



Migration and Refugee Service

Office of Migration Policy and Public Affairs

3211 4th Street NE • Washington, D.C. 20017-1194 • (p) 202-541- 3352 • (f) 202-541-3399

Website: www.usccb.org/mrs

May 29, 2019

Submitted via dhsdeskofficer@omb.eop.gov

Samantha Deshommes, Chief
Regulatory Coordination Division, Office of Policy and Strategy
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services
Department of Homeland Security
20 Massachusetts Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20529-2140

Re: OMB Control Number 1615-0067, Federal Register Volume 84, Number 86, pages 19098-19099, published on Friday, May 3, 2019; U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services/Department of Homeland Security

Dear Ms. Deshommes:

I am writing on behalf of Migration and Refugee Services (MRS) of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) regarding the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) OMB Control Number 1615-0067, Federal Register (FR) Volume (Vol.) 84, Number (No.) 86, pages (pp) 19098-19099, published on Friday, May 3, 2019.

USCCB is the nonprofit organization through which the U.S. Catholic bishops work together to carry out the mission of the Catholic Church, and Migration and Refugee Services is a program of USCCB which focuses on implementing Catholic social teaching on migration, “[c]reating a world where immigrants, refugees, migrants, and people on the move are treated with dignity, respect, welcome and belonging.” In the United States, MRS assists refugees, asylees, unaccompanied alien children, at risk immigrant families, and victims of human trafficking, including in partnership with a nationwide network of local Catholic Charities agencies, DHS/USCIS, the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration of the Department of State, the Office of Justice Programs of the Department of Justice, and the Office of Refugee Resettlement of the Department of Health and Human Services.

These comments concerning Agency Collection of Information, reported in FR Vol. 84, No. 86, page 19099, will 1) evaluate the necessity of this collection of information for the functioning of the agency; 2) evaluate the accuracy of the estimate and validity of the methodology and assumptions; 3) provide a larger context for the information being collected; and 4) suggest ways to minimize the burden on those responding, including through technology.

The necessity of the collection. The information being collected is the estimated time and resources respondents spend on filling out an I-589, the application for someone seeking certain protections in the United States, including asylum, withholding of removal, or protection under the Convention Against Torture (CAT). For many individuals seeking these protections, the application is a matter of life and death. For the United States, the application is a mechanism that helps our country to fulfill

its moral and legal international treaty and U.S. statutory obligations to provide asylum, withholding of removal, and CAT protection. Thus, one valid purpose of gathering the data could be as a precursor to developing or expanding policies and programs that might ease the time burdens and other burdens on respondents seeking these life-saving protections.

The accuracy of the estimate and validity of the methodology and assumptions. The methodology and assumptions are not explicitly detailed; thus, it is hard to evaluate their accuracy and validity. The estimated number of applicants is 114,000, but it does not specify what that number of applicants is based on. Is it the estimate for FY2019? Is it based on only affirmative applications or also defensive applications? Is it an average over the history of the program or over a certain period of recent years? The estimated number of hours taken to fill out the form is 12 hours, but it does not specify how those hours were estimated. Are they based on a survey of asylum applicants or asylum lawyers? If so, how many people were surveyed and was the study statistically valid? The estimated, apparently “in kind”, cost of filling out the forms amounts to \$46,968,000 [(i.e., (114,000 applications x 12 hours = 1,368,000) + (110,000 biographical forms x 1.17 hours = 128,700) = 1,496,700)] which appears to assume that the cost per hour is approximately \$31.38 (i.e., \$46,968,000 ÷ 1,496,700 hours = \$31.3810383 per hour). It is not clear what the basis is for the per hour cost.

The larger context for collection of data. The respondent’s time spent on an application, assuming the calculation is accurate, is a considerable investment of time and effort. Given that succeeding with the I-589 can be a life or death matter for respondents, the amount of time spent is not surprising. The diligent effort at application time is also consistent with the contributions that asylum seekers and refugees make to local U.S. communities after they are granted protection. A report prepared by the Department of Justice, text [here](#), which became public in July 2017, showed that refugees, asylees and other populations of concern to ORR contributed, between 2005-2014, \$269.1 billion to the U.S. economy (taxes, payroll, and other sources), exceeding the \$206.1 billion spent on them by \$63 billion. A 2017 report by the New American Economy, text [here](#), documented similar economic contributions nationwide. Other reports and media accounts likewise document the positive contribution of resettled refugees across the nation: [Tennessee](#) , [Southeast Michigan](#), [Columbus, OH](#), [Cleveland, OH](#) and [Buffalo, NY](#). Another report highlighted all immigrants’ contributions in [Lancaster, PA](#).

Ways to minimize the burden on applicants. Particularly given how much refugees and asylees contribute to the U.S. economy, it makes sense to ease their application burden. While time is a valid consideration, the primary issue is that people in this process have full access to legal information and legal representation so that they can best put forward the facts of their cases and receive protection, as needed. Programs that help applicants access legal information or legal representation such as Help Desks, the Legal Orientation Program, legal rights materials, and legal service pilots, all available in a person’s native language, are crucial. These programs not only reduce the number of hours that applicants take filling out forms but help assure that each application best presents each person’s case.

Please let us know if you have any questions via email at mwilch@uscceb.org or at (202) 541-3448.

Sincerely,

Anthony R. Picarello, Jr.,
Associate General Secretary and General Counsel
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
3211 Fourth Street NE
Washington, DC 20017