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IMMIGRATION STATISTICS

Status of the Implementation of National Academy of Sciences' Recommendations



General Government Division

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The Honorable Stephen Horn, Chairman
The Honorable Dennis J. Kucinich
Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on Government
Management, Information and Technology
Committee on Government Reform and Oversight
House of Representatives

The Honorable Carolyn B. Maloney
House of Representatives

The quality of immigration statistics has been a long-standing issue among experts in the public and private sectors. The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) issued two reports¹ in which it made recommendations regarding the need to improve the collection and management of immigration statistics. The recommendations were directed to various federal organizations, including Congress, the Department of Justice (DOJ), Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and Bureau of the Census.

This report responds to your request that we provide information on the implementation status of the major recommendations to Congress, the agencies, and OMB in these reports. Specifically, we summarized NAS recommendations and determined what, if any, action Congress, the agencies, and OMB took in response to the 13 major recommendations in the 1985 NAS report² and all 6 recommendations in the 1996 NAS report. Also, in your request, you asked us to assess demographic, statistical information on the foreign-born population and federal policies affecting immigration statistics. As agreed with your Subcommittee, we will provide this information at a later date.

Results in Brief

The recommendations in the 1985 and 1996 NAS reports proposed a range of corrective actions to address concerns about unreliable immigration

¹Immigration Statistics: A Story of Neglect, Daniel B. Levine, Kenneth Hill, and Robert Warren, eds., National Research Council, National Academy Press: Washington, D.C., 1985 and Statistics on U.S. Immigration: An Assessment of Data Needs for Future Research, Barry Edmonston, Ed., National Research Council, National Academy Press, Washington, D.C., 1996.

²The 1985 NAS report contained 38 recommendations to various federal agencies involved in the collection of immigration statistics. Of those, NAS considered 13 to be major recommendations because they required action and commitment at a high policy level and because they were fundamental to the accomplishment of the key goal—the ready availability of accurate, timely, and useful statistical information on international migration.

statistics. Generally, the 1985 recommendations focused on changing policies and procedures for processing immigration statistics, and the 1996 recommendations emphasized collecting more immigration statistics from new sources. Specifically, the 1985 NAS report included 13 major recommendations that action be taken to (1) improve the process for collecting and reporting immigration statistics, (2) issue policy statements regarding the importance of producing quality and timely immigration statistics, and (3) reorganize INS and increase INS' staff to improve its immigration statistical capabilities. All six 1996 NAS recommendations focused on the perceived need to collect more immigration data from additional sources, such as the Bureau of the Census' Current Population Survey.

We determined that some actions had been taken to implement most of the 19 recommendations; the majority (15) of the recommendations were fully, substantially, or partially implemented. Specifically, we determined that

- three recommendations in the 1996 report had been fully implemented;
- four recommendations in the 1985 report and one recommendation in the 1996 report had been substantially implemented, which means the actions taken were not in compliance with the technical aspects of the recommendations, but the actions were generally responsive to and consistent with the recommendations' purposes;
- five recommendations in the 1985 report and two recommendations in the 1996 report had been partially implemented; and
- three recommendations in the 1985 report had not been implemented. Agency officials were developing plans to implement one of the three recommendations during fiscal year 1998.

We did not categorize one of the recommendations to the Attorney General because it was basically the same as another recommendation but directed to INS. We categorized the recommendation to INS as substantially implemented.

Background

Immigration statistics are used to develop, execute, and evaluate immigration policies. However, experts in both the public and private sectors, including many government agencies responsible for the collection of immigration statistics, expressed concerns that immigration statistics are inadequate, incomplete, and often unreliable. Among the most common concerns were that immigration statistics do not accurately

reflect the number and characteristics of immigrant populations, or how immigrants fare after entry into the United States. During the 1980s, INS estimated that the United States received about 6.3 million immigrants, or an average of approximately 630,000 immigrants per year. The volume increased in the 1990s, with about 1 million immigrants arriving each year. Given that over a million immigrants arrive in the United States annually, the need for reliable immigration statistics is crucial for decisionmakers. For example, information about changes in the rate of arrival or departure of aliens, or their demographic characteristics, could be important to decisions about changes in immigration policies or services.

