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Applications for Liberian Refugee Immigration Fairness (LRIF): Fact Sheet

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Over the years, Congress has passed legislation to provide access to lawful permanent resident (LPR) status to certain groups of foreign nationals living in the United States without permanent status. The 116th Congress passed a measure of this type entitled Liberian Refugee Immigration Fairness (LRIF). LRIF provides an opportunity for Liberians who have been continuously present in the United States since November 2014 and their family members to obtain LPR status.¹ Enacted as part of the FY2020 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 116-92, §7611), it gives individuals until December 20, 2020, to apply for LPR status. This fact sheet presents data on applications received by the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS's) U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) under LRIF during the first 10 months of the application period.

Background

Under a series of executive branch actions beginning in 1991, certain groups of Liberians have been allowed to live and work in the United States regardless of whether they have a lawful immigration status. Liberians in the United States first received temporary protected status (TPS) in March 1991 following the outbreak of civil war in their home country. TPS is a statutory form of temporary immigration relief for individuals from countries experiencing armed conflict, natural disaster, or extraordinary conditions that prevent their safe return.² Since the 1991 TPS designation, certain Liberians in the United States have been covered by TPS or by deferred enforced departure (DED), another form of blanket immigration relief.³ The most recent TPS designation for Liberia ended on May 17, 2017, and a long-running DED designation was set to expire on March 30, 2020, but President Trump delayed the effective date of its expiration (to January 10, 2021) in order to provide continuous employment authorization to Liberians eligible to adjust their status under the recently enacted legislation.

Beginning with the 105th Congress, bills to provide LPR status to Liberians have been introduced by every Congress but have not been enacted. In December 2019, Congress enacted LRIF (in P.L. 116-92, §7611), providing Liberians an opportunity to obtain LPR status and citizenship if they had been living in the United States since November 20, 2014, and had not been convicted of certain crimes.⁴ LRIF applies to Liberian nationals who have been living in the United States since this date regardless of whether they had been covered by TPS or DED. The Center for Migration Studies estimates that approximately 10,000 Liberians are potentially eligible for LRIF.⁵

¹ The spouse or unmarried child of a Liberian national who meets the requirements of LRIF and has applied for lawful permanent residence based on LRIF is also eligible to apply for LRIF.

² Under INA Section 244 (8 U.S.C. §1254a), the Secretary of Homeland Security may designate a country for TPS for periods of 6, 12, or 18 months and may subsequently extend the designation if conditions continue to be met. Nationals of a designated country living in the United States may apply for TPS, which provides temporary protection from removal and work authorization. For more information, see CRS Report RS20844, *Temporary Protected Status: Overview and Current Issues*.

³ DED is a temporary, discretionary, administrative stay of removal granted to aliens from designated countries. Unlike TPS, a DED designation emanates from the President's constitutional powers to conduct foreign relations and has no statutory basis.

⁴ This was the date by which Liberians had to have been present in the United States to qualify for its most recent TPS designation (related to the Ebola epidemic). Individuals who have been convicted of an aggravated felony, two or more crimes involving moral turpitude, or who have participated in the persecution of others are ineligible for LRIF.

⁵ In addition to the 10,000 Liberians potentially eligible for LRIF, the authors estimate that an additional 100 spouses and 200 children of potential LRIF beneficiaries are potentially eligible as derivative family members. Donald Kerwin and Mike Nicholson, *The Liberian Refugee Immigration Fairness Program: Estimates of the Potentially Eligible*,

