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

Updated May 6, 2021

Congressional Research Service

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

R46487

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 immigration 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 specific family members to obtain LPR status.¹ Enacted as part of the FY2020 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 116-92, §7611), it gave individuals one year (until December 20, 2020) to apply for LPR status. The deadline was extended an additional year by the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (P.L. 116-260, §901). This fact sheet presents data on LRIF applications received by the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS's) U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) through April 2, 2021.

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.⁴

Beginning with the 105th and continuing through the 115th Congresses, bills to provide LPR status to Liberians have been introduced in every Congress but had 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.⁵ LRIF applies to eligible Liberian nationals who have been living in the United States since this date regardless of whether they had been

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 and Deferred Enforced Departure*.

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 DED for Liberians was reinstated by President Joe Biden on January 20, 2021, for 18 months. See The White House (President Biden), Office of the Press Secretary, "Reinstating Deferred Enforced Departure for Liberians," presidential memorandum for the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Homeland Security, January 20, 2021.

⁵ 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.

covered by TPS or DED. The Center for Migration Studies estimates that approximately 10,000 Liberians are potentially eligible for LRIF.⁶

LRIF Applications

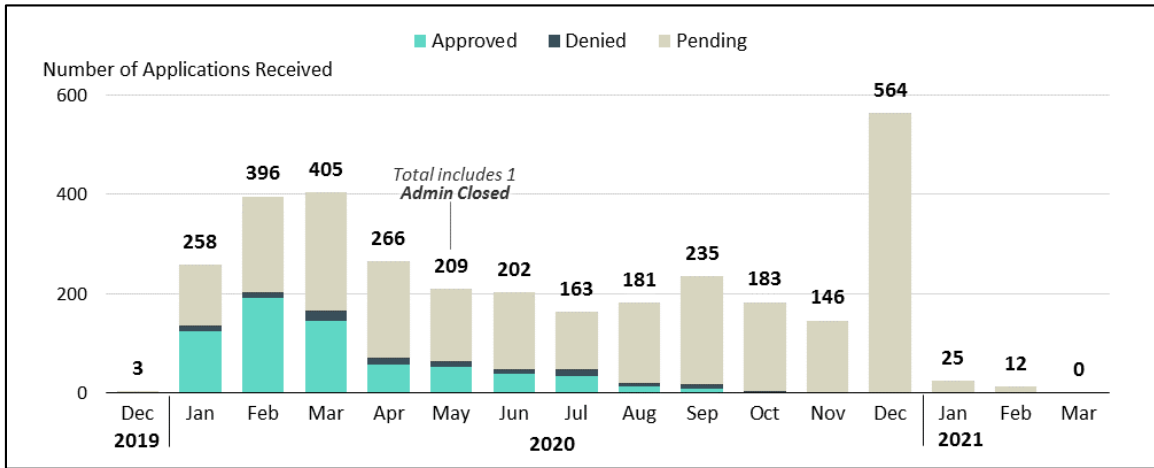
To be eligible for LPR status under LRIF, applicants must complete and file Form I-485, Application to Register Permanent Residence or Adjust Status, by December 20, 2021, which is two years since LRIF was enacted. According to data provided to the Congressional Research Service (CRS) by USCIS, as of April 2, 2021, USCIS had received a total of 3,398 LRIF applications.⁷ The data provided to CRS did not indicate how many had applied as Liberians who entered before November 2014 versus how many had applied as derivative family members.

Receipt Date and Status of Applications

Figure 1 shows the number of LRIF applications received—and their status—by USCIS in each month since LRIF was enacted. The high volume of receipts in December 2020 corresponds with the original application deadline (December 20). The one-year extension was signed into law on December 27, 2020, and it is likely that few potential applicants were aware of the extension in the early part of 2021.

Figure 1. LRIF Applications Received, by Month

December 2019–March 2021



Source: CRS analysis of data, as provided by Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, April 20, 2021.

Notes: LRIF was signed into law on December 20, 2019, and the latest receipt date in the USCIS data provided to CRS was February 2021.

⁶ 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*, Center for Migration Studies, June 2020, <https://cmsny.org/the-liberian-refugee-immigration-fairness-program-estimates-of-the-potentially-eligible/>.

⁷ These include 150 applications for which detailed data were not provided due to INA §1367 prohibitions against disclosing information related to certain victims of crime.

Of the 3,248 applications included in the USCIS data provided to CRS, 666 applications had been approved, 111 had been denied, and 2,470 were still pending as of April 2, 2021.⁸

Age and Sex of Applicants

Given the length of time that many Liberians have been living in the United States, the population tends to be older than the general U.S. population. Forty-four percent of LRIF applicants were aged 45-64, and an additional 39% were aged 19-44. Six percent were 18 or younger, and 10% were 65 or older.⁹ The median age of applicants was 46. Fifty-seven percent were female and 43% were male.

State of Residence of Applicants

As of April 2, 2021, USCIS had received LRIF applications from residents of 45 states.¹⁰ Pennsylvania accounted for the most applicants (576), followed by Minnesota (496), Maryland (322), and New Jersey (258). (See **Table 1** and **Figure 2**.)

