that are denied. For purposes of the VWP, the rate does not include applications that are originally denied, but then approved when the alien presents additional information.

Resources at the Border

A number of bills have been introduced that would add resources for Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the lead agency at DHS charged with securing U.S. borders at and between official ports of entry (POE). *At* ports of entry, CBP officers are responsible for conducting immigration, customs, and agricultural inspections on entering aliens. *Between* ports of entry, the U.S. Border Patrol (USBP) enforces U.S. immigration law and other federal laws along the border. In the course of discharging its duties, the USBP patrols over 8,000 miles of U.S. international borders with Mexico and Canada and the coastal waters around Florida and Puerto Rico. The following discussion focuses on key provisions on border resources that have seen action in the 110th Congress.

Resources at POE. P.L. 110-53 authorizes the hiring of 200 additional CBP officers in FY2008 to be deployed to the 20 busiest international airports. The act also requires DHS to submit a report to Congress concerning the ongoing efforts to secure the northern border with Canada, including an assessment of northern border vulnerabilities and recommendations for addressing them. S. 1639, the broad immigration bill the Senate considered in June, would authorize the hiring of 500 additional CBP officers each year from FY2008 through FY2012. The House-passed version of the FY2008 DHS appropriations bill (H.R. 2638) would authorize the hiring of 200 additional CBP officers in FY2008 and would direct DHS to extend federal law enforcement officer status to CBP officers for retirement purposes.

Resources Between POE. S. 1639 would authorize an increase of 2,000 agents in the USBP workforce in FY2008 and an increase of 2,400 agents each year from FY2009 through FY2012. DHS would be required to assign at least 20% of this annual increase in USBP agent manpower to the northern border. S. 1639 would also direct DHS to acquire additional remote video surveillance cameras, sensors, radars, and unmanned aerial vehicles in order to create a “virtual fence” along the international borders. DHS would be further directed to work with the Department of Defense to create a plan for using military resources to support the surveillance of the border. S. 1639 would require DHS to construct 700 miles of reinforced fencing along the southwest border; 370 miles of this fencing would be designated a priority area and should be constructed by December 31, 2008. Lastly, S. 1639 would also establish certain border security requirements that must be met by DHS before separate provisions in the bill that grant legal status to individuals could be implemented.

The Senate-passed version of H.R. 2638 includes a \$3 billion emergency supplemental appropriation that could be used to, among other things: bring the overall USBP workforce to 23,000 agents; construct 700 miles of fencing along the southern border; and deploy 105 camera and radar towers and 4 unmanned aerial vehicles to the border.

Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative

The Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) was enacted by the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act (P.L. 108-458) and requires the

Secretary of Homeland Security, in consultation with the Secretary of State, to develop and implement a plan as expeditiously as possible to require a passport or other document, or combination of documents, “deemed by the Secretary of Homeland Security to be sufficient to denote identity and citizenship,” for all travelers entering the United States. The deadline for implementation was eased by §546 of P.L. 109-295, which requires implementation not later than three months after the Secretaries of State and Homeland Security certify that specified requirements have been met, or June 1, 2009, whichever is earlier. The 110th Congress enacted P.L. 110-53, which requires DHS to enter into a pilot program with at least one state to create an enhanced driver’s license (EDL) that would be considered a valid entry document under the WHTI requirements. Under P.L. 110-53, DHS’s participation in such a pilot program is required prior to the full implementation of WHTI at the land borders.²⁶ In addition, P.L. 110-53 requires DHS to perform a cost-benefit analysis of the WHTI program and to develop proposals for reducing the fees associated with the passport card currently being developed for the program.

Moreover, a number of bills have been introduced in the 110th Congress that would modify the existing program by either adding requirements that must be met prior to implementation, expanding the number of documents that could be accepted as proof of citizenship at the border, or extending the current deadlines associated with the program. For example, Senate-passed H.R. 2638 would push back the current deadline for implementing WHTI at the land borders to the later of the following two dates: June 1, 2009, or three months *after* the Secretaries of State and Homeland Security certify that a series of implementation requirements have been met. H.R. 1061 would, among other things, allow the current registered traveler and registered shipper program documentation²⁷ to be valid proof of citizenship under the WHTI requirements.

