



Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-04-1080T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Government Reform, House of Representative

Why GAO Did This Study

Since September 11, 2001, the U.S. government has made a concerted effort to strengthen border security by enhancing visa issuance policies and procedures, as well as expanding screening of the millions of foreign visitors who enter the United States annually. Consistent with the 9/11 Commission report that recommends a biometric entry-exit screening system for travelers, the Department of State's biometric program complements the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) United States Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology (US-VISIT) program—a governmentwide program to better control and monitor the entry, visa status, and exit of visitors.

GAO was asked to present the findings of its report on State's Biometric Visa Program, as well as discuss other aspects of visa processing and border security that require coordinated, joint actions by State and DHS.

What GAO Recommends

GAO has recommended that DHS and State develop and provide guidance to consular posts on how to use information from the biometric program to adjudicate visas. In other reports, GAO has made recommendations to DHS and State to improve US-VISIT, as well as several aspects of the nonimmigrant visa process. The agencies generally agreed and are taking actions to implement our recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-1080T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Jacquelyn L. Williams-Bridgers at (202) 512-4128 or williamsbridgersj@gao.gov.

BORDER SECURITY

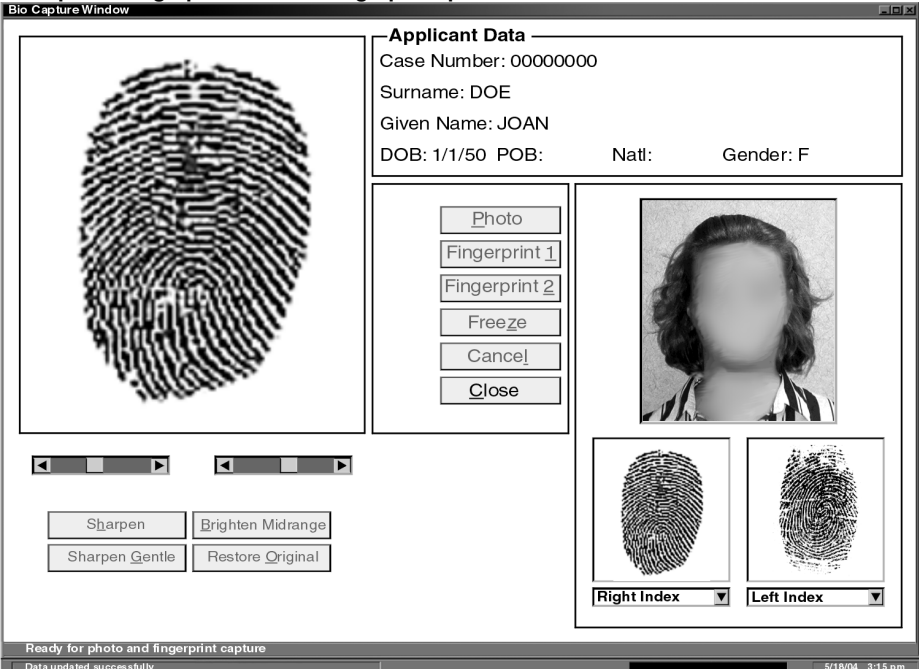
Joint, Coordinated Actions by State and DHS Needed to Guide Biometric Visas and Related Programs

What GAO Found

Our report issued today finds that State is implementing the Biometric Visa Program on schedule and will likely meet the October 26, 2004, deadline for issuing visas that include biometric indicators, as mandated by Congress. As of September 1, 2004, State had installed program hardware and software at 201 visa issuing posts overseas and plans to complete the installation at the remaining 6 posts by September 30. Technology installation has progressed smoothly, however State and DHS have not provided comprehensive guidance to consular posts on when and how information from the DHS Automated Biometric Identification System (IDENT) on visa applicants should be considered by adjudicating consular officers. In the absence of such guidance, we found that these officers are unclear on how best to use the biometric program and IDENT information.

Since September 11, State and DHS have made many improvements to visa issuance and border security policies. Nevertheless, in prior reports, we have found additional vulnerabilities that need to be addressed through joint, coordinated actions. For example, DHS has not adequately defined the operational context for US-VISIT, which affects the biometric program. In addition, we identified systemic weaknesses in information sharing between State and DHS in the visa revocation process. Moreover, we found related weaknesses in an interagency security check process aimed to prevent the illegal transfer of sensitive technologies.

Example of Fingerprints and Photograph Capture



Source: GAO analysis of State data.