In response to concerns about the quality of immigration statistics, INS asked NAS to conduct two comprehensive reviews of federal immigration statistics. First, INS asked NAS to identify major shortcomings in immigration statistics and to recommend appropriate remedies and actions. Second, INS, in conjunction with the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, asked NAS to assess the current immigration data and to identify limitations. These requests resulted in the 1985 and 1996 NAS reports.

Generally, the reports (1) identified deficiencies and limitations with immigration statistics and (2) made recommendations for improving the collection and management of immigration statistics. The 1985 NAS report identified significant problems with the collection and management of statistical immigration data. NAS found that a statistical system to produce immigration data existed, but that it was being neglected. NAS pointed out that there was an “extraordinary lack of concern with immigration data on the part of many agencies and that this neglect extended throughout almost all levels of responsibility within the agencies which are most directly involved in the statistical data.” Of the 13 major recommendations, 6 were addressed to INS, 3 were directed to Congress, 3 were directed to OMB, and 1 was addressed to the Attorney General. The recommendation made to the Attorney General was separate, but similar to one of the recommendations made to INS regarding the need to provide more reliable data on immigration statistics.

Similar to the 1985 NAS report, the 1996 NAS report addressed limitations in immigration data. In its 1996 report, NAS made six recommendations—three to Census, two to INS, and one to statistical agencies—to improve the data collection and analysis efforts of federal statistical agencies. Generally, the recommendations focused on (1) the need for additional data sources for program and research purposes and

(2) modifications to existing immigration data sources (e.g., adding new questions to and refining existing questions contained in immigration data collection instruments). Furthermore, the 1996 report had a recommendation similar to NAS' 1985 report recommendation dealing with obtaining data on new immigrants.

Scope and Methodology

To determine the actions taken by Congress, the agencies, and OMB in response to the 19 NAS recommendations, we reviewed the NAS reports, obtained the views of the agencies to which NAS directed the recommendations, classified the status of the recommendations, and discussed the reports with officials from the agencies and NAS officials. For the three recommendations directed to Congress, we also considered any related actions that the agencies may have taken.

To gain an understanding of the NAS recommendations, and the types of problems the recommendations were designed to correct, we reviewed the 1985 and 1996 NAS reports. In addition, we met with knowledgeable agency officials from INS, OMB, and Census to discuss the recommendations. Also, we had separate discussions with individuals who worked on each of the NAS reports. However, we did not evaluate the merits of the recommendations or determine whether the agencies could have or should have implemented them.

To categorize the status of the recommendations, we used the following categories.³

- Fully implemented. The entire recommendation, including all specified actions, had been fulfilled; the action taken was responsive to the letter of the recommendation and consistent with its purpose.
- Substantially implemented. While the action taken was not in compliance with the technical aspects of the recommendation, the action was generally responsive and consistent with the recommendation's purpose.
- Partially implemented. The recommendation has been implemented only in part but not fully or substantially.
- Not implemented. No part of the recommendation has been completed.

³We previously used definitions similar to these when reporting on the implementation status of the National Performance Review recommendations (Management Reform: Implementation of the National Performance Review's Recommendations (GAO/OCG-95-1, Dec. 5, 1994); Management Reform: Completion Status of Agency Actions Under the National Performance Review (GAO/GGD-96-94, June 12, 1996); and the Blue Ribbon Panel recommendations (Customs Service: Status of the Implementation of Blue Ribbon Panel Recommendations (GAO/GGD-96-163, Sept. 3, 1996).

To categorize the recommendations, we relied on information from the agency responsible for implementing the recommendation and from our prior knowledge on immigration-related issues. We discussed the implementation status with officials from INS, OMB, and Census. INS provided data on the status of the recommendations directed to the Attorney General. To obtain the official agency positions regarding the NAS recommendations, we requested and received written replies from INS, OMB, and Census. For recommendations to Congress, we reviewed immigration-related legislation and any related actions that the agencies may have taken. We did not verify the accuracy of the agencies' responses because of the extensive work that would be required on our part to analyze the actions they reported to have taken. However, in our analysis of their responses, we relied on our prior immigration-related work, as applicable.

