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Refugees, Fiscal Year 1997

A refugee is any person who is outside his or her country of nationality and is unable or unwilling to return to that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution. Persons within their country of nationality may be treated as refugees, provided that the President, after consultation with Congress, declares that they are of special humanitarian concern to the United States.

Applications (Tables 1, 2, 3, A)

The number of applications for refugee status filed with the INS decreased by 21 percent from 1996 (155,868) to 1997 (122,741). The leading countries of chargeability of the applicants were Bosnia-Herzegovina with 31 percent of the applications, the former Soviet Union (29 percent), Vietnam (16), Cuba (7), and Somalia (5) (Table A and Table 2). Among those countries of chargeability from which at least 600 applications were filed in 1997, the number of applications filed by nationals of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire) (from 65 to 2,664), Liberia (310 to 1,620), and Bosnia-Herzegovina (19,242 to 38,381), respectively, showed the largest percentage increase over the 1996 levels, while the number of applications filed by nationals of Vietnam (from 69,802 to 19,552) and Somalia (14,383 to 6,510) showed a sharp percentage decrease. The large increase in the number of applications filed by nationals of Cuba (from 1,566

At A Glance —

- ❖ The number of application filed for refugee status in fiscal year 1997 was 122,741, a 21% decrease from the 155,868 applications filed in fiscal year 1996.
- ❖ The top five countries of chargeability for refugee status applications filed in fiscal year 1997 were Bosnia-Herzegovina, the former Soviet Union, Vietnam, Cuba, and Somalia.
- ❖ The number of refugees approved for admission to the United States increased to 77,600 in fiscal year 1997 from 74,491 in 1996.
- ❖ Bosnia-Herzegovina, the former Soviet Union, Vietnam, Somalia, and Iraq accounted for 91% of all refugee approvals in 1997.
- ❖ The number of refugee arrivals declined to 69,276 in fiscal year 1997 from 74,791 in 1996. The decline is largely the result of the decrease in Vietnamese refugee arrivals.
- ❖ The former Soviet Union, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Vietnam, and Somalia comprised about 87% of the total refugee arrivals in 1997.

to 9,102) was due to a reporting procedural change that took place in the INS Mexico City district. Beginning in 1997, offices in the Mexico City district adopted a reporting guideline that was

Table A. Refugee Status Applications Filed and Approved, and Refugees Admitted, by Selected Nationality: Fiscal Year 1997

Nationality	Refugee applications filed	Refugee applications approved	Refugee arrivals
Total	122,741	77,600	69,276
Bosnia-Herzegovina	38,381	27,840	21,357
Soviet Union, former	35,329	27,632	27,072
Vietnam	19,552	6,522	6,660
Cuba	9,102	1,860	2,911
Somalia	6,510	5,599	4,974
Iraq	4,573	3,289	2,679
Congo, Democratic Republic ¹	2,664	651	45
Iran	2,244	1,234	1,305
Liberia	1,620	893	231
Croatia	1,170	884	-
Sudan	602	393	277
Other	984	797	1,762

¹ On May 30, 1997, Zaire was formally recognized as the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

consistent with all other overseas offices and reported their refugee processing workload in terms of number of individuals instead of cases processed.

Approvals (Tables 1, 2, 3, A)

The number of refugees approved for admission to the United States increased from 74,491 in 1996 to 77,600 in 1997 (Table 3). The leading countries of chargeability were Bosnia-Herzegovina with 27,840 approvals, the former Soviet Union (27,632), Vietnam (6,522), Somalia (5,599), and Iraq (3,289) (Table A and Table 2). These five countries accounted for 91 percent of all approvals in 1997. The number approved from the former Soviet Union dropped for the fifth straight year, reflecting the downward trend in applications. The number of refugees approved from Vietnam declined by 24 percent and those from the East Asia geographic region declined by 43 percent in 1997. All Vietnamese refugee processing centers outside

Vietnam were closed by the end of 1997. Residents of former refugee camps were asked to return to Vietnam. Their cases are processed through a special program called the Resettlement of Vietnamese Returnees (ROVR) in Vietnam. The ROVR program adjudicated 607 and approved 565 people in 1997.

Refugee figures include spouses and children who are cleared to join principal refugees already in the United States, and they count against the annual ceiling. Because of these family reunification cases, the data continue to show refugees being approved and arriving for some time after active refugee processing has ended for nationals of certain countries. Most of the refugee flow from Eastern Europe in fiscal year 1997, other than from the former Yugoslavia, was for family reunification. Most of the caseload from Afghanistan and Ethiopia also fall into this category. Overall, 3.1 percent of the applications and 3.6 percent of the approvals were family reunification cases.

