

Social Security Benefits Paid to Non-citizens Granted Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Status

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Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To determine whether the Social Security Administration (SSA) properly verified eligibility and paid Old-Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance (OASDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits to non-citizens granted Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status.

Background

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) established DACA to offer undocumented non-citizens who came to the United States as children relief from removal. DHS began accepting requests for DACA status on August 15, 2012 and stopped accepting initial requests on September 5, 2017. DACA provides non-citizens temporary lawful presence and work authorization.

From October 1, 2012 through June 30, 2017, SSA assigned original Social Security numbers to 838,058 non-citizens granted DACA status. We determined 528 of these non-citizens had received OASDI benefits, and 4 received SSI payments. We reviewed a random sample of 50 DACA recipients who received OASDI benefits and all who received SSI payments.

Findings

SSA properly verified eligibility for OASDI benefits paid to non-citizens granted DACA status. However, SSA did not record the accurate lawful presence expiration date for 5 (10 percent) of the 50 DACA recipients in our review, which resulted in improper payments. As such, we estimate SSA improperly paid \$218,360 to 53 of the 528 DACA recipients who received OASDI benefits. SSA did not record accurate lawful presence expiration dates for 13 other DACA recipients. However, these errors did not result in improper payments. Finally, SSA improperly paid three DACA recipients \$42,831 in SSI payments. DACA recipients are not eligible to receive SSI payments.

We provided SSA information on the eight improper payments we identified, and it took corrective action on each. Additionally, SSA requested data on the remaining 478 DACA recipients who received OASDI benefits to ensure it had recorded or updated the accurate lawful presence expiration dates. While we are making no recommendations, we encourage SSA to ensure it takes all necessary steps to minimize the risk of improper payments to DACA recipients. SSA stated it will continue exploring ways of minimizing the risk of improper payments to DACA recipients.