

August 1990

# IMMIGRATION SERVICES

## INS Resources and Services in the Miami District



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General Government Division

B-240202

August 6, 1990

The Honorable Tom Lewis  
House of Representatives

The Honorable Bill McCollum  
House of Representatives

In your November 8, 1989, letter, you asked us to review certain aspects of Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) operations in its Miami District. As agreed with your offices, we are providing information on (1) authorized and actual staffing levels for the Miami District for the 4-year period ending in December 1989, (2) its processing times for aliens' applications by selected application types as of September 1989, and (3) the Miami District budget for fiscal year 1990. For perspective, we also include information on the seven other districts in the Southern Region.

We reviewed INS staffing, application processing, and budget data for the Miami District and the Southern Region. According to INS officials, the data may contain some inaccuracies but are adequate for inter-unit comparison. We did not verify the data INS provided. We interviewed INS officials in the Miami District, Southern Region, and INS Headquarters. We also reviewed a February 1990 Department of Justice Inspector General report. Our review was done between December 1989 and June 1990. We discussed the facts presented in this report with INS officials, who generally agreed with them. A detailed objective, scope, and methodology section is contained in appendix I.

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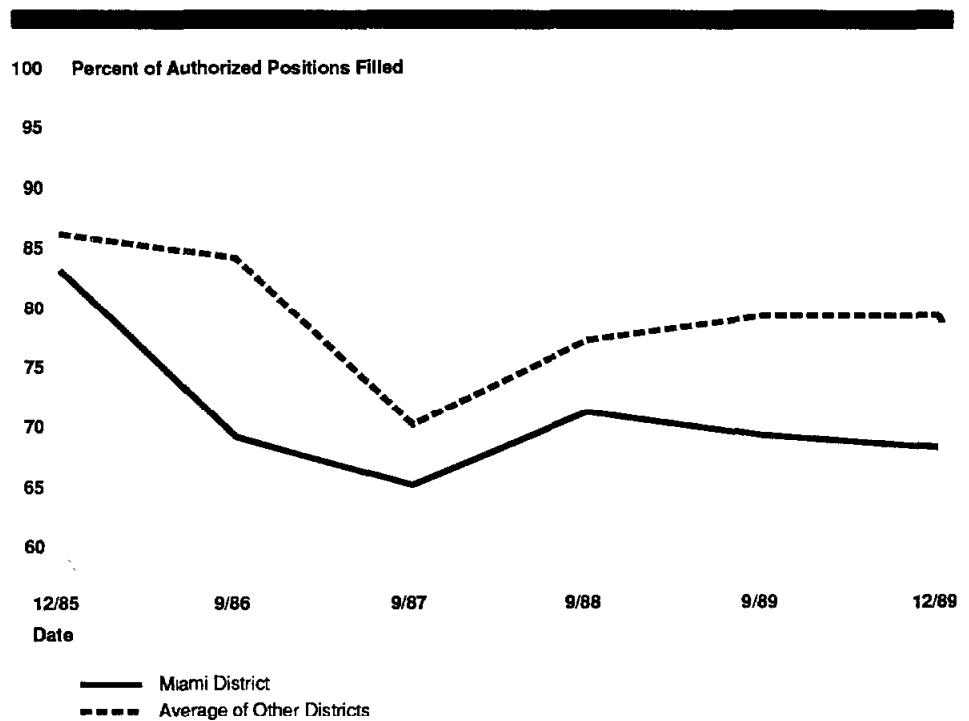
## Results in Brief

Our analysis of INS records showed the following:

- During the period December 1985 to December 1989, none of the district offices within the Southern Region, including the Miami District, were staffed to their authorized levels because of funding limitations. However, the Miami District has had a smaller share of its authorized positions filled than the other seven regional districts. Further, the Miami District has used more temporary staff than the other districts.
- As of September 1989, the Miami District generally took twice as long as the other districts within the region to process alien applications, except for two other districts. However, while those districts had comparable processing times, they had fewer total applications than the Miami District. The Miami District's longer processing times thus affected more aliens than other districts with similar processing times. To reduce the Miami District application backlog and processing times, INS created a

had 78 percent of their positions staffed over the last 4 years while the Miami District had about 70 percent. In addition, the Miami District has had more temporary staff than the other districts.

