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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-08-1006](#), a report to the Subcommittee on Government Management, Organization, and Procurement, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

In fiscal year 2007, the U.S. Mission in Mexico (Mission Mexico) processed 1.5 million of the 8 million nonimmigrant visas (NIV) that the Department of State (State) handled worldwide. This workload is expected to increase dramatically in the coming years as millions of NIV Border Crossing Cards issued in Mexico during fiscal years 1998 to 2002 expire and need to be renewed. Consulates will also face increased workloads due to implementation of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI), which will require U.S. citizens to carry passports, or other approved documentation, when traveling between the United States and Mexico, including by land.

GAO was asked to review State's (1) estimates of the workload for consulates in Mexico through 2012 and (2) efforts to help ensure consulates keep pace with expected workload increases. GAO analyzed State's workload forecasts and forecast methodology, interviewed State officials, and visited five posts in Mexico.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of State include, as part of State's evaluation of the pilot program to outsource part of the NIV application process at off-site facilities, an assessment of the risks related to fraud and security. State concurred with our recommendation.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-1006](#). For more information, contact Jess T. Ford at (202) 512-4268 or fordj@gao.gov.

BORDER SECURITY

State Department Is Taking Steps to Meet Projected Surge in Demand for Visas and Passports in Mexico

What GAO Found

According to State forecasts, Mission Mexico's NIV demand will likely peak at slightly less than 3 million applications in fiscal year 2011, almost twice the number in fiscal year 2007. Though State acknowledges there are uncertainties regarding the number of Border Crossing Card holders who will renew their cards and the number of first-time NIV applicants, the forecasts provide a reasonable basis for planning for the anticipated surge in NIV demand. In addition to its increase in NIV workload, Mission Mexico will be facing increases in its passport workload due to the implementation of WHTI. The magnitude of the increase in passport workload is more difficult to forecast than for NIVs because there is a great deal of uncertainty as to how many U.S. citizens live in Mexico and the number of these citizens likely to apply for a passport. Mission Mexico has already seen a significant increase in its passport workload as U.S. citizens living in Mexico have begun to apply for passports in response to the new documentary requirements. State forecasts that passport workload will peak in fiscal year 2009 with WHTI's anticipated implementation at land ports of entry.

State is taking steps to help ensure U.S. consulates in Mexico keep pace with anticipated demand for NIVs and U.S. passports, including adding interviewing windows to several high-demand posts and planning to hire about 100 temporary adjudicating officers. Consular officials at several posts generally agreed these efforts to expand resources should be adequate for Mission Mexico to keep pace with expected workload increases, and GAO's analysis indicates the mission will generally have enough interviewing windows during the surge. Several posts will rely on additional temporary adjudicators to keep pace with increased demand. State is confident it has an adequate pool of potential applicants. Mission Mexico may also gain additional capacity from a pilot program, under way at two posts, outsourcing a portion of the NIV application process to off-site facilities. State has said it intends to evaluate the pilot program but has not indicated if its evaluation plans include an assessment of risks related to fraud and security.

Waiting Area for Visa Applicants at Consulate in Mexico



Source: State Department.