We formed a three-member panel of our experienced staff to help in our categorization of the status of the recommendation. Two panel members are knowledgeable about INS' immigration programs and policies, and the other panel member has a design and methodology background. The panel members used the above categories to independently categorize the status of the recommendations. The panelists then met and discussed their categorizations. After their discussion, they agreed on the categorization of 14 of the 18 recommendations. For the four recommendations for which they did not agree, the difference was only between adjacent categories (e.g., substantially implemented versus partially implemented). The panel members agreed not to categorize the one recommendation that was similar but made separately to the Attorney General and INS.

In categorizing the status of the recommendations, we did not focus on the timeliness of the agencies' actions. Also affecting our categorizations of the status of the recommendations was the wording of some of the NAS recommendations. For example, one recommendation required that action be considered; it did not actually require action to be taken. Therefore, any consideration by the agency or OMB would constitute compliance with the recommendation. Accordingly, in such situations, we relied on the wording of the recommendation for our categorization (i.e., we categorized the recommendation in this case as implemented because the agency considered taking action). Also, in certain instances, several agencies shared responsibility for implementing a recommendation. In these cases, we reviewed each agency's response separately, but made a single determination as to the implementation status.

In categorizing the recommendations, we relied on (1) the analysis of the panel; (2) our past immigration work and the knowledge gained from such work; (3) discussion with OMB, Census, and INS officials; (4) written responses by these agencies on the status of the recommendations; and (5) separate discussions with individuals who worked on each of the NAS reports.

We conducted our review from October 1997 to April 1998 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. We requested comments on a draft of this report from the Attorney General; the Director, OMB; and the Commissioner, Bureau of the Census. Their comments are discussed at the end of this report.

NAS' Recommendations Address Management and Data Collection Concerns

The 19 recommendations in the 1985 and 1996 NAS reports addressed a wide range of issues needed to improve the management and collection efforts for immigration data. The recommendations were directed to Congress and those federal agencies involved in collecting immigration data, especially INS because of its central role in administering the flow of international migration to the United States. The most common problems addressed in the 1985 report were management and data collection concerns. The 1985 recommendations were intended to improve the statistical gathering policies, procedures, and programs. The following are examples:

- Most recommendations in the 1985 NAS report proposed creating new methodologies to collect better immigration data and to eliminate duplication. One recommendation required the OMB Director to establish an interagency review group to examine consistency of immigration concepts and definitions used by individual agencies in the collection of immigration data.
- Some recommendations in the 1985 NAS report urged that the production of quality immigration statistics be elevated to a high priority by issuing policy concerning the importance of reliable immigration statistics. One recommendation proposed that the Attorney General issue a strong policy directive asserting the importance of reliable, accurate, and timely statistical information on immigration to the mission of INS and unequivocally committing INS to improving its existing capabilities.
- Several recommendations proposed that INS, given its central role in assembling data on aliens, expand its immigration statistical capabilities. NAS recommended that INS establish a Division of Immigration Statistics,

which would have increased authority, responsibility, and professional staff.

The 1996 NAS recommendations focused on efforts to improve the collection of immigration data at federal statistical agencies. All of the 1996 recommendations focused on collecting more and better immigration data from new sources. For example, one 1996 recommendation urged that INS work with other federal agencies and Census, under the overall direction of OMB, to include key immigration questions on future censuses, including a question on nativity and parental nativity, based on the requirements of the Immigration Act of 1990.

Most Recommendations Acted Upon

At least some action had been taken to implement most of the 1985 and 1996 NAS recommendations. Tables 1 and 2 provide a summary of the 1985 and 1996 NAS recommendations, the agencies' views on the status of the recommendations, and our categorization of the implementation status. As previously discussed, we did not categorize one recommendation to the Attorney General because it was basically the same as another recommendation directed to INS.

