

Non-responders to the Social Security Administration's Foreign Enforcement Questionnaires

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Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To assess the Social Security Administration's (SSA) processes pertaining to the Foreign Enforcement Questionnaire (FEQ).

Background

U.S. citizens and noncitizens who meet certain eligibility requirements can receive Old-Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance (OASDI) while they live abroad.

SSA uses the Foreign Enforcement Program to verify the existence and identities of OASDI beneficiaries living outside the United States. A significant component of the Foreign Enforcement Program is the FEQ.

SSA uses the FEQ to contact beneficiaries and representative payees annually or biennially. Beneficiaries who receive their own benefits receive a Form SSA-7162, *Report to United States Social Security Administration*, annually or biennially, depending on their age, country of residence, and benefit type as well as the last four digits of their Social Security numbers. All representative payees receive Form SSA-7161, *Report to the United States Social Security Administration by Person Receiving Benefits for a Child or Adult Unable to Handle Funds*, annually on behalf of the beneficiaries they serve.

Findings

Generally, SSA complied with its policies and procedures concerning the FEQ process. For example, we reviewed FEQs for 500 beneficiaries and found no issues for 419. However, we could not find FEQs for 66 beneficiaries. Of the 66 beneficiaries, SSA held benefits for 18 in suspense status throughout the remainder of the 2015 cycle. For the remaining 48 beneficiaries, 15 continued receiving benefit payments, and 33 were reinstated without a completed FEQ for the 2015 cycle. Therefore, we estimated SSA paid approximately \$17.2 million in questionable payments to 6,334 beneficiaries without receipt of a completed FEQ. Finally, Agency staff did not take appropriate action based on the FEQs received for 15 beneficiaries.

Recommendations

We recommend SSA:

1. Ensure the appropriate action was taken for the 48 beneficiaries we identified who did not respond to the FEQs.
2. Remind employees to ensure receipt of the FEQs before reinstating the benefits for beneficiaries in suspense status for non-receipt of FEQs.
3. Remind employees to scan the completed FEQs in the Automated Image Retrieval System.
4. Remind employees to follow up on actionable FEQ responses.

SSA agreed with our recommendations.