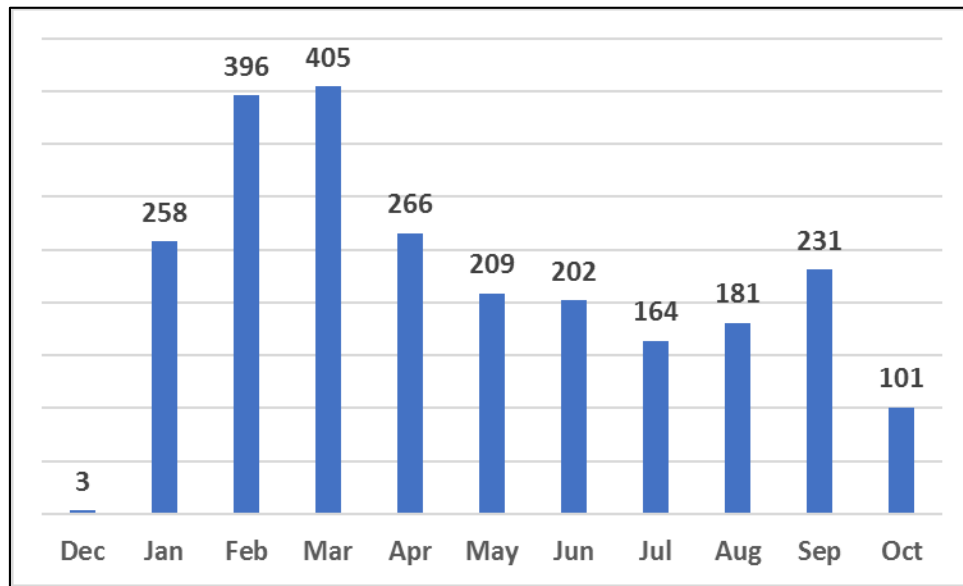
LRIF Applications

To be eligible for LPR status under LRIF, applicants must complete and file Form I-485, Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjust Status, by December 20, 2020, which is one year since LRIF was enacted. According to data provided to the Congressional Research Service (CRS) by USCIS, as of October 12, 2020, USCIS had received a total of 2,532 LRIF applications.⁶ The data provided to CRS did not indicate how many had applied as Liberians who entered before November 2014 or had applied as their derivative family members.

Receipt Date and Status of Applications

Figure 1 shows the number of LRIF applications received by USCIS in each month since LRIF was enacted through October 12, 2020.

Figure 1. LRIF Applications Received by Month
December 2019–October 2020



Source: CRS analysis of data provided by Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

Notes: LRIF was signed into law on December 20, 2019, and the latest receipt date in the USCIS data provided to CRS was October 12, 2020.

Of the 2,416 applications included in the USCIS data provided to CRS, 261 applications had been approved, 10 had been denied, and 2,145 were still pending as of October 12, 2020.⁷

Center for Migration Studies, June 2020, <https://cmsny.org/the-liberian-refugee-immigration-fairness-program-estimates-of-the-potentially-eligible/>.

⁶ These include 116 applications for which detailed data were not provided due to INA §1367 protections.

⁷ As noted in the previous footnote, USCIS did not provide detailed data for 116 applications due to INA §1367 protections.

Age and Sex of Applicants

Forty-three percent of applicants were aged 45–64, and an additional 40% were aged 19–44. Seven percent were 18 or younger, and 10% were 65 or older. The median age of applicants was 46. Fifty-eight percent were female and 42% were male.

State of Residence of Applicants

As of October 12, 2020, USCIS had received LRIF applications from residents of 44 states. Pennsylvania accounted for the most applicants (424), followed by Minnesota (382), Maryland (233), and New Jersey (185). (See **Table 1** and **Figure 2**.)