**Figure 1: The Miami District Has Had Fewer of Its Authorized Positions Filled**

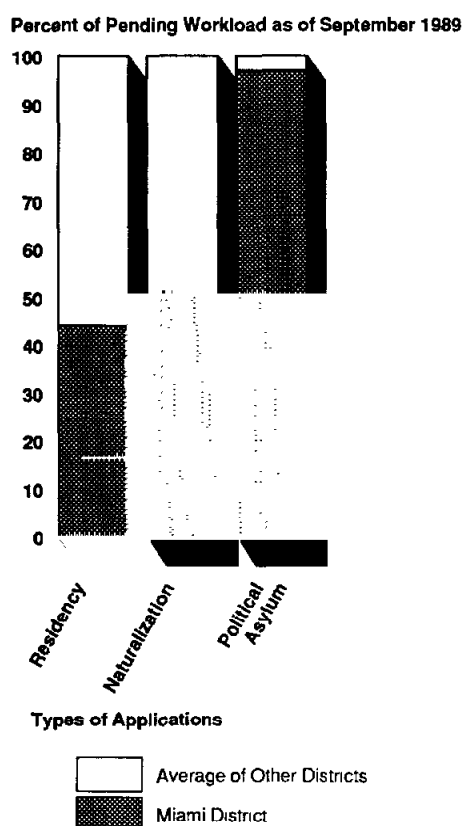


**Miami District’s Use of Temporary Employees**

Miami also has a larger percentage of its workforce filled by temporary staff than the other districts, as shown in figure 2. About 23 percent of Miami’s employees are temporaries, while other districts have about 10 percent temporary staff. According to regional officials, the Miami District often needed to hire staff quickly, and using temporary employees allowed Miami to fill vacancies faster. But according to a Miami District official, this practice results in higher turnover rates since most employees want permanent jobs with accompanying benefits and security. He further stated it would be better to recruit and hire a qualified permanent employee than to recruit several temporary employees for the same position.

and so fewer aliens were affected. As shown in figure 3, the Miami District had to process about half of the permanent residency and naturalization applications and almost all the asylum applications in the Southern Region as of September 1989.

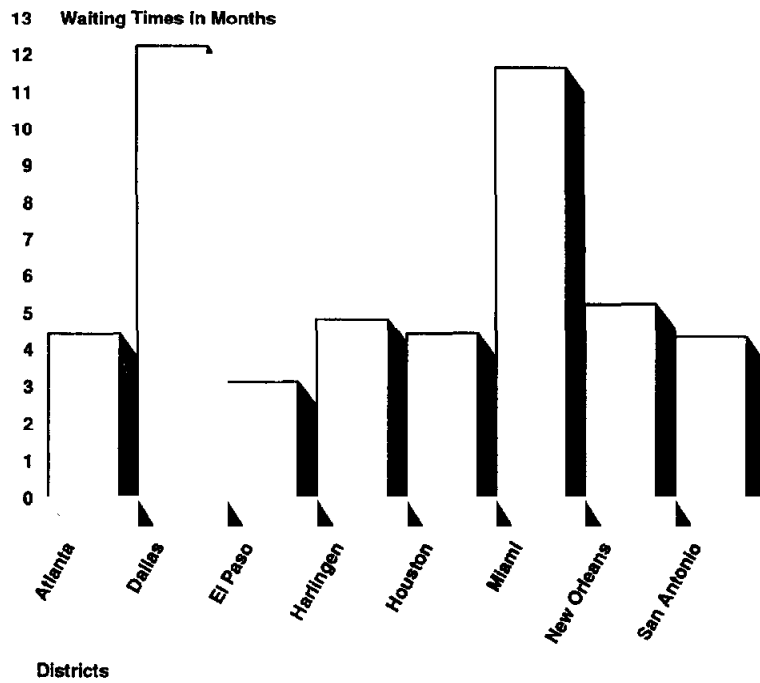
**Figure 3: The Miami District Has the Major Share of the Region's Pending Applications**



