

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-105328](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

To help ensure the integrity of the immigration system, FDNS develops policies and procedures for detecting benefit fraud, national security, and public safety concerns related to immigration benefit applications. It also conducts administrative investigations in those areas, among other activities. For example, FDNS investigates concerns that the marriages that form the basis of family-based immigration benefits are not bona fide, or that international students are not meeting attendance criteria to maintain their nonimmigrant status.

A 2020 House Appropriations Committee report included a provision for GAO to review USCIS fraud detection operations. This review describes FDNS's workload and evaluates, among other things, USCIS processes to determine staff resource needs; efforts to assess fraud risks and develop an antifraud strategy; and efforts to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of antifraud activities. GAO analyzed USCIS documents and data on FDNS operations from fiscal years 2016 through 2021 and interviewed officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making six recommendations to USCIS, including that it identify factors affecting its workload; implement additional data entry guidance; and implement processes to regularly conduct fraud risk assessments, develop an antifraud strategy, and conduct risk-based evaluations of the effectiveness of antifraud activities. DHS concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-22-105328](#). For more information, contact Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512-8777 or GamblerR@gao.gov.

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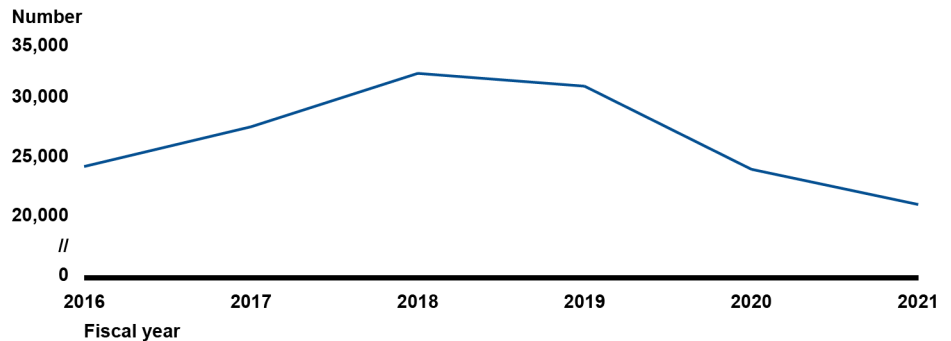
U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES

Additional Actions Needed to Manage Fraud Risks

What GAO Found

Each year, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) processes millions of applications and petitions for persons seeking to visit or reside in the U.S. or become citizens. USCIS's Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate (FDNS) leads efforts to combat fraud and detect national security and public safety threats posed by applicants. Each year, FDNS completes thousands of administrative investigations into benefit fraud concerns.

USCIS Fraud Detection and National Security Directorate (FDNS) Fraud Cases Completed, Fiscal Years 2016 through 2021



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) data. | [GAO-22-105328](#)

USCIS uses a staffing model to estimate the number of Immigration Officers needed to handle FDNS's projected workload. However, the FDNS staffing model's assumptions do not reflect operating conditions. Also, due to inconsistent data entry practices, the data used in the staffing model do not accurately reflect FDNS staff workloads. Conducting additional analyses to identify factors that affect FDNS's workload and issuing guidance to clarify data entry practices would improve the accuracy of the staffing model's estimates.

USCIS has conducted fraud risk assessments for three immigration benefit types in response to prior GAO recommendations. However, USCIS does not have a process for regularly conducting these assessments because no USCIS entity is responsible for leading them. Implementing a process for conducting fraud risk assessments would help FDNS better understand its fraud risks. In addition, while FDNS has documented some of its antifraud activities, it has not developed an antifraud strategy to guide their design and implementation and the allocation of resources to its highest-risk areas. Implementing a process for developing an antifraud strategy could help FDNS ensure that it has an appropriate balance of antifraud activities to address its fraud risks.

Since fiscal year 2016, USCIS has implemented several changes to its antifraud activities. These changes include adding new activities, modifying ongoing activities, and developing technology tools to support operations. However, FDNS has not evaluated its antifraud activities for efficiency and effectiveness. Implementing a process for risk-based evaluation of antifraud activities would provide FDNS greater assurance that it is effectively preventing, detecting, and responding to potential fraud.