Arrivals (Tables 3, 4)

Refugee arrivals to the United States declined to 69,276 in 1997 from 74,791 in 1996 (Table 4). The decline was largely attributed to the decrease in Vietnamese refugee arrivals. Arrivals from Bosnia-Herzegovina increased significantly (78 percent) against an overall declining trend. The former Soviet Union, the former Yugoslavia, Vietnam, and Somalia were the leading countries for refugee arrivals in 1997, comprising 87 percent of the total. The time lag between approval of a refugee application and the refugee's arrival in the United States may be 6 months or more. After approval, refugees must undergo health and security clearances, have sponsorship and placement arranged, and in some cases go through orientation and English language training. This time lag accounts for the discrepancies between approval and arrival figures in any given year.

U.S. Refugee Program

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

At the beginning of each fiscal year, the President, after consultation with Congress to review the worldwide refugee situation, determines the number of refugees in need of resettlement who are of special humanitarian concern to the United States. The President then establishes the authorized number of admissions for that fiscal

A Refugee —

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

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

year. During the year, changes in the need for resettlement may require revisions in the overall limit on refugee admissions or reallocation among areas of the world. The admission ceiling of 78,000 for 1997 was established and later reallocated among geographic regions as follows:

Geographic region of origin	Initial ceiling	Final ceiling
Total	78,000	78,000
Africa	7,000	7,000
East Asia	10,000	10,000
Eastern Europe / Soviet Union (fmr.)	48,000	52,500
Latin America / Caribbean	4,000	4,000
Near East / South Asia	4,000	4,500
Unallocated, funded	5,000	-

- Represents zero.

The authorized admission levels set the maximum number of refugees allowed to enter the United States in a fiscal year from each of the geographic areas of chargeability. The authorized ceiling was lowered from 90,000 in 1996 to 78,000 in 1997, continuing a downward trend since the peak of 142,000 in 1992. An unallocated funded reserve of 5,000 was placed in the 1997 ceiling to allow for small increases in one or more areas as needed without subtracting refugee numbers from other areas.

The ceiling for East Asia includes certain Vietnamese Amerasians, who enter the United States with immigrant visas. Although these aliens are immigrants rather than refugees, they are included in the refugee ceiling since they are eligible for refugee benefits in the United States. Only 809 Amerasians, including their family members, entered the United States in 1997. The Amerasian program is ending, since most of those eligible have already been identified and entered the United States.

During 1997, refugees were interviewed and approved for admission to the United States by officers in ten of the Service's thirty-nine overseas offices. To qualify for admission as a refugee, each applicant must meet all of the following criteria: be a refugee as set forth in the Refugee Act of 1980; be among the types of refugees determined to be of special humanitarian concern to the United States; be admissible under the Immigration and Nationality Act; and not be firmly resettled in any foreign country. Spouses and minor children of qualifying refugees also enter the United States as refugees, either accompanying or following to join the principal refugee. Occasionally these family members gain refugee status after arriving in the United States; this was the case with 196 people in 1997.

Under the Refugee Act of 1980, refugees are eligible to adjust to lawful permanent resident status, exempt from the worldwide annual limitation, after 1 year of residence in the United