State and Local Enforcement of Immigration Law

The authority for state and local law enforcement officials to enforce immigration law has generally been construed to be limited to the criminal provisions of the INA; the enforcement of the civil provisions, which includes apprehension and removal of deportable aliens, has been viewed as a federal responsibility, with states

²⁶ DHS is currently participating in an enhanced driver’s license pilot program with the state of Washington.

²⁷ Current registered traveler programs include NEXUS, between the United States and Canada, and the Secure Electronic Network for Travelers’ Rapid Inspection (SENTRI), between the United States and Mexico. These programs expedite the entry of registered foreigners by providing them with dedicated lanes and radio identification frequency enabled cards. The Free and Secure Trade (FAST) program is a fully electronic expedited cargo release program in place at the Northern and Southern borders. FAST uses electronic data transmissions and transponder technology to expedite the processing of shipments at land border ports of entry.

playing an incidental supporting role.²⁸ One of the broadest grants of authority for state and local immigration enforcement activity stems from §133 of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, which amended INA §287 by adding a new provision. This provision, commonly referred to as the 287(g) program, authorizes the Attorney General (now the Secretary of Homeland Security) to enter into written agreements with states and local governments to allow their law enforcement officers to perform certain immigration law enforcement functions.

Some bills in the 110th Congress would modify or expand the 287(g) program. For example, S. 1639 would require DHS to reimburse states and local governments for training provided for their law enforcement officers under the 287(g) program and for the cost of any equipment required by the agreement. S. 1269 would create a web-based curriculum that could be used to train state and local law enforcement officers on immigration law enforcement.

Other related bills would create grant programs to reimburse states and local communities for unauthorized immigration-related expenses they may incur. For example, Senate-passed H.R. 2638 would establish a Border Relief Grant Program. Under this program, subject to available appropriations, the Secretary would award grants to tribal, state, and local law enforcement agencies located in counties no more than 100 miles from the U.S.-Mexico or U.S.-Canadian land border, or located in counties further than 100 miles from the U.S. land borders that are certified as High Impact Areas by the Secretary of DHS. Two-thirds of the program's funds would be allocated to agencies in the six states with the largest number of unauthorized alien apprehensions, and one-third would be set aside for agencies in High Impact Areas. The grants could be used to provide additional resources to a law enforcement agency to help address "criminal activity that occurs in the jurisdiction of such agency by virtue of [its] proximity to the United States border, and the impact of any lack of security along the United States border." Priority would be given to law enforcement agencies serving communities with populations less than 50,000 and located no more than 100 miles from the U.S. international land borders. The bill would authorize \$50 million each year for FY2008 through FY2012 for the program.

Lastly, some bills (including S. 1269, H.R. 842, and H.R. 2954) would "reaffirm the existing inherent authority of States," as sovereign entities (including their law enforcement personnel), to investigate, identify, apprehend, arrest, detain, or transfer into federal custody aliens in the United States in the course of carrying out routine duties. H.R. 842 would also require DHS to designate one detention facility within each state as a central facility for law enforcement entities within that state to place aliens. Under H.R. 842 and S. 1269, DHS would be further required to take aliens into federal custody within 48 hours of their apprehension by state and local law enforcement officers.

²⁸ For more information about state and local law enforcement authorities to enforce immigration law, see CRS Report RL32270, *Enforcing Immigration Law: The Role of State and Local Law Enforcement*, by Blas Nuñez-Neto, Michael John Garcia, and Karma Ester.

Employment Eligibility Verification and Worksite Enforcement

Employment eligibility verification and worksite enforcement have been key issues in the debate over comprehensive immigration reform. There appears to be considerable congressional support to expand verification requirements and bolster worksite enforcement efforts. In some cases, this support seems to be linked to support for other proposals to establish new temporary worker programs and to legalize the status of unauthorized aliens in the United States.

