

Customer Waiting Times in the Social Security Administration's Field Offices

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Office of Audit Report Summary

Background

We are issuing this report to provide information about customer wait times at the Social Security Administration's (SSA) field offices.

SSA administers its programs and services through a network of approximately 1,220 field offices in 10 regions that serve the public throughout the United States and its territories. Field offices are SSA's primary point of face-to-face contact with the public.

Major field office workloads include

1. processing original or replacement Social Security number applications;
2. taking applications and determining non-medical eligibility for Old-Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income benefits;
3. conducting continuing non-medical eligibility reviews to ensure payment accuracy; and
4. performing other functions, such as updating beneficiary records and answering telephone calls.

Summary

While the total number of visitors to all SSA field offices steadily increased between Fiscal Years (FY) 2006 and 2010, the number of visitors began declining in FY 2011 and declined each year through FY 2015. The annual number of visitors to all SSA field offices decreased from 45.4 million in FY 2010 to 40.7 million in FY 2015.

Even as the number of visitors to SSA field offices has declined each year since FY 2010, customer wait times have increased in all 10 SSA regions. For all regions, the average wait time increased from 19 minutes in FY 2010 to 26 minutes in FY 2015.

The number of visitors to SSA field offices who waited longer than 1 hour for service significantly increased from FYs 2010 to 2015. In fact, for all regions, the number of field office visitors who waited longer than 1 hour for service increased from 2.3 million in FY 2010 to 4.5 million in FY 2015. Further, more than 11 percent of all visitors to SSA field offices waited longer than 1 hour for service in FY 2015. In contrast, only about 5 percent of visitors waited longer than 1 hour in FY 2010.

We plan to conduct a follow-up review that will examine factors that affect wait times and how SSA is managing field office wait times.