The Social Security Administration's Enumeration Services During the COVID-19 Pandemic
A-15-21-51015

Objectives

To determine whether the Social Security Administration (SSA) complied with its enumeration policies and procedures and had adequate controls over managing evidentiary documents submitted to support Social Security number (SSN) card applications during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Background

One of SSA's mission-essential functions is enumeration, the process of assigning SSNs. During the enumeration process, SSA issues a Social Security card (original and any later replacement) to each individual assigned an SSN. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 (October 1, 2020 to September 30, 2021), SSA processed approximately 12 million applications for original and replacement SSN cards, which is approximately 1 million fewer than it processed in FY 2020 and 5 million fewer than in FY 2019.

We reviewed non-automated enumeration services (in-person and mail-in SSN applications) for original and replacement SSN cards during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Results

SSA staff did not consistently comply with established enumeration policies and procedures or temporary enumeration guidelines, and the Agency did not have adequate controls over managing evidentiary documents submitted to support SSN card applications during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- ✓ We reviewed a sample of 150 SSN card applications SSA processed between November 2020 and January 2021 and found 41 contained processing errors and 45 contained documentation errors. Based on our sample, we estimated SSA made 188,659 and 128,346 SSN card application processing and documentation errors, respectively.

- ✓ We reviewed an additional sample of 50 replacement SSN card applications SSA processed between June and September 2021 and found 15 contained processing errors and 19 contained documentation errors.

- ✓ SSA staff issued multiple SSNs to 27 individuals without cross-referring the SSNs. Therefore, SSA was unaware that each individual had more than one SSN.

- ✓ Some SSA offices did not report the loss, or suspected loss, of personally identifiable information.

- ✓ SSA did not have a comprehensive method to track the total number of lost original documents.

- ✓ SSA did not complete the privacy assessment on WorkTrack, the workload management tool staff used to manage the enumeration workload during the pandemic.

Recommendations

We made 10 recommendations. SSA agreed with Recommendations 1 and 4 through 10. SSA disagreed with Recommendations 2 and 3.