Under INA §274A, it is unlawful for an employer to knowingly hire, recruit or refer for a fee, or continue to employ an alien who is not authorized to be so employed. Employers are required to participate in a paper-based employment eligibility verification system, commonly referred to as the I-9 system, in which they examine documents presented by new hires to verify identity and work eligibility, and complete and retain I-9 verification forms. In addition, employers may elect to participate in an electronic employment eligibility verification system, established under a 1996 law. Participants in the system, now known as E-verify (formerly, the Basic Pilot program and then the Employment Eligibility Verification System), electronically verify new hires' employment authorization through Social Security Administration (SSA) and, if necessary, DHS databases. Employers violating prohibitions on unlawful employment may be subject to civil and/or criminal penalties. Enforcement of these provisions is termed worksite enforcement.²⁹

Several FY2008 appropriations bills (H.R. 3043, H.R. 3074, H.R. 3093, and H.R. 3161³⁰), as passed by the House, contain identical language to prohibit any funds made available in the acts to be used to enter into contracts with entities that do not participate in E-verify.³¹

A variety of other bills introduced in the 110th Congress, several of which are discussed here, would go further in requiring employers to conduct electronic employment eligibility verification and would make other changes to current law related to employment eligibility verification and worksite enforcement. Title III of S. 1639 would amend INA §274A to establish a new employment eligibility

²⁹ For further discussion of unauthorized employment, see CRS Report RL33973, *Unauthorized Employment in the United States: Issues and Options*, by Andorra Bruno.

³⁰ These bills are the FY2008 appropriations acts for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies (H.R. 3043); Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies (H.R. 3074); Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies (H.R. 3093); and Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies (H.R. 3161).

³¹ In a related development, the Bush Administration announced in August 2007 that it would commence a rule-making process to require all federal contractors and vendors to use E-verify. See White House (G.W. Bush), "Fact Sheet: Improving Border Security and Immigration Within Existing Law," August 10, 2007, item #14, at [<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/08/print/20070810.html>], visited September 5, 2007.

verification system (EEVS; modeled on the current largely voluntary electronic system). Under S. 1639, it would be unlawful for an employer to hire, or recruit or refer for a fee, an individual for employment in the United States without verifying identity and employment eligibility, as specified. Over time, participation in the new electronic EEVS would become mandatory. As of the date of enactment, the Secretary of DHS would be authorized to require any employer or industry that is a federal contractor, part of the critical infrastructure, or directly related to U.S. national or homeland security to participate in the new EEVS. This requirement could be applied to both newly hired and current employees. No later than 18 months after the date of enactment, all employers would be required to participate in the new EEVS with respect to newly hired employees and certain current employees. No later than three years after enactment, all employers would be required to participate with respect to new employees and all employees not previously verified through the EEVS.

Under S. 1639, individuals who receive final notices that the system cannot confirm their employment eligibility, known as final nonconfirmation notices, could seek administrative and judicial review, as specified. The current I-9 system would remain in place with some modifications.³² Among its other employment eligibility verification and worksite enforcement-related provisions, S. 1639 would provide for the disclosure of certain taxpayer identity information by SSA to DHS (§304); require SSA to issue more secure Social Security cards (§305); and establish a voluntary program through which participating employers could submit employees' fingerprints to verify identity and employment eligibility (§307).

Title III of H.R. 1645 (STRIVE Act) would likewise amend INA §274A to establish a new electronic employment verification system. Under this bill, it would be unlawful for an employer to hire an individual for employment in the United States without verifying identity and employment eligibility, as specified. Unlike under S. 1639, these verification requirements for the most part would not apply in cases of recruitment or referral for a fee. Requirements to participate in the new electronic system with respect to new hires would be phased-in, beginning no later than one year after enactment for "critical employers"³³ and no later than two, three, and four years after enactment, respectively, for large, mid-sized and small employers, as defined in the bill. This schedule for participation, however, would be contingent on the Comptroller General of the United States submitting annual certifications that the system's databases are updated in a timely fashion; there are low error rates in verification; the system has not and will not result in increased discrimination; workers' private information is protected; and staffing and funding are adequate. In the absence of such certifications, employer participation requirements would be waived or delayed. In addition to the participation requirements with respect to new hires, H.R. 1645 includes a separate requirement

³² S. 1639 also would make changes to existing monetary penalties for employer violations, but these provisions are somewhat unclear.

³³ Critical employers under the bill are U.S. agencies and departments (including the Armed Forces), state governments, and other employers who employ individuals working at a federal, state, or local government building, military base, nuclear energy site, weapon site, or airport.

that critical employers complete a one-time reverification of all individuals currently employed at these facilities.

