



Highlights of [GAO-06-318T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Homeland Security, Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has established a program—the U.S. Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology (US-VISIT)—to collect, maintain, and share information, including biometric identifiers, on selected foreign nationals who enter and exit the United States. US-VISIT uses these biometric identifiers (digital fingerscans and photographs) to screen persons against watch lists and to verify that a visitor is the person who was issued a visa or other travel document. Visitors are also to confirm their departure by having their visas or passports scanned and undergoing fingerscanning at selected air and sea ports of entry.

GAO was asked to testify on (1) the status of US-VISIT and (2) DHS progress in implementing recommendations that GAO made as part of its prior reviews of US-VISIT annual expenditure plans. The testimony is based on GAO's prior reports as well as ongoing work for the House Committee on Homeland Security. GAO's recommendations are directed at helping the department improve its capabilities to deliver US-VISIT capability and benefit expectations on time and within budget. According to DHS, the recommendations have made US-VISIT a stronger program.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-318T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Randolph C. Hite at (202) 512-3439 or hiter@gao.gov.

HOMELAND SECURITY

Visitor and Immigrant Status Program Operating, but Management Improvements Are Still Needed

What GAO Found

The US-VISIT program has met a number of demanding requirements that were mandated in legislation. A pre-entry screening capability is in place in overseas visa issuance offices, and an entry identification capability is operating at 115 airports, 14 seaports, and 154 land ports of entry. This has been accomplished during a period of DHS-wide change, and has resulted in preventing criminal aliens from entering the country and potentially deterring others from even attempting to do so.

Nevertheless, DHS has more to do to implement GAO recommendations aimed at better ensuring that US-VISIT is maximizing its potential for success and holding itself accountable for results.

- DHS has taken steps to address those GAO recommendations intended to ensure that US-VISIT as defined is the “right thing.” For example, it is clarifying the strategic context within which US-VISIT is to operate, having drafted a strategic plan to show how US-VISIT is aligned with DHS's mission goals and operations and to provide an overall vision for immigration and border management. However, the plan has yet to be approved, causing its integration with other departmentwide border security initiatives to remain unclear. In addition, the department has analyzed the program's costs, benefits, and risks, but its analyses do not yet demonstrate that the program is producing or will produce mission value commensurate with expected costs and risks. In particular, the department's return-on-investment analyses for exit options do not demonstrate that these solutions will be cost-effective.
- DHS has also taken steps to address those GAO recommendations aimed at ensuring that the program is executed in the “right way.” The department has made good progress in establishing the program's human capital capabilities, which should help ensure that it has sufficient staff with the necessary skills and abilities. This is particularly important in light of the program's more limited progress in establishing capabilities in certain program management process areas, such as test management. For example, a test plan used in a recent system acceptance test did not adequately trace between test cases and the requirements to be verified by testing. Incomplete test plans reduce assurance that systems will perform as intended once they are deployed.
- DHS also has begun addressing GAO's recommendations to establish accountability for program performance and results, but more needs to be done. For example, DHS's expenditure plans have not described progress against commitments made in previous plans. Unless performance against commitments is measured and disclosed, the ability to manage and oversee the program will suffer.

The longer the program proceeds without fully addressing GAO's recommendations, the greater the risk that it will not deliver promised capabilities and benefits on time and within budget.