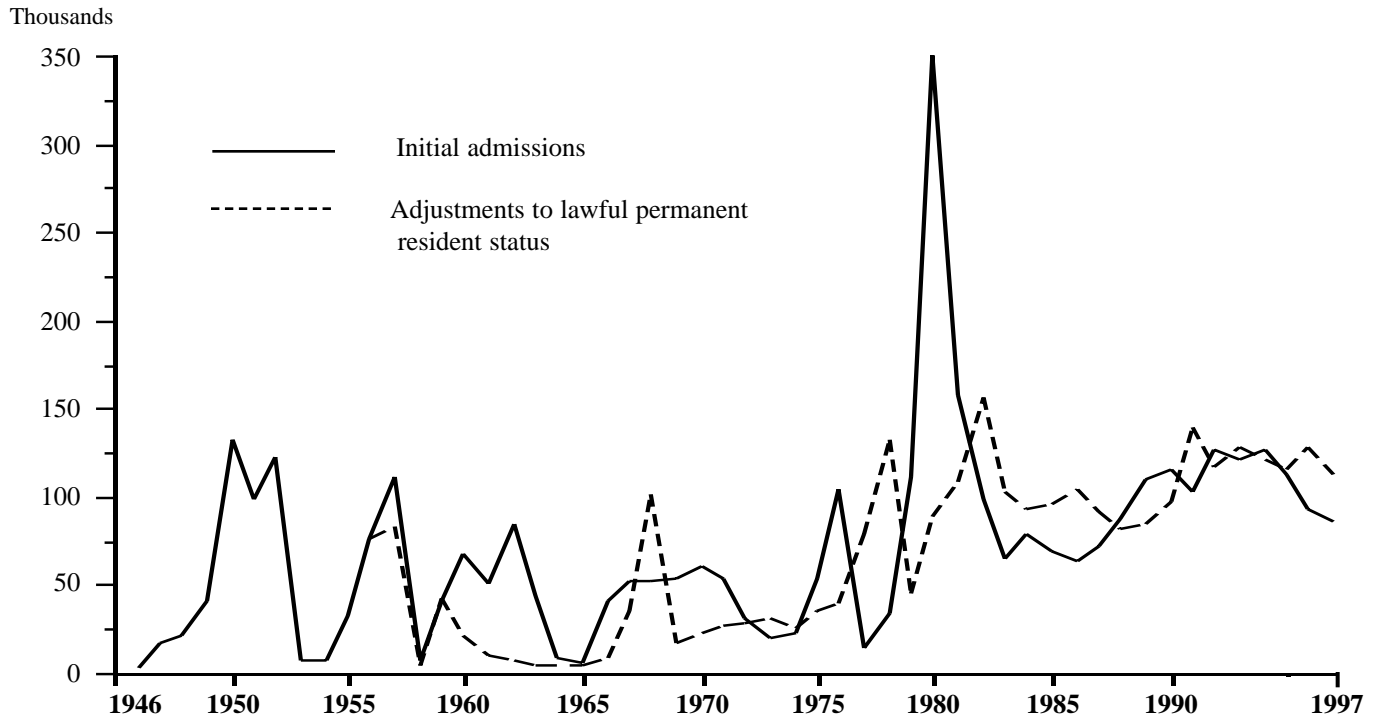
States. When they adjust status, their date of admission is recorded as their date of entry as refugees, so that the length of time spent in refugee status is counted toward the residency requirement for naturalization.

Chart 1 depicts initial refugee admissions and adjustments to lawful permanent resident status for the period 1946-97. This graph demonstrates the time lag between initial admission and adjustment to immigrant status. At the onset of parole programs there generally were no mechanisms for adjustment to permanent status, thus creating a recurring need for special legislation. The Refugee Act of 1980 addressed this situation by providing for routine adjustment of status by refugees one year after arrival.

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

During fiscal year 1997, the WPC received 25,416 questionnaires and scheduled 53,436 persons for Moscow interviews. About 19 percent of these potential applicants did not appear for their interviews. Applicants from the former Soviet Union who were in other countries at the start of fiscal year 1990 are still allowed to submit applications for refugee status directly to other INS refugee processing posts. Only 49 Soviet applications were filed outside of Moscow in 1997, including 18 spouses and children who received refugee status in the United States.

Chart 1. Refugee and Asylee Initial Admissions and Adjustments to Lawful Permanent Resident Status: Fiscal Years 1946-97



Major refugee programs

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

NOTE: For the period 1946-56, adjustments to lawful permanent resident status and initial admissions were the same.

Source of Data

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

Prior to the 1996, statistics on refugee arrival published by the INS were derived from data

collected by the Nonimmigrant Information System (NIIS) of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. However, since the NIIS records each entry of a person with non-immigrant status, a refugee traveling abroad and returning to the United States may be counted more than once during a fiscal year. After giving careful consideration to the reporting requirements and nature of the data in NIIS, a decision was made to report refugee arrival statistics using data from the Bureau for Refugee Programs, Department of State. This source counts the actual number of refugees arriving in the United States in each fiscal year, and is shown in the *Statistical Yearbook* beginning with the 1996 edition. Therefore, any comparison of refugee

arrival data from a 1995 or earlier INS statistical publication with one from 1996 or later must be made with caution.

The Immigration and Naturalization Service collects data on refugees adjusting to lawful permanent resident status as part of its immigrant

data series gathered by the Computer Linked Application Information Management Systems (CLAIMS). The data collected include demographic as well as immigration-oriented variables. This is the only stage in the refugee process during which the INS collects detailed information about the characteristics of refugees.