Under the STRIVE Act, as under S. 1639, individuals who receive final nonconfirmation notices could seek administrative and judicial review. The current I-9 system would remain in place with some modifications. In addition, H.R. 1645 would increase monetary penalties for employer violations. Like S. 1639, the STRIVE Act also contains provisions on the disclosure of taxpayer identity information by SSA to DHS (§306(b)), and on enhancing the security of Social Security cards. The provisions in the two bills differ, however. With respect to Social Security cards, H.R. 1645 includes language like that in H.R. 98 discussed below, to require the issuance of Social Security cards with a machine-readable electronic identification strip unique to the bearer and a digitized photograph. Furthermore, the STRIVE Act would amend INA §274B on unfair immigration-related employment practices (§303) to, among other changes, add new antidiscrimination requirements related to the electronic verification system.

H.R. 98 would require Social Security cards to include an encrypted machine-readable electronic identification strip unique to the bearer and a digitized photograph. Under the bill, new hires would have to present a Social Security card of this type to their employers, who would use it to verify the worker's identity and work authorization. Employment eligibility verification would be conducted by accessing a database to be established by DHS that would contain DHS and SSA data. Similar provisions are included in H.R. 2954. Both H.R. 98 and H.R. 2954 would increase penalties on employers who violate prohibitions on unlawful employment, but would do so differently.

More limited in scope, H.R. 19 would phase in a requirement that all employers participate in the existing electronic verification system with respect to any individuals they hire. Although the bill is not entirely clear, it seems that this requirement would be limited to new hires. The mandatory participation requirement would be phased in based on the size of the employer's workforce. By seven years after enactment, it would apply to all employers.

Another related bill (S. 699) would require SSA to share data with DHS for immigration enforcement purposes in certain circumstances. These would include cases in which earnings are reported on a social security account number issued to an alien who is not authorized to work and cases in which the same social security account number is used with multiple names. Under S. 699, SSA also would be required to perform a search or manipulation of its records at the request of DHS to help identify individuals who are violating immigration laws. Currently, the Internal Revenue Code restricts SSA from sharing certain information that it receives from the Internal Revenue Service.³⁴ These provisions are also included in H.R. 2954.

³⁴ Internal Revenue Code §6103; 26 U.S.C. §6103.

U.S. Refugee Program

The admission of refugees to the United States and their resettlement here are authorized by the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), as amended.³⁵ The U.S. worldwide refugee ceiling for FY2007 is 70,000, with 50,000 of these numbers allocated among the regions of the world and the remaining 20,000 comprising an “unallocated reserve” to be used if, and where, additional refugee slots are needed. As of September 19, 2007, actual FY2007 refugee admissions totaled 43,451. Refugee numbers that are unused in a fiscal year are lost; they do not carry over into the following year.

The “Lautenberg amendment,” first enacted in 1989, requires the Attorney General (now the Secretary of DHS) to designate categories of former Soviet and Indochinese nationals for whom less evidence is needed to prove refugee status, and provides for adjustment to LPR status for certain former Soviet and Indochinese nationals denied refugee status. P.L. 108-199 amended the Lautenberg amendment to add a new provision, known as the “Specter amendment,” that directs the Attorney General to establish categories of Iranian religious minorities who may qualify for refugee status under the Lautenberg amendment’s reduced evidentiary standard. P.L. 110-5 extends the Lautenberg amendment through FY2007. Both the House-passed and Senate-passed versions of H.R. 2764 would extend the amendment through FY2008.

The “McCain amendment,” first enacted in 1996, made the adult children of certain Vietnamese refugees eligible for U.S. refugee resettlement. P.L. 107-185 revised the amendment for FY2002 and FY2003. Among its provisions, this law enabled adult children previously denied resettlement to have their cases reconsidered. Subsequent laws extended the amendment, as revised, through FY2007. The Senate-passed version of H.R. 2764 would extend the amendment through FY2009.

Resettlement Funding. The Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Refugee Resettlement (HHS/ORR), within the Administration for Children and Families, administers an initial transitional assistance program for temporarily dependent refugees and Cuban/Haitian entrants.³⁶ P.L. 110-5 provides \$587.8 million for refugee assistance for FY2007. For FY2008, the House-passed Labor, HHS, Education appropriations bill (H.R. 3043) would provide \$650.6 million for the refugee resettlement programs, while the related Senate-reported measure (S. 1710) would appropriate \$654.2 million for these programs.

