Government of Canada

Gouvernement du Canada

Evaluation of the Immigration National Security Screening Program: Conclusions and recommendations

[← Previous page] [Table of contents] [Next page →]

In this section

- Conclusions
  - Recommendations

Conclusions

The NSSD's workload is at the mercy of fluctuating referrals; increases in workload can and do occur at various times due to changing Government of Canada priorities. During the evaluation period, the NSSD experienced two instances of unanticipated, significant increases in referral numbers — Operation Syrian Refugee (OSR) and increased irregular migration (IIM) — which adversely impacted the Program's ability to achieve its objectives of providing legally defensible recommendations to decision-makers in a timely manner. NSSD responded by adopting new policies and procedures, securing additional staff and staffing hours, and by enhancing inter-partner

collaboration. Nonetheless, there was a large backlog in NSSD for a prolonged period, during which time the Division fell short of meeting the service standards and providing timely recommendations.

The evaluation concluded that the NSSD's recommendations are well-grounded in legislation. This is evidenced by the small proportion of legal challenges to immigration decisions based on security inadmissibility and a low success rate of applicants who do litigate their decisions. NSSD analysts have had access to legal advice and expertise on an ongoing basis and receive comprehensive training to be effective in their roles.

In terms of measuring performance, key variables such as legal defensibility have yet to be defined and outcomes are insufficiently articulated. Performance measurement, overall, is limited.

There are good working relations between NSSD, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) in the security screening continuum, but all participating partners would benefit from leveraging the trilateral agreement to strengthen inter-departmental engagement and collaboration. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) is noticeably absent from the process, and could bring much-needed information and intelligence to support NSSD in assessing inadmissibility related to organized criminality. There are opportunities to better coordinate the refugee claimant security screening activities internal to the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), namely between NSSD and regional hearings and investigations units.

NSSD and its partners sought to improve the effectiveness of the referral process by refining the security screening indicators, but the impact of the new indicator packages remains unknown. There is a general lack of clarity among partners as to the intended objectives of the new indicator

packages and how they could be measured. While not widespread, the involvement of locally-engaged staff in the initial screening of applications in IRCC missions is of concern and warrants further examination.

NSSD's policies and procedures were enhanced over the evaluation period, but internal procedures were not always being applied consistently across GeoDesks. In addition, analysts reported not being kept up-to-date on changing country and region-specific conditions, including new and emerging events of concern. Writing briefs to accompany non-favourable recommendations so as to protect classified information, but so as not to jeopardize procedural fairness, is a challenge for NSSD analysts, and current SOPs do not provide explicit guidance in this regard.

Despite notable improvements in the Program's performance in 2018 to 2019, there remain areas of improvement to ensure the Program is in a better position to respond to future referral surges. Even without any significant events, referral numbers are expected to continually increase as overall immigration applications increase. Program adjustments could include greater flexibility with service standards, further refining security screening indicators, and developing a robust surge capacity plan, including the ability to readily access additional trained staff when necessary.
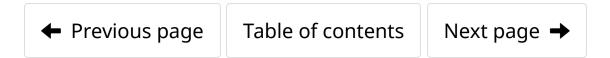
Recommendations

1. The VP of Intelligence and Enforcement (I&E) should strengthen the measurement of the Program's performance. This includes:
   a. revising the logic model to ensure that the immediate and intermediate outcomes fully capture the Program's intended objectives and include logical flow from one outcome to the other

   b. revising the key performance indicators (KPIs) to align with the objectives in the revised Logic Model and assist NSSD's leadership with performance management accountability and decision-making. The new KPIs should include establishing internal processing times that are independent from service standards communicated to the IRCC

2. The VP of I&E should enhance the NSSD's Surge Capacity Plan, so as to develop additional capacity within CBSA to support a sudden surge in referrals. This includes the consideration of:

   a. identifying staff within CBSA, including Regional staff, who are able to conduct screenings and who can quickly be deployed on a part-time or full-time basis, and for an extended period if necessary

   b. providing regular training and refresher training to the above identified staff

   c. applying QA to security screenings conducted by the above identified staff

3. The VP of I&E should advocate for clearer articulation of the objectives of the new thematic indicators and their expected impact on the security screening process, and for the establishment of mechanisms to track the achievement of these objectives. This includes:

   a. advocating for the IRCC to develop and implement a standardized mechanism to track the specific security indicator(s) that trigger referrals to NSSD; this should allow for regular monitoring of their usage by IRCC missions and of the impact on the number of referrals made

   b. advocating for the development and implementation of a strategy to measure the ongoing effectiveness of the new thematic indicators in terms of their impact on the quality of referrals sent to NSSD

4. The VP of I&E should engage in systematic outreach and communication activities with CBSA regional hearings and investigations units to increase mutual understanding of the HQ and regional roles and responsibilities in the front-end security screening (FESS) process, with a view to minimizing duplication and enhancing collaboration. This could include:

   a. establishing a working group at the managerial level to regularly exchange information on new trends and events of concern within countries, regions and globally, as well as best practices, lessons learned and challenges in screening claimants and in preparing well-documented cases for Immigration and Refugees Board (IRB) hearings

   b. establishing a mechanism through which NSSD analysts and regional officers have access to relevant intelligence (such as via subscription databases), and systematically share intelligence obtained(such as emerging trends seen with claimants from a specific country, or information shared by local police services) to enhance each other's work

   c. enhancing communication, to raise awareness of NSSD's processes and procedures, including the procedures to follow when regions need to ask NSSD for more time before a referral is closed and IRB is notified about the completed screening

5. The VP of I&E should advocate to address a number of key interdepartmental issues through the fora referenced in the trilateral Memoranda of Understanding (MoU), including:

   a. the roles and responsibilities in performance measurement across the continuum

   b. the need for interdepartmental training

c. adopting a whole-of-government approach to setting service standards, taking into account of inter-dependencies in service delivery

d. the development and implementation, by IRCC, of a monitoring mechanism to determine whether all applicants who should be referred for screening are being referred

6. The VP of I&E should ensure that NSSD analysts have reliable and up-to-date information on country- and region-specific concerns and that all GeoDesks and teams apply policies, procedures and processes consistently. This includes:

a. conducting an internal exercise to map current security screening practices in each GeoDesk and teams within GeoDesks, and assessing whether improvements have been made in implementing a harmonized approach to security screening across NSSD

b. introducing a standardized approach to collecting, storing and updating information on countries' social, political, economic changes, and to communicating such changes to analysts across GeoDesks in a timely manner

7. The VP of I&E, in collaboration with the VP of ISTB, should develop a plan to:

a. assess program priorities and, accordingly, make adjustment to Secure Tracking System (STS) and the future replacement system (Security Referral Request Service), to start collecting additional data to support performance measurement

b. ensure that Security Screening Automation (SSA) is fully operational with all its advanced functionalities, including the text-query reading capability before retiring STS; this is in view of

mitigating major risks associated with the transition to the new system

← Previous page   Table of contents   Next page ➡

Date modified:

2023-02-24