

*Summary of Usefulness of Department of Homeland Security
Travel Data to Identify Supplemental Security Income Recipients
Who Are Outside the United States
A-01-11-01142*



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Objective

Our objective was to determine the amount of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) overpayments the Social Security Administration (SSA) could identify using Department of Homeland Security (DHS) travel data.

Background

Generally, SSI recipients are ineligible for payments once they are absent from the United States for 30 consecutive days.

DHS' U.S. Customs and Border Protection maintains TECS, which is a system that collects, among other things, travel data on individuals who enter and leave the United States.

Our Findings

Although there are legal and technical challenges in obtaining data from DHS to identify SSI recipients who are absent from the United States, we estimated 35,068 SSI recipients had approximately \$152 million in overpayments because of unreported absences from the United States between September 2009 and August 2011. Furthermore, millions of dollars more in overpayments could be identified if SSA includes all SSI recipients, regardless of their country of birth or associated bank. If our results using sample data associated with one bank represent all banks, we estimate our review would have identified an additional \$289 million in overpayments.

Developing a process with DHS—and if necessary, the Department of State—would be a long-term initiative; and SSA has a history of overcoming legal and technical factors with other initiatives it has pursued to address improper payments. Ultimately, the other agencies have to be willing to work with SSA.

Our Recommendations

We recommended that SSA reach out to DHS again (and if necessary, the Department of State) to attempt to create a process that provides the necessary information to identify all (not just foreign-born) SSI recipients outside the United States for longer than 30 days, which could include proposing legislative changes.

SSA agreed with the recommendation.