Table 1. Refugee-Status Applications: Fiscal Years 1980-97

Year	Applications pending beginning of year	Applications filed during year	Applications approved during year	Applications denied during year	Applications otherwise closed during year	Applications pending end of year
1980 (April-Sept.).....	16,642	95,241	89,580	6,149	1,197	14,957
1981	14,957	178,273	155,291	15,322	3,998	18,619
1982	18,619	76,150	61,527	14,943	6,631	11,668
1983	11,668	92,522	73,645	20,255	2,489	7,801
1984	7,801	99,636	77,932	16,220	604	12,681
1985	12,681	80,734	59,436	18,430	1,842	13,707
1986	13,707	67,310	52,081	9,679	3,362	15,895
1987	15,895	85,823	61,529	13,911	6,126	20,152
1988	20,152	105,024	80,282	11,821	5,632	27,441
1989	27,441	190,597	95,505	33,179	4,005	85,349
1990	39,524	135,251	99,697	29,805	24,904	20,369
1991	20,369	123,492	107,962	12,644	5,700	17,555
1992	18,238	133,786	115,330	14,886	6,780	15,028
1993	15,028	127,676	106,026	20,280	5,107	11,291
1994	15,582	142,068	105,137	20,557	19,485	12,471
1995	12,471	143,223	78,936	32,412	34,251	10,095
1996	10,095	155,868	74,491	26,317	59,589	5,566
1997	5,566	122,741	77,600	22,725	17,270	10,712

NOTE: The Refugee Act of 1980 went into effect April 1, 1980. Because of an administrative processing change, 45,825 applications pending in Moscow at the end of fiscal year 1989 were administratively closed and added to the pool of initial questionnaires submitted to the Washington Processing Center (WPC) beginning in 1990. Changes in the number of applications pending from 1991 to 1992 and 1993 to 1994 are due to revisions in the data from reporting offices.

**Table 2. Refugee-Status Applications by Geographic Area and Selected Country of Chargeability
Fiscal Year 1997**

Geographic area and country of chargeability	Applications pending beginning of year	Applications filed during year	Applications approved during year	Applications denied during year	Applications otherwise closed during year	Applications pending end of year
All countries	5,566	122,741	77,600	22,725	17,270	10,712
Africa	788	11,796	7,854	1,828	2,269	633
Congo, Democratic Republic ¹	83	2,664	651	274	1,746	76
Eritrea	2	15	13	-	1	3
Ethiopia	48	210	195	4	9	50
Liberia	44	1,620	893	674	66	31
Nigeria	1	69	51	16	-	3
Rwanda	3	34	28	-	-	9
Sierra Leone	4	17	15	2	1	3
Somalia	484	6,510	5,599	736	355	304
Sudan	103	602	393	108	82	122
Uganda	2	17	1	11	1	6
Other Africa	14	38	15	3	8	26
East Asia	23	19,905	6,810	2,731	10,383	4
Burma	-	236	210	26	-	-
Laos	-	109	71	38	-	-
Vietnam	23	19,552	6,522	2,667	10,382	4
Other East Asia	-	8	7	-	1	-
Eastern Europe and Soviet Union (former)	3,538	74,927	56,379	10,371	2,752	8,963
Albania	38	27	9	18	3	35
Poland	12	5	6	-	-	11
Romania	24	5	2	-	3	24
Soviet Union, former	6	35,329	27,632	7,681	5	17
Yugoslavia, former	3,456	39,561	28,730	2,672	2,741	8,874
Bosnia-Herzegovina	3,455	38,381	27,840	2,642	2,736	8,618
Croatia	-	1,170	884	30	3	253
Unknown	1	10	6	-	2	3
Other Eastern Europe	2	-	-	-	-	2
Latin America	6	9,102	1,860	5,902	1,346	-
Cuba	6	9,102	1,860	5,902	1,346	-
Near East	1,211	6,853	4,539	1,893	520	1,112
Afghanistan	7	30	10	-	4	23
Iran	396	2,244	1,234	571	221	614
Iraq	808	4,573	3,289	1,322	295	475
Other Near East	-	6	6	-	-	-
Not reported	-	158	158	-	-	-

¹ In May 1997 Zaire was formally recognized as the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

- Represents zero.