Table 1: Implementation Status of 1985 NAS Recommendations

Recommendation	Action taken	GAO's categorization
Recommendation 1: Congress should strongly affirm the importance of reliable, accurate, and timely statistical information on immigration to the needs of Congress and direct the Attorney General to reexamine the organizational structure of INS as it relates to statistics, with a view to placing greater priority on this important task.	INS: Although no such directives were issued by Congress after the 1985 NAS recommendation, the current INS Commissioner has provided formal internal and external statements committed to improving the accuracy and timeliness of INS information.	Partially implemented. While Congress has not taken the recommended action, the current INS Commissioner has issued a statement concerning improving the accuracy of INS data and has placed INS' Statistical Branch under the Executive Associate Commissioner for Office of Policy and Planning (OPP).

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Recommendation	Action taken	GAO's categorization
<p>Recommendation 2: Congress should require that the Attorney General prepare and submit by June 30 of each year an annual report to the President and Congress presenting data on aliens admitted or excluded, naturalization, asylees, and refugees; describing their characteristics; and containing an analysis of significant developments during the preceding fiscal year in the immigration and emigration field.</p>	<p>INS: INS said that the Immigration Act of 1990 provided for a statistical information system as follows:</p> <p>“(d)(1) The Commissioner, in consultation with interested academicians, government agencies, and other parties, shall provide for a system for collection and dissemination, to Congress and the public, of information (not in individually identifiable form) useful in evaluating the social, economic, environmental, and demographic impact of immigration laws.</p> <p>(2) Such information shall include information on the alien population in the United States; on the rates of naturalization and emigration of resident aliens; on aliens who have been admitted, paroled, or granted asylum; on nonimmigrants in the United States (by occupation, basis for admission, and duration of stay); on aliens who have not been admitted or have been removed from the United States; on the number of applications filed and granted for cancellation of removal; and on the number of aliens estimated to be present unlawfully in the United States each fiscal year.</p> <p>(3) Such system shall provide for the collection and dissemination of such information not less often than annually.</p> <p>(e)(1) The Commissioner shall submit to Congress annually a report that contains a summary of the information collected under subsection (d) and an analysis of trends in immigration and naturalization.</p> <p>(2) Each annual report shall include information on the number, and rate of denial administratively, of applications for naturalization, for each district office of the Service and by national origin group.” 8 USC 1103</p> <p>INS produces its Statistical Yearbook annually to fulfill this requirement. INS is examining the development of regularly produced reports for various data series, such as immigrants and naturalizations, in order to make the information provided in the Yearbook more timely.</p>	<p>Substantially implemented.</p> <p>Congress took action by passing the Immigration Act of 1990, which required INS to produce an annual report that contained specific immigration data. INS produces an annual report, the Statistical Yearbook, which contains much, but not all, of the statistical data recommended by NAS.</p>
<p>Recommendation 3: Congress should mandate that a study be initiated and conducted among new immigrants over a 5-year period, in order to develop information for policy guidance on the adjustment experience of families and individuals to the labor market, use of educational and health facilities, reliance on social programs, mobility experience, and income history.</p>	<p>INS: Congress has not mandated an immigrant adjustment study. However, federal agencies have taken the first steps to establish a longitudinal study titled the New Immigrant Survey. INS is a major cosponsor of the survey, which is a pilot study to identify whether the immigrant's address on the green card application can be used to locate recent immigrants. If proven successful, the pilot may lead to a longitudinal study of immigrant adaptation in the United States. The study will also collect baseline information describing the characteristics of the immigrants when they enter the United States. The pilot test is currently in its second year, and the researchers are concentrating on determining the feasibility and costs of conducting such a study on a permanent basis.</p>	<p>Partially implemented.</p> <p>While Congress has not taken action, INS is in the process of conducting a study, which would address this recommendation. Therefore, we, along with INS, considered it to be partially implemented.</p>