³⁵ For an overview of the U.S. refugee program, see CRS Report RL31269, *Refugee Admissions and Resettlement Policy*, by Andorra Bruno (hereafter cited as CRS Report RL31269).

³⁶ For information on refugee resettlement assistance, see CRS Report RL31269.

Iraqi Refugees

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that there are up to 2 million Iraqi refugees in neighboring states, mainly Syria and Jordan. According to UNHCR, “many were displaced prior to 2003, but an increasing number are fleeing now.”³⁷ The plight of Iraqi refugees is of congressional interest. Multiple bills have been introduced in the 110th Congress to facilitate the resettlement of Iraqi refugees in the United States.

The admission of refugees to the United States and their resettlement here are authorized by the INA, as amended.³⁸ DOS handles overseas processing of refugees, which is conducted through a system of three priorities for admission. Priority One (P-1) covers compelling protection cases and individuals for whom no durable solution exists, who are referred to the U.S. refugee program by UNHCR, a U.S. embassy, or a designated nongovernmental organization (NGO). Iraqis, like all nationalities, are eligible for P-1 processing. Priority Two (P-2) covers groups of special humanitarian concern to the United States. It includes specific groups within certain nationalities, clans, or ethnic groups. Certain Sudanese Darfurians in Iraq have been designated as a P-2 group.³⁹ Priority Three (P-3) comprises family reunification cases involving spouses, unmarried children under age 21, and parents of persons who were admitted to the United States as refugees or granted asylum. Iraqis are among the nationalities eligible for P-3 processing in FY2007 and will continue to be eligible for P-3 processing in FY2008.

In February 2007, DOS established the Iraq Refugee and Internally Displaced Persons Task Force to coordinate refugee and internally displaced persons assistance to the region and refugee resettlement. Led by the Under Secretary of State for Democracy and Global Affairs, the task force includes officials from DOS, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and DHS.⁴⁰ As of September 20, 2007, FY2007 admissions of Iraqi refugees totaled 1,135.

Beyond the formal refugee program, other immigration mechanisms have been established or are under consideration to facilitate the admission to the United States

³⁷ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “The Iraq Situation,” at [<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/txis/vtx/iraq?page=intro>], visited August 7, 2007. Also see CRS Report RL33936, *Iraqi Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons: A Deepening Humanitarian Crisis?* coordinated by Rhoda Margesson (hereafter cited as CRS Report RL33936).

³⁸ The Refugee Act (P.L. 96-212, March 17, 1980) amended the INA to establish procedures for the admission of refugees to the United States. For additional information on the U.S. refugee program, see CRS Report RL31269, *Refugee Admissions and Resettlement Policy*, by Andorra Bruno (hereafter cited as CRS Report RL31269).

³⁹ U.S. Department of State, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Proposed Refugee Admissions for Fiscal Year 2008: Report to the Congress*, at [<http://www.state.gov/g/prm/refadm/rls/rpts/2007/92585.htm>], visited September 20, 2007.

⁴⁰ For additional information, see CRS Report RL33936.

of Iraqis who have worked for or been closely associated with the U.S. government, including the U.S. military. Laws enacted by the 110th Congress (P.L. 110-28 and P.L. 110-36) build on provisions enacted in 2006 that authorize DHS to grant LPR status as *special immigrants* to certain nationals of Iraq or Afghanistan who worked directly with the U.S. Armed Forces as translators for at least one year, and their spouses and children. This program was initially capped at 50 aliens (excluding spouses and children) annually.⁴¹ Both P.L. 110-28 and P.L. 110-36 expand this program to authorize DHS to grant special immigrant status to nationals of Iraq or Afghanistan who have worked directly with the U.S. Armed Forces, or under Chief of Mission authority, as translators or interpreters. These laws also increase the annual cap on this program to 500 for FY2007 and FY2008.⁴² P.L. 110-36 further establishes that an individual's absence from the United States due to his or her work with the Chief of Mission or U.S. Armed Forces as a translator or interpreter, some of which work was done in Iraq or Afghanistan, will not be considered a break in U.S. continuous residence for purposes of naturalization under the INA.

