

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-105959](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

DHS currently uses an outdated system, implemented over 29 years ago, for providing biometric identity management services (e.g., fingerprint matching). The system stores over 290 million identities. In 2016, DHS initiated a multi-billion dollar program known as HART, which is intended to replace the legacy system. GAO previously reported that due to several challenges, in 2017 the program breached its schedule baseline. In 2019 the program established new cost and schedule commitments with DHS leadership (referred to as a rebaseline). This resulted in delaying the program by 3 years.

GAO was asked to evaluate the HART program. This report's objectives were to (1) determine how the HART program has changed since the 2019 baseline, (2) assess the extent to which the program's cost and schedule estimates followed best practices, and (3) assess the extent to which DHS implemented selected privacy requirements for the program.

GAO reviewed HART planning documentation, evaluated cost and schedule estimates against best practices identified by GAO, and compared privacy documentation to selected Office of Management and Budget privacy requirements. GAO also interviewed appropriate officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making nine recommendations to DHS to follow best practices when preparing HART cost and schedule estimates and implement selected privacy requirements for the system. DHS concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-23-105959](#). For more information, contact Marisol Cruz Cain at (202) 512-5017 or cruzcainm@gao.gov.

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BIOMETRIC IDENTITY SYSTEM

DHS Needs to Address Significant Shortcomings in Program Management and Privacy

What GAO Found

Since rebaselining its original cost and schedule commitments in 2019, the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Homeland Advanced Recognition Technology (HART) program has further delayed its schedule. Specifically, in 2020 the program declared a second schedule breach and its first cost breach. Accordingly, DHS rebaselined the program again. This extended the schedule for delivering the initial capabilities to replace the legacy system by an additional 33 months beyond the 2019 plan. In addition, the 2022 rebaseline did not include an estimate for completing the program (see table).

Changes in the Homeland Advanced Recognition Technology (HART) Program Schedule from 2019 to 2022

Milestone	Planned completion date ^a (as of May 2019)	Planned completion date ^a (as of May 2022)
Initial operational capability	December 31, 2020	September 30, 2023
Complete full program	June 30, 2024	Not yet planned

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Homeland Security data. | [GAO-23-105959](#)

^aThis represents the schedule threshold dates defined in the HART acquisition program baseline.

Regarding costs, the program's 2022 rebaseline increased its estimated costs by \$354 million. In April 2023, program officials stated that they needed to rebaseline HART's schedule a third time due to, among other things, higher than expected software defects and performance issues.

The program's 2022 cost and schedule estimates did not fully follow GAO's identified cost and schedule best practices and were, therefore, unreliable. Specifically, the program's cost estimate did not substantially or fully meet the four characteristics of a reliable cost estimate. Moreover, the program's schedule estimate did not substantially or fully meet three of the four characteristics of a reliable schedule estimate. Until these weaknesses are addressed, the HART cost and schedule estimates will continue to be unreliable. In turn, this will impair the ability of senior leadership to make informed decisions regarding the program's future.

DHS fully implemented five of 12 selected Office of Management and Budget privacy requirements. For example, the program addressed the requirement to appropriately encrypt information by demonstrating encryption settings for information at rest and in transit. However, DHS had gaps in the remaining seven requirements. For example, the program's privacy impact assessment, which is intended to analyze how personal information is collected, shared, and managed, was missing key information. Specifically, the assessment was missing information on (1) individuals whose data will be stored in the system and (2) the partners with whom the system will share information. In addition, the program did not have assurances that partners that provide information to the system will appropriately retain and dispose of personally identifiable information. Until DHS addresses these privacy weaknesses, the department lacks assurance that the hundreds of millions individuals' personally identifiable information that will be stored and shared by HART will be appropriately protected.