Table 1. State of Residence of Applicants for Liberian Refugee Immigration Fairness
Applications received as of April 2, 2021

State	Approved	Denied	Pending	Total
Alabama	0	1	6	7
Arizona	0	1	11	12
Arkansas	1	0	4	5
California	6	0	52	58
Colorado	2	0	9	11
Connecticut	1	0	15	16
Delaware	14	0	39	53
District of Columbia	3	0	8	11
Florida	1	5	30	36
Georgia ^a	21	10	153	185
Hawaii	0	0	1	1
Idaho	1	0	2	3
Illinois	5	0	23	28
Indiana	3	1	27	31
Iowa	8	0	23	31
Kansas	0	0	1	1
Kentucky	11	2	10	23
Louisiana	0	0	5	5

⁸ In addition, one application was administratively closed. As noted in the previous footnote, USCIS did not provide detailed data for 150 applications due to INA §1367 prohibitions against disclosing information related to certain victims of crime.

⁹ Percentages do not sum to 100% due to rounding.

¹⁰ No applications were received from residents of Alaska, Hawaii, Maine, Montana, Vermont, or Wyoming.

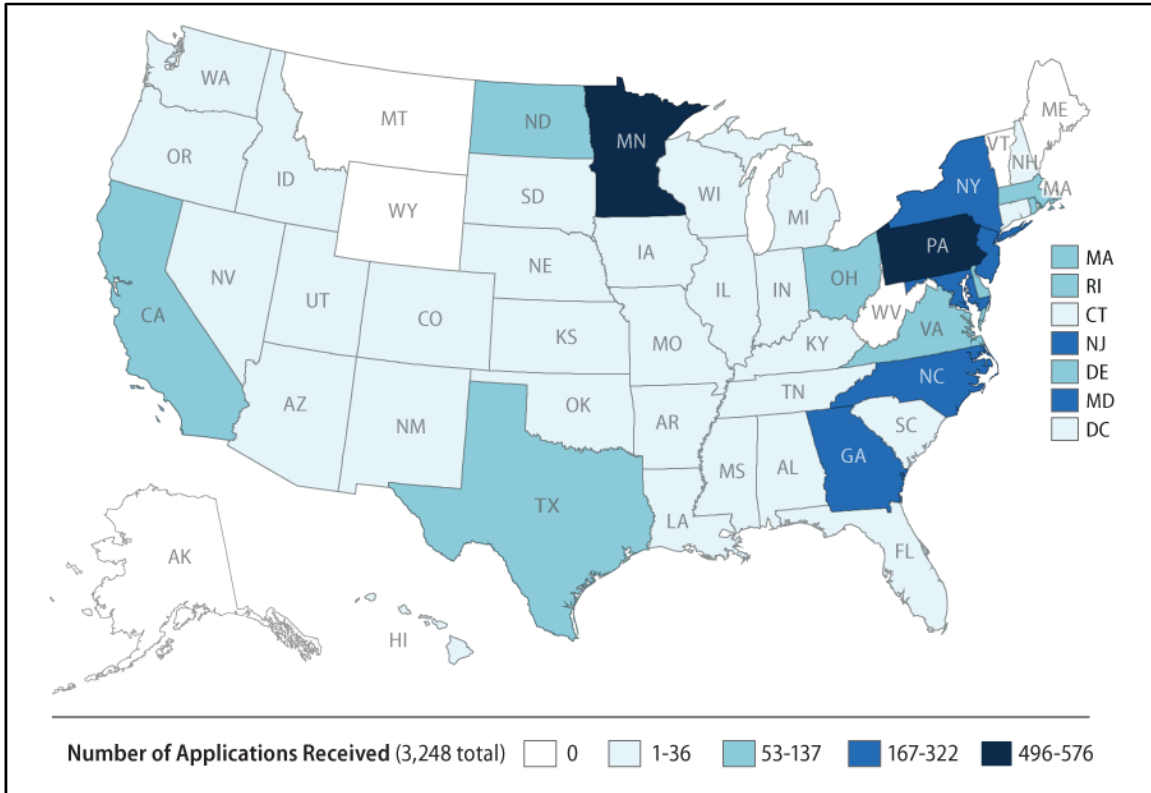
State	Approved	Denied	Pending	Total
Maryland	16	8	298	322
Massachusetts	28	7	76	111
Michigan	0	0	32	32
Minnesota	142	19	335	496
Mississippi	0	0	3	3
Missouri	3	0	5	8
Nebraska	0	1	1	2
Nevada	0	0	4	4
New Hampshire	1	0	2	3
New Jersey	29	3	226	258
New Mexico	4	0	0	4
New York	24	11	181	216
North Carolina	46	3	118	167
North Dakota	13	7	38	58
Ohio	17	1	43	61
Oklahoma	3	0	5	8
Oregon	0	0	1	1
Pennsylvania	134	27	415	576
Rhode Island	49	0	88	137
South Carolina	2	0	11	13
South Dakota	3	0	6	9
Tennessee	2	1	10	13
Texas	46	3	88	137
Utah	3	0	2	5
Virginia	23	0	41	64
Washington	0	0	13	13
Wisconsin	1	0	9	10
Total	666	111	2470	3248*

Source: CRS analysis of data, as provided by Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, April 20, 2021.

Notes: Note: *State numbers and U.S. totals do not include 150 applications that were omitted from the USCIS data provided to CRS due to INA §1367 prohibitions against disclosing information related to certain victims of crime.

- a. One application from a Georgia resident was administratively closed and is not shown in this table.

Figure 2. State of Residence of Applicants for Liberian Refugee Immigration Fairness
Applications received as of April 2, 2021



Source: CRS analysis of data, as provided by Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, April 20, 2021.

Author Information

Jill H. Wilson
Analyst in Immigration Policy

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