

# **AUDITING AND EVALUATING IMMIGRANT AND IMMIGRATION POLICIES OF THE UNITED STATES**

*United States Government Accountability Office*

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) regularly audits and evaluates immigrant and immigration policies of the United States, as well as other policies and programmes across the federal Government. Known for many years as the U.S. General Accounting Office, the Congress changed its name



\$739 million and \$1.28 billion, and annual recurring costs would likely range between \$522 million and \$810 million.”

In a nationwide selection of more than 414,000 businesses applying to sponsor immigrant workers from 1997 to 2004, GAO found that about 20,000 (5 per cent) businesses and organizations “that were unknown” to the U.S. Internal Revenue Service (IRS). In the same audit, it found that nearly 68,000 (about 16 per cent) businesses applying to sponsor immigrant workers during the same period “did not file one or more tax returns.” “Information like this can be used to select taxpayers for audit or other enforcement efforts,” and “failure to file a tax return could be relevant to a DHS decision about whether a business meets the financial feasibility (ability to pay wages) and legitimacy (proof of existence) tests for sponsoring an immigrant,” according to the report.

GAO has recommended that the Department of State “improve its implementation of the visa process to improve its effectiveness and consistency among its overseas posts.” GAO determined that “a l(“-4.6.3(t)-8.9(ma)-tclcyir

Recognizing the difficulty of estimating the illegal immigrant population, GAO devised the “Three-Card Method” to take a different approach to estimate both the size and characteristics of the resident illegal alien population. It is a survey-based demographic method of residual estimation, and is only generally described here. GAO developed the new method to collect new information about illegal aliens, because there is relatively little reliable information about their characteristics and behaviors, and as a result, their impacts are difficult to document. Without reasonably reliable and valid estimates of the illegal alien population, it is difficult to accurately assess the coverage of the U.S. national decennial census; for example, if census figures indicate unexpected population increases, this might be traced to unexpectedly high levels of illegal immigration—or from changes in coverage levels. The method is interesting because it does not require any person surveyed to identify himself or herself as an illegal alien, nor to identify anybody else as an illegal alien.

During 2003-2004, DHS and the Bureau of the Census collaborated in testing and evaluating GAO’s three-card method for “question threat” and its ability to gather information on the different legal statuses of foreign-born persons. In addition to illegal aliens, these statuses include student or temporary worker, U.S. citizen, refugee or asylee (person granted asylum in the United States), as well as LPR (that is, holder of a “green card). DHS provided funds for the National Opinion Research Center, Chicago, Illinois, the United States, to field test the three-card method with respect to one legal category—the legal permanent resident, or “green card” category—and the Bureau of the Census has agreed to evaluate the results of the test after it is completed in December 2004.

### C. CONCLUSIONS

Because it seeks to provide evidence-based facts and information to the Congress, and may recommend that agencies change their practices to reflect legal requirements or Congressional intentions, GAO has significant influence on legislation and Executive Branch operations. In the controversial area of immigrant and immigration policy the impacts of GAO’s work are evident, and its influences on Congressional decision-making has been and is likely to remain significant.

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### REFERENCES

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