

The Social Security Administration's International Workloads in Processing Center 8

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Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To determine whether Social Security Administration (SSA) Processing Center 8 accurately processed actions for beneficiaries under its jurisdiction.

Background

Processing Center 8 processes Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance and Medicare claims from all claimants who reside outside the United States as well as Totalization claims. SSA provides Totalization benefits to individuals who may qualify for a partial retirement, disability, or survivor benefit in the United States, or a foreign benefit based on combined work credits from both countries. It is possible for a person to qualify for a separate benefit payment from each country.

Processing Center 8 staff (as well as all other SSA employees) must follow SSA's Program Operations Manual System when they process its workloads. Additionally, Processing Center 8 has a screening guide that contains instructions on processing workloads.

We used management information on pending workloads at Processing Center 8 for Fiscal Years 2018 through 2023. At that time, Processing Center 8 had 104,946 actions pending among 34 workloads. We reviewed 196 of 41,684 cases pending at Processing Center 8 as of September 29, 2023, involving 12 of the workloads.

Results

SSA can reduce improper payments and enhance customer service if Processing Center 8 staff improves case processing accuracy. Processing Center 8 accurately processed 66 (33.7 percent) of the 196 sample cases we reviewed. However, for the remaining 130 cases (66.3 percent), Processing Center 8 staff did not always comply with SSA policies and screening guide. At least 12 of these cases had approximately \$211,418 in improper payments.

In September 2024, the Commissioner of SSA introduced a *Human Capital Operating Plan* that included improving training programs. Over the long term, this Plan's focus on training programs could improve Processing Center 8 staff's accuracy.

Additionally, in December 2024, SSA informed us it started revising the screening guide to incorporate more policy references and address the issues we identified in the audit regarding accuracy. SSA anticipates having the updated version of the screening guide available for staff in 2025.

Recommendations

1. Take corrective actions on the case errors we identified in the sample that were still unresolved as of November 2024.
2. Provide refresher training to Processing Center 8 staff on SSA policies and the screening guide related to the issues identified in this report.

SSA agreed with the recommendations.