

Report Summary

Social Security Administration Office of the Inspector General

October 2010



Objective

To determine whether the Social Security Administration (SSA) (1) had adequate procedures to monitor the length of time visitors waited for service at its field offices and, when applicable, (2) took actions to shorten long wait times.

Background

SSA administers its programs and services through a network of approximately 1,300 field offices that directly serve the public in communities throughout the United States and its territories. Field offices are SSA's primary point of face-to-face contact with the public. SSA has experienced a steady increase in the number of visitors to its field offices. In Fiscal Year 2009, SSA reported 45.1 million visits, compared to only 41.9 million visits in Fiscal Year 2006.

To view the full report, visit http://www.ssa.gov/oig/ADO_BEPDF/A-04-10-11034.pdf

Customer Waiting times in the Social Security Administration's Field Offices (A-04-10-11034)

Our Findings

SSA closely monitored field office wait times at the national, regional, and field office levels. Additionally, the Agency had various initiatives to reduce customer wait times. Based on our review, we believe SSA is focused on providing timely service to its customers. However, SSA faces many current and future challenges in maintaining and improving this level of service. For example, a significant number of customers still waited more than 1 hour for service. Additionally, many others left SSA field offices before receiving service.

To SSA's credit, wait times improved during our audit period. During the first 14 months of our 21-month audit period, 7.5 percent of visitors waited more than 1 hour for service. In comparison, during the last 14 months of the audit period, the percentage of customers who waited more than 1 hour decreased to 6.1 percent.

Our Recommendations

We recommended that SSA ensure regional offices establish performance goals that measure average customer wait times, percent of customers who wait over 1 hour, and percent of customers who leave without service. We also recommended that SSA routinely evaluate the effectiveness of ongoing initiatives and, when necessary, take actions to ensure their success on a national level and develop a mechanism for regional and field offices to share best practices.

SSA agreed with two of our recommendations but did not agree to establish regional performance goals for customer wait times at field offices. SSA stated that it was not reasonable to establish a "one size fits all" field office wait time performance goal—even at the regional level. We continue to believe establishing performance goals would provide clear and consistent guidance to field office employees and help identify offices that may need additional resources or other forms of assistance.