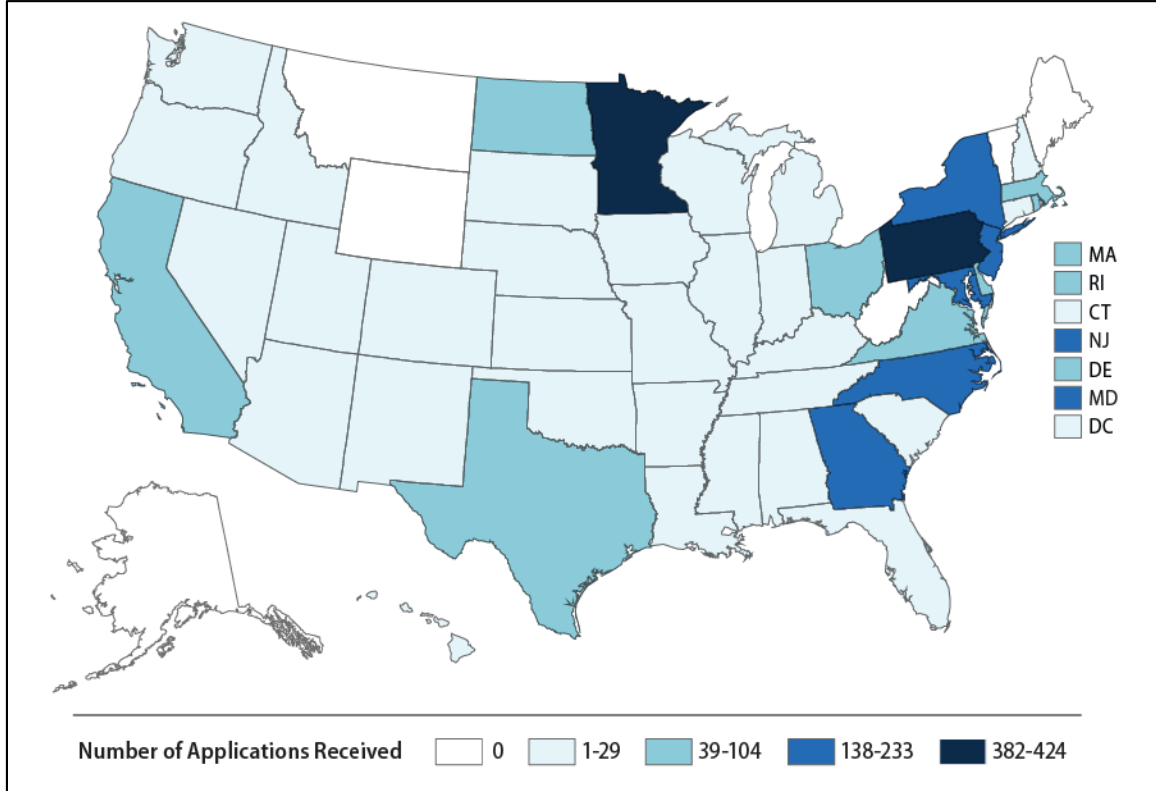
Table 1. State of Residence of Applicants for Liberian Refugee Immigration Fairness
Applications received as of October 12, 2020

State	Applications	State	Applications
Alabama	7	Montana	0
Alaska	0	Nebraska	1
Arizona	9	Nevada	1
Arkansas	5	New Hampshire	1
California	42	New Jersey	185
Colorado	8	New Mexico	4
Connecticut	10	New York	154
Delaware	42	North Carolina	138
District of Columbia	7	North Dakota	46
Florida	29	Ohio	39
Georgia	144	Oklahoma	4
Hawaii	1	Oregon	1
Idaho	3	Pennsylvania	424
Illinois	23	Rhode Island	100
Indiana	20	South Carolina	9
Iowa	20	South Dakota	6
Kansas	1	Tennessee	11
Kentucky	21	Texas	104
Louisiana	2	Utah	4
Maine	0	Vermont	0
Maryland	233	Virginia	42
Massachusetts	82	Washington	9
Michigan	23	West Virginia	0
Minnesota	382	Wisconsin	10
Mississippi	2	Wyoming	0
Missouri	7	Total	2,532*

Source: CRS analysis of data provided by Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

Note: *State numbers do not sum to total due to 116 applications that were omitted from the USCIS data due to INA §1367 protections.

Figure 2. State of Residence of Applicants for Liberian Refugee Immigration Fairness
Applications received as of October 12, 2020



Source: CRS analysis of data provided by Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

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