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Recommendation	Action taken	GAO's categorization
<p>Recommendation 4: The Attorney General should issue a strong policy directive asserting the importance of reliable, accurate, and timely statistical information on immigration to the mission of the INS and unequivocally committing the INS to improving its existing capabilities.</p>	<p>INS: Although no such policy directives were issued by any Attorney General after the NAS recommendation, the current INS Commissioner has provided formal internal and external statements committed to improving the accuracy and timeliness of INS information.</p>	<p>Not classified.</p> <p>We did not categorize this recommendation to the Attorney General because the requirements for implementing the recommendation were documented in another 1985 NAS recommendation to the INS Commissioner. (See Recommendation #5 in the 1985 NAS recommendations.)</p>
<p>Recommendation 5: INS should issue an explicit statement clearly setting forth that the collection, cumulation, and tabulation of reliable, accurate, and timely statistical information on immigration is a basic responsibility and inherent in the mission of INS.</p>	<p>INS: The current Commissioner placed the Statistics Branch in the new OPP in 1994. One of OPP's explicit missions is to "more effectively collect and maintain statistical databases, produce and disseminate timely statistical reports (many will be monthly) which are of direct relevance to program planning, monitoring and evaluation." OPP functions include "directing the development of a Service-wide statistical reporting system," and "maintaining and improving the Performance [Analysis] System (PAS) of program statistical reporting and analysis."</p> <p>Improvements in data reliability and accuracy have been explicit priorities of the Service for several years. Beginning in 1997, each of the INS priorities had a data integrity component and, beginning in 1998, "Data Integrity and Integration" will be consolidated under one priority.</p> <p>The 1998 priority states that INS will improve data integrity by focusing on current and future data collection, processing and reporting activities in order to increase efficiency, consistency, accuracy, and timeliness of data availability. Efforts will be concentrated on ensuring appropriate data reporting for fiscal year 1998 and fiscal year 1999, and pursuing initial efforts required to maximize effectiveness and efficiency in complying with new Results Act performance management requirements and for satisfying other long-term data needs. Functions to be addressed include: field-level data collection and reporting; collection and reporting processes and automated systems support; technical training and support to users; and data reconciliation, analysis, and validation of INS activities.</p>	<p>Substantially implemented.</p> <p>INS' Strategic Plan includes a mission statement, which addresses data integrity. This is consistent with the recommendation that INS issue a statement about quality immigration data.</p>

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Recommendation	Action taken	GAO's categorization
<p>Recommendation 6: INS should establish a Division of Immigration Statistics, reporting directly to an associate commissioner or an equivalent level, with overall responsibility for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> —ensuring the use of appropriate statistical standards and procedures in the collection of data throughout the agency; —ensuring the timely publication of a variety of statistical and analytic reports; —providing statistical assistance and direction to all parts of the agency to help in carrying out their mission; and —directing statistical activities throughout the agency. 	<p>INS: INS attempted to establish a Bureau of Immigration Statistics in its Fiscal Year 1996 Budget to the Congress, but the request for 10 additional positions and \$10 million for salaries and expenses was eliminated in committee without comment. The budget request stated that the Bureau of Immigration Statistics would:</p> <p>“collect, process, analyze and disseminate data useful in evaluating the social, economic, environmental, demographic and geographic impact of immigration laws. The entity will establish a statistical information system in consultation with interested government agencies and other parties to satisfy a number of criteria, including relevance to current social and economic issues, timeliness in reflecting today's rapidly changing economic conditions, accuracy and consistently high statistical quality, an impartiality in both subject matter and presentation.”</p>	<p>Not implemented.</p> <p>Although INS created a new office, OPP, in 1994, it does not carry out all of the functions specified in the recommendation. In addition, INS stated that it had not implemented this recommendation.</p>
<p>Recommendation 7: INS should direct and implement the recruitment of a full complement of competent, trained professionals with statistical capabilities and subject-area expertise.</p>	<p>INS: The Statistics Branch currently has 24 employees—14 professional and 10 clerical. The staff includes recognized subject-matter experts and persons with graduate degrees in demography, statistics, and sociology. There are currently six analysts with degrees at the doctoral level, whereas none were employed at that level in 1985. Four analysts have been hired over the past 2 years. The other professional employees consist of management analysts and computer specialists who work on the systems to collect, process, and tabulate INS data.</p>	<p>Partially implemented.</p> <p>INS has made progress in implementing this recommendation by hiring some trained professional staff to work in the Statistical Branch.</p>
<p>Recommendation 8: INS should establish an advisory committee composed of experts in the use and production of immigration-related data, to advise the associate commissioner and the proposed Division of Immigration Statistics of needs for new or different types of data; to review existing data and data collection methodology; and to provide the Service with independent evaluation of its statistical products, plans, and performance.</p>	<p>INS: The Statistics Branch does not have a standing advisory committee but has brought in advisers several times to review existing data systems and to comment on current products. For example, INS collaborated with the National Institute of Child Health and Development to fund the National Academy of Science Workshop titled “Statistics on U.S. Immigration: An Assessment of Data Needs for Future Research.” NAS provided recommendations on improving immigration statistics that were published in 1996. Groups of outside experts have also provided comments on current methodologies, such as the estimates of the illegal immigrant population. INS plans to continue to use outside experts on an ad hoc basis rather than through a standing committee to better address the variety of data specialties and methodologies used to make estimates.</p>	<p>Not implemented.</p> <p>INS considers that it has partially implemented this recommendation. Although INS used outside advisers on an ad hoc basis, INS did not establish a standing advisory committee as directed in the recommendation. In our opinion, using advisers on an ad hoc basis is not a substitute for a standing advisory committee.</p>

