

The Social Security Administration's Field Office Customer Service

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Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To review access and wait times for people seeking assistance from, and problem resolution through, the Social Security Administration's (SSA) field offices.

Background

On November 6, 2019, Representative Larson, Chair of the Subcommittee on Social Security, requested that the Office of the Inspector General review SSA's field office customer wait times and telephone services. In this report, we address SSA's field office customer wait times. We have issued a separate report related to SSA's telephone services.

SSA provided field office wait times for Fiscal Years (FY) 2010 through 2019 from its Customer Service Record data. We discussed with SSA factors that affect field office wait times and strategies it uses to manage those wait times.

Results of Review

Since 2010, we have conducted four reviews of field office customer service and found management and reduction of wait times continue to be major challenges for SSA. Between FYs 2010 and 2019, 9 of SSA's 10 regions had an increase in wait times. The following table depicts total visitors, average wait time per visitor, and visitors who waited over 1 hour for service in FYs 2010 and 2019. However, SSA had staffing losses during this period, and field offices were open to the public from a high of 35 hours per week to a low of 27 hours per week.

All Field Offices	FY 2010	FY 2019
Total Visitors	45.4 million	43.3 million
Average Wait Time Per Visitor	19.4 minutes	24.8 minutes
Visitors with Wait Time over 1 Hour	2.3 million	4.2 million

SSA closely monitors field office wait times at the national, regional, and field office levels. To meet the challenges it faces in minimizing customer wait times, SSA continues focusing on authorizing overtime; implementing more eServices; transferring pending workloads from busy offices to less busy offices; and hiring and training additional staff.

Factors that affect wait times include the volume of visitors, complex workloads, staffing issues, and public operating hours. As part of its effort to improve customer service, SSA ended its telework pilot in field offices in November 2019 and expanded its Wednesday office hours for the public in January 2020. However, effective March 17, 2020, the coronavirus disease forced SSA to temporarily close field offices to the public and expand telework. We plan to conduct additional reviews that will examine further factors that affect wait times and how SSA is managing field office wait times once SSA's offices re-open.