Spotlight

Department of Homeland Security

Office of Inspector General

Why This Matters

US-VISIT maintains the Automated Biometric Identification System (IDENT), a repository of biometric and biographic data such as fingerprints, names, and dates of birth of foreign visitors, visa applicants, and certain criminals collected by various federal entities. It maintains information on about 350 million encounters since its creation in 2004. IDENT is maintained and shared with federal law enforcement and intelligence entities to assist in identifying foreign visitors and determining whether they pose a threat to national security.

DHS Response

The National Protection & Programs Directorate (NPPD) concurred with both our recommendations. NPPD stated that US-VISIT has already started a data review to determine whether additional biographic identity fraud can be identified. We believe that this partially addresses one of our recommendations, although more comprehensive work is necessary to help identify all foreign visitors who may be using multiple biographic identities.

For Further Information:

Contact our Office of Public Affairs at (202)254-4100, or email us at DHS-OIG.OfficePublicAffairs@dhs.gov

US-VISIT Faces Challenges in Identifying and Reporting Multiple Biographic Identities

What We Determined

US-VISIT needs to improve procedures that specifically target individuals using multiple biographic identities to enter the United States. Although US-VISIT has implemented some manual procedures, the process is labor-intensive and requires that program analysts spend most of their time resolving slight biographic discrepancies from the same individuals rather than identifying potential fraud. Since the program's inception in 2004, US-VISIT has identified 2 cases of individuals using multiple biographic identities to attempt to enter the United States.

Our analysis found 375,000 foreign travelers (as represented by the same set of fingerprints) were associated with 825,000 different names and dates of birth in IDENT. Most of the variations were likely due to data entry errors at points of collection, and differences in ways that various Federal entities recorded the same biographic information. However, we identified instances where individuals were recorded with as many as 9 different names and dates of birth. We also identified other examples where individuals with derogatory information, such as criminal aliens, attempted to enter the United States or apply for visas to enter the United States under different names and dates of birth. The magnitude of discrepant biographic data pose a challenge to identifying whether discrepancies contained in US-VISIT data are due to data entry errors or potential fraud.

What We Recommend

Director, US-VISIT:

1) Review data inconsistencies that we have provided to the US-VISIT office to determine if additional examples of biographic fraud exist beyond the two cases it has previously referred to ICE.

2) Provide information on individuals determined to be using multiple biographic identities to appropriate law enforcement entities for identity fraud resolution and possible inclusion on the biometric watch list so they are identifiable when entering the United States.