## Applicant Waiting Times

As of September 1989, residency applicants waited about 10 months in Miami, with similar times in Dallas and Houston, but much less in other districts (see fig. 4). However, almost 7,000 applications were pending in the Miami District as compared to about 2,800 in the Houston District and 2,400 in the Dallas District. With respect to naturalization applications, the Miami and Dallas Districts took about a year, while the other six districts took about 4 months as of September 1989 (see fig. 5). The Miami District had about 22,500 pending applications, or about 3 times

**Figure 5: Comparison of Applicant Waiting Times for Naturalization, as of September 1989**



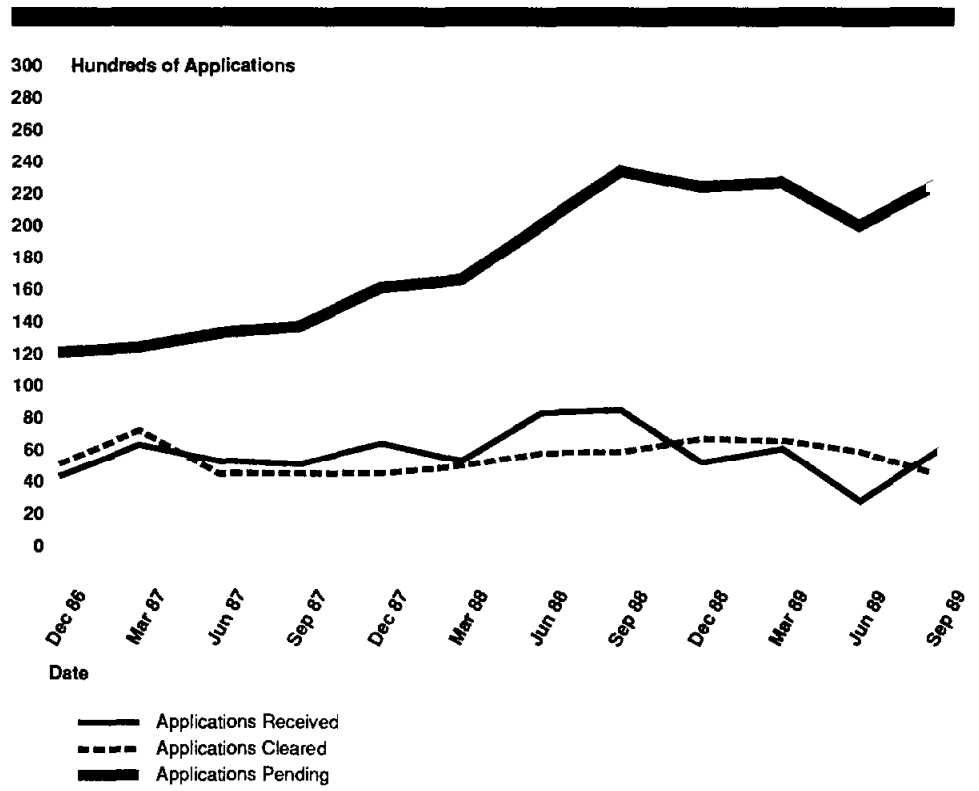
## Application Workload

Through September 1989, the Miami District had about kept pace with new residency, naturalization, and political asylum applications. However, the staff had not been able to significantly reduce large pending workloads.<sup>4</sup> According to INS, a workload backlog exists when applications have been pending for more than 4 months.

As shown in figure 6, the Miami District's residency application receipt rate has been relatively stable, and, for the most part, staff have been able to process about as many applications as they received. The peak in processing many residency applications was accomplished through the use of a task force to process the sharp increase in applications in early 1988.

