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SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

## Press Release

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<http://oig.ssa.gov>

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### **SSA Inspector General Report: Homeland Security's Travel Data Could Help Identify SSI Recipients outside the United States**

The Social Security Administration (SSA) could potentially prevent hundreds of millions of dollars in overpayments by using travel data from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to identify Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients outside the United States, according to a recent report from SSA's Office of the Inspector General (OIG).

SSI recipients are required to report to SSA changes that may affect their eligibility or payment amounts—including departures from the United States. Recipients are generally not eligible for payments once they are outside the U.S. for 30 consecutive days. However, some recipients may fail to report this information to SSA because they want to continue receiving SSI—and SSA is not currently able to identify these individuals in other ways.

For this report, DHS' OIG matched selected SSI recipient data against a Customs and Border Protection system that collects travel data on individuals who enter and leave the United States. Based on that match, we estimated that about 35,000 SSI recipients received about \$152 million they weren't eligible to receive, because of unreported absences from the United States between September 2009 and August 2011. Moreover, if we had analyzed travel data for all SSI recipients, we estimated we could have identified an additional \$289 million in overpayments.

For example, one SSI recipient was outside the United States for longer than six months, but did not report this absence to SSA. Had SSA received travel data from DHS—instead of relying on self-reporting or identifying the overpayment during a scheduled redetermination—SSA would have been able to determine the recipient was overpaid at least \$5,000.

Our report did identify various legal and technical challenges in obtaining and utilizing DHS data; and because of privacy restrictions, we could not provide our findings to SSA for assessing actual overpayments. In response to our report, however, SSA said it would reach out to DHS—and, if necessary, the Department of State—to attempt to create a process that provides the necessary information to identify SSI recipients outside the United States for more than 30 days. We noted in our recommendation that this effort could involve proposing legislative changes to facilitate the data match.

To view the full report, [click here](#), or for additional information, contact Jonathan Lasher, Assistant Inspector General for External Relations, at (410) 965-2671. Refer to Common Identification Number A-01-11-01142.