

Individuals with Multiple Social Security Numbers that Were Not Cross-referenced in the Social Security Administration's Systems

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Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To assess the Social Security Administration's (SSA) effectiveness in addressing individuals with multiple Social Security numbers (SSN) that were not cross-referenced in its systems.

Background

Generally, SSA assigns an individual one SSN to track his/her earnings and any benefits he/she may receive. In some cases, an individual can have more than one SSN. For example, when SSA assigns consecutive SSNs to members of the same family, one of the individuals can request a new SSN. If SSA assigns an individual more than one SSN, the Agency generally cross-references it electronically in its records.

We identified 21,891 pairs of SSNs that had the same name, date of birth, place of birth, and parents' names in the Numident that were not cross-referenced in SSA's systems. From this population, we reviewed 66 pairs of SSNs from the 217 individuals who were alive and had claims and/or earnings activity on both SSNs. We also reviewed 81 pairs of SSNs where SSA's records for 1 of the SSNs indicated the person was deceased and had another SSN, suggesting the person was alive.

Our Findings

We conducted this review because we were concerned that this population of multiple, non-cross-referenced SSNs created a risk for SSN misuse and/or benefit fraud. For example, an individual with two such SSNs could use one SSN to file a disability claim and use the other to work and earn wages. Because the SSNs were not cross-referenced, SSA would be less likely to recognize these situations as problematic and in need of investigation.

To determine whether the non-cross-referenced SSNs were misused, we attempted to identify cases of living numberholders who used both SSNs to collect benefits and/or earn wages. Of the 21,891 pairs we identified, only 217 had claims and/or earnings activity on both SSNs.

Of the 66 pairs we reviewed, 33 belonged to 2 different individuals. In all but one of these cases, the SSNs belonged to twins who had similar first names. Because they were twins, their date, place of birth, and parents' names were the same. In the last case, SSA acknowledged the individual had earnings discrepancies and issued the individual a new SSN.

The remaining 33 cases are questionable. We did not find evidence suggesting the SSNs belonged to separate individuals. Additionally, both SSNs had earnings in 22 of these cases, and SSA paid Old-Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance benefits to the individuals using 1 SSN, while the individuals had earnings recorded under the second SSN in 11 cases.

Of 81 pairs of SSNs where SSA's records for 1 of the SSNs indicated the person was deceased, we found 18 cases where both SSNs appeared to belong to the same person and both SSNs had reported earnings or benefit claims attributed to them.

Our Recommendation

We recommend that SSA review and take appropriate action to address the SSN pairs that were not cross-referenced and did not belong to two different individuals, including the five cases our Office of Investigations concluded needed further review or to be cross-referenced.

The Agency agreed with our Recommendation.