<sup>4</sup>We did not compare filled positions to pending workload or processing times because data for such a comparison were not readily available.

**Figure 7: Miami District Receipts, Clearings, and Pending Workload for Naturalization Applications**



it had not completed its work as of March 1990, the last date for which data are available.

## Miami District Budget

According to Southern Region officials, all of the Southern Region districts had their funding allocations reduced in fiscal year 1989 to finance unanticipated operations in southern Texas. These expenditures were caused by a sudden and unexpected influx of Central Americans seeking political asylum. Additionally, hiring more Border Patrol agents late in fiscal year 1988 contributed to increased payroll costs in fiscal year 1989 that further exacerbated the situation.

The region allocates funds to each district for their discretionary-type expenses (e.g., detention, supplies, travel, vehicle maintenance) and pays for certain recurring district expenses (e.g., rent, utilities). As shown in table 1, the Miami District had the largest total expenditures for fiscal year 1989 and largest budget for fiscal year 1990.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 1: Fiscal Year 1989 Expenditures and Fiscal Year 1990 Budget Amounts**

Dollars in millions

Districts	Total fiscal year 1989 expenditures		Total fiscal year 1990 budget	
	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent
Atlanta	\$7.7	8	\$7.0	7
Dallas	10.9	12	10.8	12
El Paso	10.9	12	10.9	12
Harlingen	9.2	10	10.6	11
Houston	13.0	14	12.2	13
Miami	22.9	24	22.2	24
New Orleans	6.3	7	6.5	7
San Antonio	13.2	14	13.2	14
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$94.1</b>	<b>101<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>\$93.4</b>	<b>100</b>

<sup>a</sup>Exceeds 100 percent due to rounding

In fiscal year 1989, the Miami District requested approximately \$3.2 million for discretionary purposes. The region approved \$1 million of the \$3.2 million for the discretionary budget. The district received allocations totaling \$852,000 in quarterly installments of \$302,000,

<sup>5</sup>Prior years' expenditures are available by program but not by district.





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**Appendix I**  
**Objectives, Scope, and Methodology**

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with the facts as presented. Their views were incorporated where appropriate.

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# Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

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Our objective was to provide information on (1) authorized and actual staffing levels, (2) the processing times for aliens' applications by selected types, and (3) the Miami District budget. For perspective, we also included information on the seven other districts in the Southern Region.

Most of our work was done at the Miami District office. We also visited the District's suboffices in Tampa and Jacksonville and INS' Southern Region in Dallas, Texas, which had direct financial, personnel, and operational oversight over the District. We contacted Miami Border Patrol sector officials at several Florida locations and officials in INS Headquarters in Washington, D.C. We reviewed Justice's Office of Inspector General's February 1990 report dealing with INS' Miami District budget and staffing.

To determine the staffing levels in the Miami District, we reviewed INS records for authorized, funded, and staffed positions from December 1985 through December 1989; interviewed appropriate INS officials; and analyzed the Miami District's share of Southern Region staff resources. While averaging can mask individual district differences, such masking did not occur in our analysis.

To determine processing times for certain applications, we analyzed Miami District workloads and computed processing times for residency, political asylum, and naturalization applications for all Southern Region district offices from October 1, 1986, to March 31, 1990. We selected these workloads because they are a significant portion of the work done by the Miami District and are also common to other districts, except for asylum, for which the Miami District processes almost all applications. These workloads are also more labor-intensive, normally requiring an applicant interview.

To analyze the Miami District budget, we reviewed budget requests, approved budgets, and increases and decreases to fiscal year 1989 allocations. Prior to fiscal year 1989, INS' accounting system in the Southern Region did not have budget information, such as discretionary funding, by district. We did not verify INS computer-generated personnel and workload data to source documents. Although INS workload data may contain some inaccuracies, according to INS officials, the data are the best available and are adequate for inter-unit comparison.

