



Highlights of [GAO-07-632T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

This testimony summarizes GAO's work on the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) efforts to implement the U.S. Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology (US-VISIT) program at air, sea, and land ports of entry (POE). US-VISIT is designed to collect, maintain, and share data on selected foreign nationals entering and exiting the United States at air, sea, and land POEs. These data, including biometric identifiers like digital fingerprints, are to be used to screen persons against watch lists, verify identities, and record arrival and departure. This testimony addresses DHS's efforts to (1) implement US-VISIT entry capability, (2) implement US-VISIT exit capability, and (3) resolve longstanding management challenges that could impair DHS's ability to effectively implement the US-VISIT program. GAO analyzed DHS and US-VISIT documents, interviewed program officials, and visited 21 land POEs with varied traffic levels on both borders.

For more information, contact Richard Stana at (202) 512-8777 or [stanar@gao.gov](mailto:stanar@gao.gov), or Randolph Hite at (202) 512-3439 or [hiter@gao.gov](mailto:hiter@gao.gov).

## HOMELAND SECURITY

# US-VISIT Program Faces Operational, Technological, and Management Challenges

## What GAO Found

DHS is operating US-VISIT entry capabilities at most POEs and has begun to work to move from 2 to 10 fingerprint biometric capabilities and expand electronic information sharing with stakeholders. Of particular note is the fact that a US-VISIT biometric-based entry screening capability is operating at 115 airports, 14 seaports, and 154 land POEs. While US-VISIT has improved DHS's ability to process visitors and verify identities upon entry, we found that management controls in place to identify and evaluate computer and other operational problems at land POEs were insufficient and inconsistently administered.

Although US-VISIT has conducted various exit demonstration projects at a small number of POEs, a biometric exit capability is not currently available. According to program officials, this is due to a number of factors. For example, at this time the only proven technology available for biometric land exit verification would necessitate mirroring the processes currently in use for entry at these POEs, which would create costly staffing demands and infrastructure requirements, and introduce potential trade, commerce, and environmental impacts. Further, a pilot project to examine an alternative technology at land POEs did not produce a viable solution. By statute, DHS was to have reported to Congress by June 2005 on how it intended to fully implement a comprehensive, biometric entry/exit program, but DHS had not yet reported how it intended to do so, or use nonbiometric solutions.

DHS continues to face longstanding US-VISIT management challenges and future uncertainties. For example, DHS had not articulated how US-VISIT is to strategically fit with other land border security initiatives and mandates and could not ensure that these programs work in harmony to meet mission goals and operate cost effectively. DHS had drafted a strategic plan defining an overall immigration and border management strategy but, as of February 2007, the plan was under review by OMB. Further, critical acquisition management processes need to be established and followed to ensure that program capabilities and expected mission outcomes are delivered on time and within budget. These processes include effective project planning, requirements management, contract tracking and oversight, test management, and financial management. Until these issues are addressed, the risk of US-VISIT continuing to fall short of expectations is increased.