

News Release

Nov. 6, 2008

USCIS MAKES MAJOR STRIDES DURING 2008

Application processing, transformation, FBI name checks, all part of agency enhancements

WASHINGTON—More than one million new citizens took the *Oath of Allegiance* during fiscal year 2008, just one of the significant accomplishments introduced today by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Acting Director Jonathan Scharfen highlighted the agency's progress throughout the past year and discussed future goals, saying the positive results are directly attributable to the USCIS workforce.

“The tremendous dedication and hard work of more than 18,000 USCIS employees and contractors has resulted in the continuous progress we've realized this past year,” Scharfen said. “We set aggressive goals to reduce application processing times, further cut the FBI name check backlog, and began a viable transformation process for the agency. I'm proud to say that we are achieving those goals while ensuring that national security is an essential part of our ongoing customer service improvements.”

Key accomplishments for the year include the following:

- Completed more than 1.17 million naturalization applications, up more than 50 percent from FY07.
- Reduced naturalization application processing times to 9-10 months, down from the 16-18 months projected after the surge of applications in late FY07.
- Hired 1,600 new adjudications officers during FY08. Significantly revised and restructured the existing training curriculum and developed the BASIC training program at the USCIS Training Academy, preparing new officers to be “job-ready” upon completion of training.
- Worked with the FBI to effectively eliminate all name checks pending more than two years and reduced the cases waiting for a name check final result from almost 350,000 in late FY07 to less than 37,000.
- Interviewed more than 100,000 refugee applicants and completed more than 47,000 asylum applications.
- Increased participation in E-Verify, the nation's preeminent employment eligibility verification system, by 260 percent over last year, resulting in the verification of more than 10 percent of the Nation's new hires.

During FY09, USCIS' goal is to achieve a 20 percent reduction in processing times for the majority of key petitions and applications, in spite of having to work through an unexpected surge of applications received during FY07. The agency plans a five-month processing time for naturalization applications (N-400s) and a four-month processing time for both adjustment of status applications (I-485s) and petitions for alien workers (I-140s).

USCIS moves into 2009 with a more aggressive agenda to improve its services to customers. The agency has awarded the Transformation Solution Architect task order to IBM, a five-year investment to improve its filing

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and adjudication systems. The task order is just one of the building blocks of USCIS' overall transformation plan made possible through last year's implementation of a new fee structure.

"We're proud of 2008 and the milestones we've met," Scharfen added. "But, much work remains. We are gearing up for 2009 with a forward-looking and robust agenda that will result in an even better immigration service for our customers and our great Nation."

[Fact sheets](#) on USCIS' 2008 accomplishments, as well as updated processing times for both naturalization and adjustment of status applications accompany this press release and are also posted on the USCIS Web site. For more information on USCIS and its programs and services, visit www.uscis.gov.

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Fact Sheet

Nov. 6, 2008

USCIS MAKES MAJOR STRIDES DURING 2008

Application processing, transformation, FBI name checks, all part of agency enhancements

At U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), fiscal year 2008 brought unprecedented progress towards reducing naturalization processing times, improving refugee and asylum processing, increasing adjudications officer hiring and training, and reducing the backlog of FBI name checks.

USCIS has reduced processing times for applications and petitions thanks in large part to the increase of trained adjudications officers hired as a result of the implementation of last year's new fee structure. USCIS surpassed annual targets for completed asylum applications and supported the highest level of refugee admissions in the last seven fiscal years. The agency worked closely with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to reduce name checks pending for more than one year and is on track to eliminate by early next year those pending more than six months.

Processing Times for Naturalization Applications

During FY08, USCIS completed an unprecedented 1,171,140 naturalization applications, an increase of more than 422,000 processed applications a year earlier. Production for FY08 increased by 56 percent over FY2007, and surpassed original naturalization projections by 233,140 applications.

USCIS continues to make steady progress in reducing the number of pending naturalization applications received during FY07. The processing of naturalization applications is currently averaging 9-10 months, down from the 16-18 months projected after the surge of applications in late FY07. The agency will reduce processing times to five months by the end of FY09.

Hiring and Training

USCIS has made tremendous progress in hiring new employees, particularly adjudications officers, who have directly contributed to reducing the agency's pending caseload.