Our work was done between December 1989 and June 1990. We discussed our report with appropriate INS officials, who generally agreed

\$308,000, \$186,000, and \$56,000, which was less than its approved discretionary budget. As operating needs increased, Miami District managers asked for additional funds for expenses of a minor nature, such as photocopying and office supplies, vehicle repairs, and printing.

According to Southern Region officials, all the districts in the region received budget reductions. Southern Region officials stated that they tried to avoid disrupting operations. However, according to Miami District managers, the budget reductions and uncertain budget environment limited operations. For example, to reduce travel costs, agents could work only near their immediate duty stations. Further, maintenance on vehicles was postponed and alien apprehension and removal was affected by the reduced funding.

The Miami District funding continued to fluctuate during the fiscal year. The Southern Region provided the Miami District funding in addition to its quarterly allocation to pay for travel costs, enforcement activities, detention costs from local detention facilities, and other expenses. By year's end, the Southern Region reported that the Miami District had actually spent \$1.6 million in fiscal year 1989. The Southern Region has budgeted \$1.7 million for Miami's fiscal year 1990 discretionary expenses.

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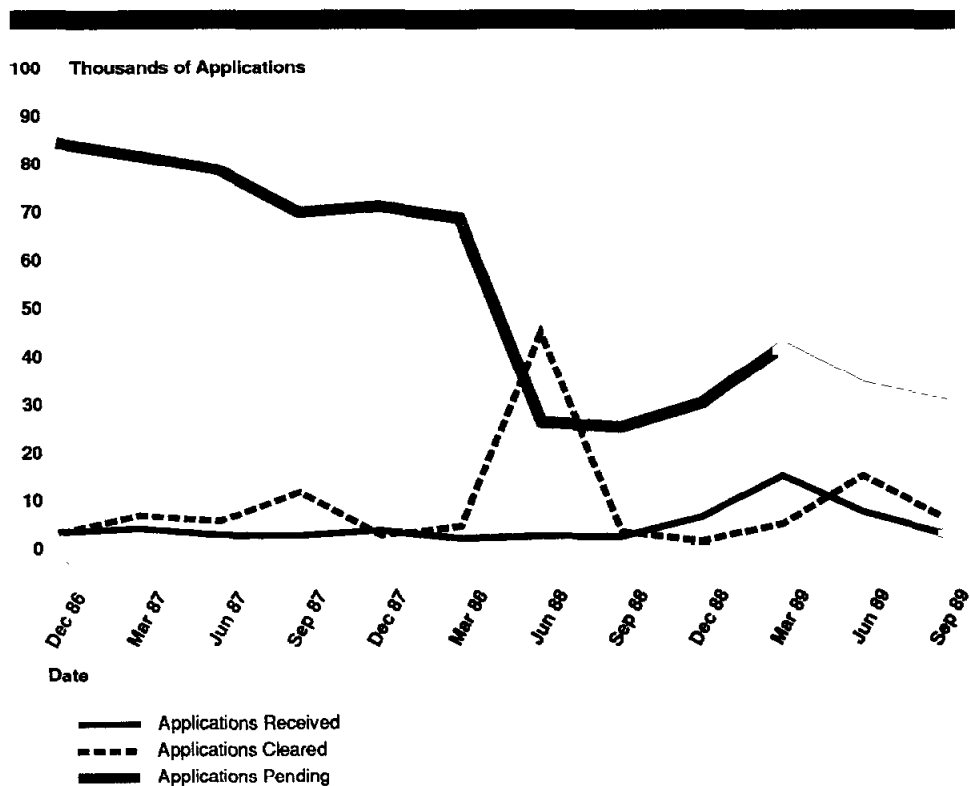
As arranged with your offices, unless you publicly announce the contents of this report earlier, we plan no further distribution until 30 days from the date of issuance. At that time, we will send copies to interested parties and make copies available to others upon request.

The major contributors to this report are listed in appendix II. If there are any questions concerning the contents of this report, please call me at (202) 275-8389.



