

Social Security Numbers Assigned to Diversity Visa Immigrants

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Office of Audit Report Summary

Background

Because the Social Security number (SSN) is one of the keys to financial, legal, and social assimilation in this country, we are issuing this report to convey information related to diversity visa (DV) immigrants' use of SSNs.

The DV program makes available up to 50,000 immigrant visas, annually, to individuals from countries with historically low rates of immigration to the United States. A small number of individuals reside in the United States in a nonimmigrant or other legal status when they apply.

Recent reports have warned that the DV program is vulnerable to fraud committed by, and against, DV applicants. According to one report, criminal activity continued after some DV immigrants entered the United States, including situations where fraudsters kept the DV immigrants' Social Security card and number for misuse.

We requested that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) provide us data on individuals to whom the Department of State issued a DV from 2010 through 2012. We did not independently verify the reliability of the data DHS provided nor could we share the results with the Social Security Administration (SSA). Decisions about specific individuals' rights, benefits, or privileges cannot be determined from the data.

Summary

We reviewed the earnings and enumeration records for 60,549 DV immigrants whom SSA assigned an original SSN from 2010 through 2012. Over this 3-year period, SSA placed over 1,100 wage items in the Earnings Suspense File because the name on the earnings record did not match over 400 DV immigrants' SSNs. These wage items represented almost \$11 million in suspended wages. In some cases, it appeared multiple individuals used DV immigrants' SSNs to work. For example, the first and last name an employer reported was different from the DV immigrant's name.

SSA earnings records from 2010 through 2014 showed 53,260 (88 percent) of the 60,549 DV immigrants had posted wages. Of the DV immigrants who had earnings in 2013, the most current full year of information available, approximately 48,000 (98 percent) had earnings from 1 to 5 employers. About 700 DV immigrants had earnings from 6 to 9 employers, and 32 had earnings from 10 or more employers. The primary occupations of DV immigrants with 10 or more employers were healthcare, restaurant, staffing, construction, and retail.

Earnings records also showed that 7,289 (12 percent) of the 60,549 DV immigrants had no posted earnings in the Master Earnings File for Tax Years 2010 through 2014. Of the DV immigrants who had no earnings, 71 percent was between ages 25 and 49, and 26 percent was between ages 50 and 74. Although we could not determine why these DV immigrants had no posted earnings, we believe some may not have reported their self-employment income. In addition, some DV immigrants may not have worked or may have received support from a family member.

SSA issued replacement SSN cards to almost 12,000 (20 percent) of the 60,549 DV immigrants from 2010 through 2013. While most DV immigrants received 2 or fewer replacement SSN cards, SSA issued 3 or more replacement cards to 207, including 17 who received 4 or more cards.