Other related bills introduced in the 110th Congress include H.R. 2265 and S. 1651, both of which would broaden DHS's authority to grant special immigrant status to certain nationals of Iraq. H.R. 2265 would make Iraqi nationals eligible for special immigrant status if they had worked directly with the U.S. government, the United Nations, a certified government or United Nations contractor or subcontractor, or a U.S.-based nongovernmental organization for at least one year. To be eligible under S. 1651, the Iraqi national would have to have been employed by, or worked for or directly with, the U.S. government in Iraq in or after 2003 for not less than one year. Under H.R. 2265, the program would be capped at 15,000 (excluding spouses and children) annually for FY2008 through FY2011. Under S. 1651, the program would be capped at 5,000 for each of the five fiscal years after the date of enactment. Under both bills, aliens granted special immigrant status would be eligible for the same resettlement assistance and benefits as refugees.⁴³

H.R. 2265 and S. 1651 also would make changes to the U.S. refugee program with respect to the resettlement of Iraqi refugees. While the particular provisions in the bills differ, both would direct the Secretary of State to establish processing facilities where eligible Iraqi nationals could apply for admission to the United States as special immigrants or refugees. In addition, both bills would establish new Priority Two groups of Iraqi refugees under the processing priority system, mentioned above. The new P-2 groups proposed in the bills include, among others, female-headed households and unaccompanied children (H.R. 2265) and Iraqis who were employed by, or worked for or directly with, the U.S. government in Iraq (S. 1651).

⁴¹ P.L. 109-163, §1059, January 6, 2006.

⁴² The cap reverts to 50 for FY2009 and subsequent years.

⁴³ For a discussion of refugee resettlement assistance, see CRS Report RL31269.

Other Legislation and Issues

Unaccompanied Alien Children

The Unaccompanied Alien Child Protection Act (S. 844), which addresses several of the issues and charges that advocates have raised surrounding unaccompanied alien children (UAC), has again been introduced in the 110th Congress. In the 109th Congress, a similar bill (S.119) was passed in the Senate. S. 844 would provide for several changes to the INA. Among them, it would establish in statute: the right of UAC to consult with a consular officer prior to repatriation; criteria for treatment and detention of UAC; and the preference order of child placement. The legislation additionally would grant the Office of Refugee Resettlement, which is tasked with managing the federal government's UAC program, access to children in DHS's custody to determine the child's age. Notably, the legislation also would provide for the appointment of child advocates for UAC, including counsel for all children in the custody of DHS who are not being repatriated to a contiguous country. These advocates would largely serve on a *pro bono* basis. This same legislation was offered as a floor amendment (S.Amdt. 1146) to S.Amdt. 1150 to S. 1348 and passed the Senate by a voice vote.

Victims of Trafficking

The most recent U.S. government reports on human trafficking estimate that there are between 14,500 and 17,500 victims trafficked into the United States each year.⁴⁴ In 2000, Congress passed the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 (VTVPA; P.L. 106-386), which created a new nonimmigrant category (T visa)⁴⁵ as well as several programs to help victims of trafficking in the United States. Congress reauthorized VTVPA in 2003 and 2005,⁴⁶ providing new authorizations for existing grant programs, creating new grant programs, and amending the T visa. Authorizations for current anti-trafficking grant programs expire at the end of FY2007.

The Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2007 (H.R. 270) would authorize funds for anti-trafficking programs for FY2008 through FY2010. The bill would make juvenile victims eligible for interim trafficking assistance from HHS. It would also require the Attorney General to prepare model anti-trafficking legislation for use by states. The model legislation would define and prohibit all acts related to prostitution of children and trafficking of children for forced labor or sexual exploitation.

⁴⁴ See, for example, U.S. Department of Justice, *Attorney General's Annual Report to Congress on U.S. Government Activities to Combat Trafficking in Persons: Fiscal Year 2005*, June 2006, p. 3, at [<http://www.usdoj.gov/ag/annualreports/tr2005/agreport/humantrafficking2005.pdf>], visited September 20, 2007.

⁴⁵ P.L. 106-386 amended the INA to add §101(a)(15)(T). Although T nonimmigrant status is often referred to as the T visa, it is not technically a visa if it is given to aliens present in the United States.

⁴⁶ P.L. 108-193 and P.L. 109-162.