- USCIS hired 2,058 employees, a 24 percent increase of the USCIS workforce from FY07.
- 1,600 of USCIS' new employees have become adjudications officers.

Throughout the year, hundreds of USCIS employees have conducted naturalization interviews on weekends, after normal business hours and traveled to additional locations to further reduce processing times.

USCIS designed an extensive training program and course curricula at the USCIS Training Academy to be both flexible and adaptable to the training and educational needs of USCIS employees. The Academy also placed an unprecedented number of newly-hired adjudications officers through a restructured BASIC

training program that allows officers to exit the academy 'job-ready', thus making an immediate impact on pending caseloads.

The personnel enhancements allow USCIS to more efficiently process applications, provide better customer service, and improve security against fraud and possible threats to our homeland.

FBI Name Checks

During FY08, USCIS worked with the FBI to effectively eliminate all pending name checks more than two years old and reduced the number of cases waiting for a name check final result from almost 350,000 in late FY07 to less than 37,000. The FBI is on target to eliminate all name checks pending more than six months by early 2009.

Refugee and Asylum Processing

During FY08, the USCIS Refugee Affairs Division, in coordination with USCIS overseas district offices, deployed officers to 71 countries to interview more than 100,000 refugee applicants from 59 nations. These efforts supported the admission of more than 60,000 refugees from around the world, a 25 percent increase in refugee admissions compared to FY07, and the highest level of admissions since FY01.

Since the large-scale Iraqi refugee processing was announced in February 2007, the Departments of Homeland Security and State have worked cooperatively to increase the number of Iraqi refugees admitted as part of the worldwide commitment. DHS and DOS have streamlined the process for admitting Iraqi refugees to the United States and share responsibility for initiating security checks of Iraqi refugee applicants. During FY08, the Refugee Affairs Division deployed more than 150 officers in the Middle East to interview more than 23,000 Iraqi refugee applicants. As a result of these efforts, more than 13,800 Iraqi refugees were admitted during FY08, exceeding the Administration's goal of 12,000 admissions and establishing a robust pipeline of approved Iraqi refugee applicants for admission in FY09.

USCIS' Asylum Division completed more than 47,000 asylum applications (120 percent of the division's annual target). This reduced the total end of the year pending applications to a historically unprecedented level.

E-Verify

Free, safe, secure and simple to use, E-Verify is the best means available for determining employment eligibility of new hires and the validity of their Social Security Numbers. The program provides participating employers an automated Internet-based resource to verify the employment eligibility of newly hired employees. Through this process, E-Verify assists employers in maintaining a legal workforce and protects jobs for authorized U.S. workers.

More than 92,000 employers are currently using E-Verify to verify that their new hires are authorized to work in the United States.

- During FY08, approximately 6.6 million employment verification queries were run (as compared to a total of 3.27 million in all of FY07).
- The Department of Homeland Security's FY09 appropriation legislation, signed into law on Sept. 30, 2008, provided \$100 million to continue, expand, and improve E-Verify in FY09.

A recent study conducted by Westat, a social science research firm which monitors the effect of various changes made to the E-Verify program, found that between April and June 2008:

- Approximately 96.1 percent of all cases queried through E-Verify were instantly found to be employment authorized (this is a substantial improvement from 94.2 percent);
- About 99.6 percent of all work-authorized employees verified through E-Verify are verified without receiving a tentative nonconfirmation or having to take any type of corrective action;
- Erroneous tentative nonconfirmations (those that were work-authorized but who received a tentative nonconfirmation) has improved from 0.5% to 0.4%. Ultimately, these mismatches are successfully resolved; and
- Of all queries received, final nonconfirmations (meaning not work-authorized) are 3.5 percent; down from 5.3 percent.

USCIS Transformation

USCIS is committed to making investments which will result in long-term changes to the agency's ability to provide better, more timely customer service.

USCIS moves into 2009 with a more aggressive agenda to improve its services to customers.

- The agency has awarded the Transformation Solution Architect task order to IBM, a five-year investment to improve its filing and adjudication system.
- The task order is just one of the building blocks of USCIS' overall transformation plan made possible through the implementation of last year's new fee structure.

Future contracts that will add more building blocks to USCIS' transformation plan include program management office support and a research and development center contract to assist in administrative and program oversight.

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