Lowell Dodge  
Director, Administration  
of Justice Issues

**Figure 8: Miami District Receipts, Clearings, and Pending Workload for Political Asylum Applications**

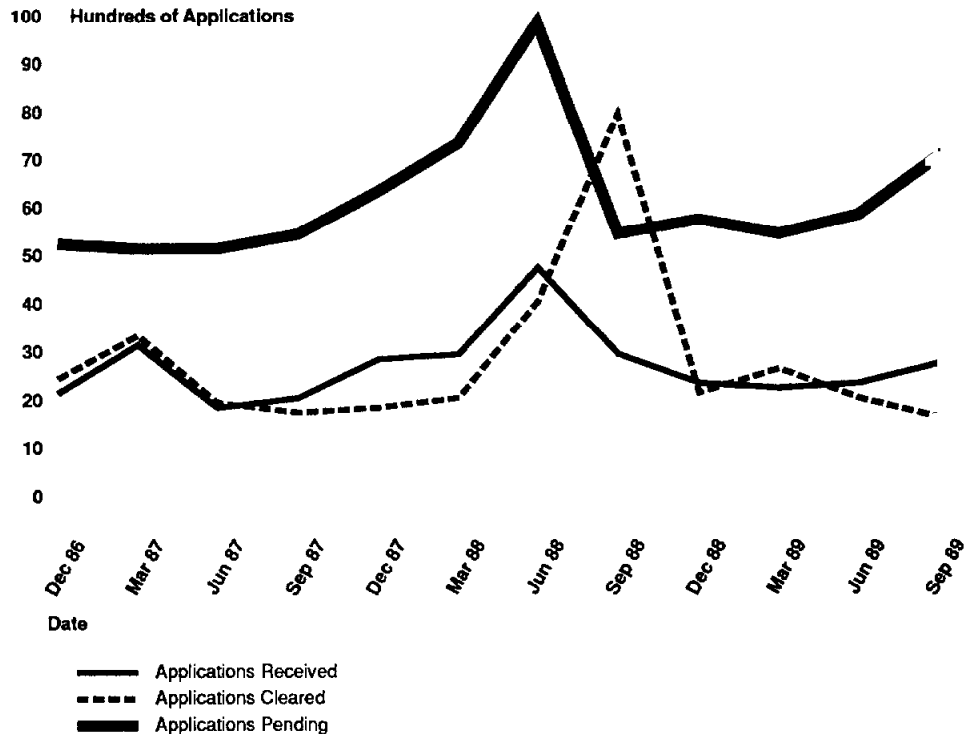


### Task Force Established to Reduce Processing Times

To reduce the longer processing times and growing backlog, INS established a task force in November 1989 consisting of staff from other districts nationwide to expedite application processing in the Miami District. The effort helped to reduce waiting times and pending workloads. The task force completed processing applications for residency in January 1990 and naturalization in February 1990. It completed its processing of asylum applications in May 1990. From September 1989 to March 1990, the waiting time for residency applications decreased from 10 to 6 months. For naturalization applications, applicant waiting times decreased from 12 to 9 months.

The task force dramatically reduced the district's number of pending residency applications from 6,998 as of September 1989 to 3,858 in March 1990. The naturalization backlog was reduced to 17,816 as of March 1990 from 22,533 as of September 1989. The number of asylum applications increased from 29,130 to 32,149 during the same period; however, the task force results are not reflected in these figures because