Temporary Protected Status

When civil unrest, violence, or natural disasters erupt in spots around the world, concerns arise over whether nationals from these troubled places who are in the United States will be safe if they are required to return home at the end of their authorized period of stay. Provisions exist in the INA to offer temporary protected status (TPS) or other forms of relief from removal, under specified circumstances. TPS is blanket relief that may be granted under the following conditions: There is ongoing armed conflict posing serious threat to personal safety; a foreign state requests TPS because it temporarily cannot handle the return of nationals due to environmental disaster; or there are extraordinary and temporary conditions in a foreign state that prevent aliens from returning, provided that granting TPS is consistent with U.S. national interests.

The Secretary of Homeland Security, in consultation with the Secretary of State, can issue TPS for periods of 6 to 18 months and can extend these periods if conditions do not change in the designated country. The United States currently provides TPS to nationals from seven countries: Burundi, El Salvador, Honduras, Liberia, Nicaragua, Somalia, and Sudan. In September 2006, the Bush Administration announced that Liberian TPS would expire on October 1, 2007, stating that country conditions caused by the civil war had improved. In July 2007, the House passed under suspension H.R. 3123, which would extend Liberia's TPS designation until September 30, 2008, and would extend work authorization for Liberian nationals with TPS until April 1, 2008. On September 12, 2007, President George W. Bush directed the Secretary of Homeland Security to defer the enforced departure of Liberians with TPS until March 31, 2009.

Legislation

The following are immigration bills or bills with significant immigration provisions that have received legislative action in the 110th Congress beyond hearings. All of these measures are discussed earlier in the report.

Enacted

P.L. 110-5 (H.J.Res. 20). Revised Continuing Appropriations Resolution, 2007. Contains refugee-related provisions. Passed House on January 31, 2007. Passed Senate on February 14, 2007. Signed on February 15, 2007.

P.L. 110-28 (H.R. 2206). U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Care, Katrina Recovery, and Iraq Accountability Appropriations Act, 2007. Contains refugee-related provisions. Passed House on May 10, 2007. Passed Senate on May 17, 2007. Signed on May 25, 2007.

P.L. 110-36 (S. 1104). A bill to increase the number of Iraqi and Afghan translators and interpreters who may be admitted to the United States as special immigrants. Passed Senate on April 12, 2007. Reported by House Judiciary

(H.Rept. 110-158) on May 21, 2007. Passed House, as amended, on May 22, 2007. Senate agreed to House amendments on May 24, 2007. Signed on June 15, 2007.

P.L. 110-53 (H.R. 1). Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007. Passed House on January 9, 2007. Passed Senate, as amended, on July 9, 2007. Senate agreed to conference report (H.Rept. 110-259) on July 26, 2006; House agreed on July 27, 2006. Signed on August 3, 2007.

Receiving Action

H.R. 2638 (D. Price). Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, 2008. Reported by House Appropriations Committee (H.Rept. 110-181) on June 8, 2007. Passed House on June 15, 2007. Passed Senate, as amended, on July 26, 2007.

H.R. 2764 (Lowey). Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2008. Contains refugee-related provisions. Reported by House Appropriations Committee (H.Rept. 110-197) on June 18, 2007. Passed House on June 22, 2007. Passed Senate, as amended, on September 6, 2007.

H.R. 3043 (Obey). Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2008. Contains provisions related to refugee assistance and employment eligibility verification. Reported by House Appropriations Committee (H.Rept. 110-321) on July 13, 2007. Passed House on July 19, 2007.

H.R. 3074 (Olver). Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2008. Contains provision related to employment eligibility verification. Reported by House Appropriations Committee (H.Rept. 110-238) on July 18, 2007. Passed House on July 24, 2007. Passed Senate, as amended, on September 12, 2007.

H.R. 3093 (Mollohan). Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2008. Contains provision related to employment eligibility verification. Reported by House Appropriations Committee (H.Rept. 110-240) on July 19, 2007; supplemental report filed by Committee (H.Rept. 110-240, Part II) on July 25, 2007. Passed House on July 26, 2007.

H.R. 3123 (Kennedy). A bill to extend the designation of Liberia under section 244 of the INA so Liberians can continue to be eligible for temporary protected status. Passed House on July 30, 2007.

H.R. 3161 (DeLauro). Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2008. Contains provision related to employment eligibility verification. Reported by House Appropriations Committee (H.Rept. 110-258) on July 24, 2007. Passed House on August 2, 2007.

S. 1710 (Harkin). Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2008. Contains refugee-related provisions. Reported by Senate Appropriations Committee (H.Rept. 110-107) on June 27, 2007.