

Spotlight

Department of Homeland Security



Office of Inspector General

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Why This Matters

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Visa Security Program (VSP) is intended to prevent terrorists, criminal, and other ineligible applicants from receiving U.S. visas. DHS assigns special agents with expertise in immigration law and counterterrorism to U.S. diplomatic posts overseas to perform visa security activities.

Congressional leaders have repeatedly expressed concerns about the program's slow expansion to additional overseas locations.

DHS Response

ICE concurred with all recommendations. Based on ICE's response, one recommendation is resolved and closed, and nine are resolved and open.

The DHS Visa Security Program

What We Determined

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is required to employ mechanisms that measure and accurately report VSP performance. However, current performance measures for the VSP do not include key aspects to determine its effectiveness. In addition, ICE has not taken actions to assure that (1) data needed to assess program performance is collected and reported; (2) consular officers receive appropriate advice and training; and (3) VSP hours are tracked and used to determine staffing and funding needs.

DHS has consistently delivered annual reports to Congress about VSP expansion after the required time frame. As a result, the reports were ineffective in providing information to Congress about program decisions.

ICE has only established 20 Visa Security Units at overseas diplomatic posts to date. ICE attributes the program's slow expansion to funding challenges, a limited number of trained special agents, and Department of State challenges to make space and provide support for DHS' overseas presence. According to ICE officials, a solution to the program's slow expansion may be the Pre-Adjudicated Threat Recognition and Intelligence Operations Team that will eventually be capable of screening visa applications from all visa-issuing posts.

What We Recommend

We made ten recommendations to the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Executive Associate Director for Homeland Security Investigations to improve the Visa Security Program.

For Further Information:

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