**Table 3. Refugee Approvals and Arrivals by Geographic Area of Chargeability
Fiscal Years 1990-97**

Geographic area of chargeability	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Authorized admissions	111,000	116,000	123,500	116,000	117,500	111,000	90,000	78,000
Africa	3,500	4,900	6,000	7,000	7,000	7,000	7,000	7,000
East Asia	36,800	38,500	33,500	36,000	41,500	39,000	25,000	10,000
Eastern Europe & Soviet Union (former)	58,300	53,500	64,000	51,500	55,000	48,000	45,000	48,000
Latin America & Caribbean	2,400	3,100	3,000	3,500	4,000	8,000	6,000	4,000
Near East	6,000	6,000	6,000	7,000	6,000	5,000	4,000	4,000
Unallocated Reserve	4,000	10,000	11,000	11,000	4,000	4,000	3,000	5,000
Approvals	99,697	107,962	115,330	106,026	105,137	78,936	74,491	77,600
Africa	3,318	4,430	5,667	6,813	5,748	4,895	9,681	7,854
East Asia	30,613	33,560	31,751	38,314	40,639	23,023	11,891	6,810
Eastern Europe & Soviet Union (former)	58,951	62,582	68,131	52,090	48,963	45,900	47,611	56,379
Latin America & Caribbean	1,863	2,263	4,121	3,991	2,513	1,933	982	1,860
Near East	4,952	5,127	5,660	4,818	7,229	3,068	4,246	4,539
Not reported	-	-	-	-	45	117	80	158
Arrivals ¹	109,078	96,587	114,498	107,926	109,593	98,520	74,791	69,276
Africa	3,493	4,424	5,491	6,969	5,856	4,779	7,502	6,069
East Asia	38,370	37,262	34,202	38,302	40,601	35,956	18,343	7,781
Eastern Europe & Soviet Union (former)	56,912	45,516	64,184	51,278	50,838	45,703	41,617	48,450
Latin America & Caribbean	5,312	4,026	3,777	4,377	6,437	7,618	3,541	2,986
Near East	4,991	5,359	6,844	7,000	5,861	4,464	3,788	3,990

¹ Arrivals may be higher than approvals because of the arrival of persons approved in previous years.

NOTE: The authorized admission levels for 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, and 1995 were 125,000, 131,000, 142,000, 132,000, 121,000, and 112,000, respectively, including 15,000 Amerasians in both 1990 and 1991, 18,500 in 1992, 16,000 in 1993, 3,500 in 1994, and 1,000 in 1995. Since Amerasians enter the United States on immigrant visas, they are not included as refugee admissions. As a result, the authorized admission levels for 1990 through 1995 for East Asia have been reduced accordingly. Beginning in fiscal year 1996, there is no specific allocation for Amerasians in authorized admissions.

- Represents zero.

**Table 4. Refugee Arrivals into the United States by Selected Country of Chargeability
Fiscal Years 1991-97**

Country of chargeability	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
All countries	96,587	114,498	107,926	109,593	98,520	74,791	69,276
Afghanistan	1,480	1,452	1,233	21	4	-	-
Albania	1,363	1,108	458	171	51	23	9
Bulgaria	585	126	34	5	3	-	-
Cambodia	38	141	22	6	1	-	-
China, People's Republic	4	1	-	-	-	1	-
Congo, Democratic Republic ¹	73	76	199	92	85	38	45
Cuba	3,933	3,720	3,065	2,670	6,133	3,498	2,911
Czechoslovakia, former	158	18	3	5	-	1	-
El Salvador	6	2	1	-	-	-	-
Eritrea	²	²	²	6	-	14	7
Ethiopia ²	3,948	2,972	2,765	328	239	194	197
Ghana	-	-	2	5	9	1	4
Haiti	-	54	1,307	3,766	1,485	39	75
Hungary	7	1	-	1	-	-	-
Iran	2,692	1,949	1,161	851	978	1,256	1,305
Iraq	842	3,442	4,605	4,984	3,482	2,528	2,679
Laos	9,249	7,315	6,967	6,272	3,675	2,201	939
Liberia	1	637	961	610	52	46	231
Nicaragua	87	1	1	1	-	2	-
Poland	290	134	54	31	39	11	6
Romania	4,452	1,499	215	67	24	16	3
Somalia	192	1,570	2,753	3,555	2,506	6,436	4,974
South Africa	19	15	8	-	-	1	1
Soviet Union, former	38,661	61,298	48,627	43,470	35,716	29,536	27,072
Sudan	24	113	244	1,220	1,705	575	277
Uganda	125	93	24	2	10	10	9
Vietnam	27,957	26,690	31,219	34,248	32,244	16,130	6,660
Yugoslavia, former ³	-	-	1,887	7,088	9,870	12,030	21,360
Bosnia-Herzegovina	³	³	1,887	7,088	9,870	12,030	21,357
Unknown	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
Other	401	71	111	118	209	204	512

¹ In May 1997 Zaire was formally recognized as the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

² Data for Eritrea are not available separately from Ethiopia prior to fiscal year 1994; beginning in 1994, data for Ethiopia exclude Eritrea.

³ Yugoslavia was officially dissolved as an independent republic in 1992. Data for Bosnia-Herzegovina are not available separately from Yugoslavia prior to fiscal year 1993.

- Represents zero.