**Figure 6: Miami District Receipts, Clearings, and Pending Workload for Residency Applications**

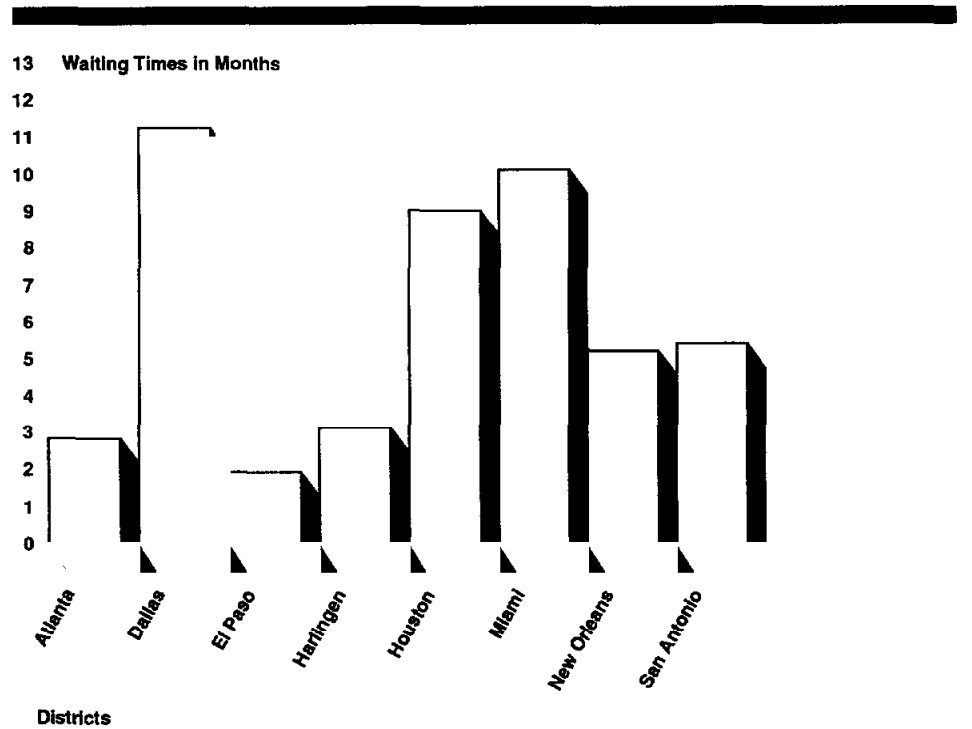


As shown in figure 7, the naturalization pending workload has increased and remained steady since June 1988. As shown in figure 8, Miami District staff have processed about as many asylum applications as received. The sharp reduction in the pending workload was due to clearing many Cuban political asylum applications under the Cuban Refugee Adjustment Act.



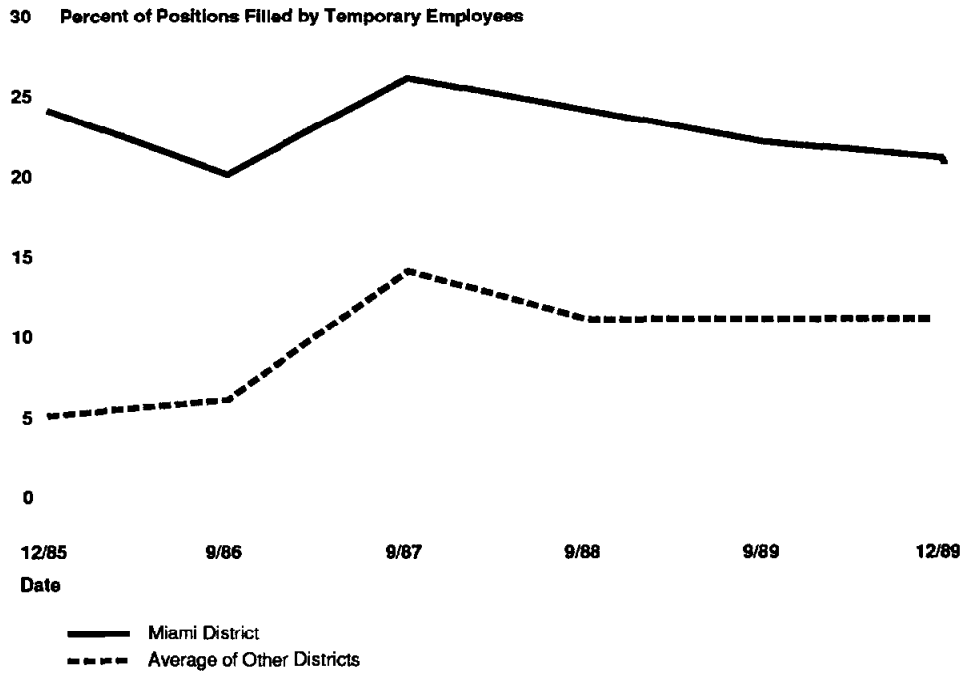
the number (7,600) in the Dallas District. As of September 1989, the processing time in Miami for asylum applications was about 14 months.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 4: Comparison of Applicant Waiting Times for Residency, as of September 1989**



<sup>3</sup>To calculate the waiting times we divided the pending applications as of September 1989 (e.g., 6,998 residency applications) by the average monthly number of applications processed for the year (e.g., 690). This calculation resulted in an average waiting time (e.g., 10 months). This approach did not consider new applications

**Figure 2: The Miami District Has More Temporary Employees**



Southern Regional officials stated that Miami’s staffing situation is related to the low salaries paid to clerical staff and detention officers. While the regional officials’ views may have merit, this explanation does not address the lack of funding for authorized positions. In December 1989, the region funded 69 percent of Miami’s authorized positions. In other districts, the region funded an average of 78 percent of the authorized positions. Funds for staffing would not be affected by local labor market conditions; they are a regional resource allocation decision.<sup>2</sup>

## Application Processing

As of September 1989, aliens in the Miami District had to wait about a year to have their residency and naturalization applications processed. Miami processing times were generally twice as long as most of the other Southern Region districts. While some other Southern Region districts also had long processing times, they had fewer applications than Miami,

<sup>2</sup>A February 1990 Department of Justice Inspector General review said that INS does not have an adequate resource allocation system. The study did not address the adequacy of overall staffing levels at the Miami District because such an analysis would have had to include an INS-wide evaluation of the agency’s resource allocation processes.

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task force in November 1989. As a result, applicant waiting times were decreased. For example, naturalization applicants' waiting time was reduced from 12 to 9 months.

- The Southern Region reduced the fiscal year 1989 budgets for all of its district offices. It did this to finance the unanticipated operations in southern Texas caused by the sudden and unexpected influx of aliens seeking asylum. According to regional officials, budget reductions were equally distributed among its districts.

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## Background

On the basis of INS' fiscal year 1989 appropriations, INS Headquarters provided funds and staffing levels to each of its four regions, which then allocated these resources among the districts in their regions. The Southern Region authorized staffing levels for each of its eight districts and provided funds to fill the positions; the region also allocated funds for each district's discretionary expenses (e.g., travel) and funded recurring expenses (e.g., rent and utilities) for the districts out of its budget.<sup>1</sup>

INS' Southern Region has eight district offices, five of which are located in Texas, and one each in New Orleans, Atlanta, and Miami. The Miami District is responsible for INS' Florida operations. It has the largest district budget for the region and processed more applications than any of the other Southern Region districts. These applications consist of requests from aliens for U.S. citizenship, asylum, or change of status (e.g., from "visitor" to permanent resident alien). Within the Miami District, applications are processed at the Miami and West Palm Beach offices and the Jacksonville and Tampa sub-offices.

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## Miami District's Share of Region's Staff

INS Headquarters allocates authorized and funded positions (i.e., positions for which funds are available to hire staff) to its four regions. In recent years, INS has not had resources to actually fund all authorized positions; as a result, INS has more authorized positions than people on the job.

The Southern Region allocates authorized and funded positions among its districts. The region also decides the number of funded positions that each district can fill. As with the other regions, the Southern Region districts are staffed below authorized levels. However, the Miami District has consistently had fewer authorized positions filled than the other Southern Region districts. As shown in figure 1, the other districts have

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<sup>1</sup> As of January 1, 1990, INS Headquarters began allocating staffing to the districts.