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Recommendation	Action taken	GAO's categorization
<p>Recommendation 9: INS should establish a formal liaison with other federal and state agencies involved in the collection or analysis of immigration- and emigration-related data.</p>	<p>INS: The Statistics Branch initiated a meeting of federal agencies involved in the collection and use of immigration statistics in December 1991. This group has met quarterly since then and has improved information sharing and cooperation among the federal and congressional members. For example, this group identified the need for "country of birth" to be added to the control card in the monthly Current Population Survey, and beginning in 1994, several of the agencies provided funds to Census to collect country of birth data. The group also evaluated existing longitudinal studies involving significant immigrant populations, and participant agencies helped fund the New Immigrant Survey pilot survey.</p>	<p>Partially implemented.</p> <p>INS considers that it has implemented this recommendation. While INS has established a liaison with federal agencies and is scheduled to meet regularly with them, state agencies did not participate. NAS recommended that not only federal but state agencies are to participate.</p>
<p>Recommendation 10: INS should initiate a review of all data-gathering activities to eliminate duplication, minimize burden and waste, review specific data needs and uses, improve question wording and format design, standardize definitions and concepts, document methodologies, introduce statistical standards and procedures, and promote efficiencies in the use of staff and resources.</p>	<p>INS: Almost all of INS' data originate from administrative records rather than surveys. There has not been a comprehensive review of these forms to eliminate duplication and evaluate data needs. In fiscal year 1998, however, the issues of duplication, data needs and gaps, and standardization of concepts will be addressed in the 1998 priority titled "Data Integrity and Integration." The specific plans for the priority are currently under development. INS has developed a plan to implement a corporate information system structure that will ensure that all systems use the same definitions and will allow for consistent information across all INS systems.</p>	<p>Not implemented.</p> <p>INS considers that it has partially implemented this recommendation. However, it has not conducted a comprehensive review of immigration data to eliminate duplication. Furthermore, as INS stated, it is currently developing plans to address specific issues.</p>

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Recommendation	Action taken	GAO's categorization
<p>Recommendation 11: OMB should ensure that it exercises its responsibilities to monitor and review statistical activities and budgets concerning statistics on immigration and emigration, particularly those of the INS, to minimize duplication and ensure that appropriate procedures are used; standards are met; and priorities are observed in the collection, production, and publication of such data.</p>	<p>OMB: OMB is responsible for reviewing agency management activities and budget requests in support of the Executive Office of the President and the President's annual budget submission to Congress. OMB provided the same level of scrutiny to INS' statistical program as other INS programs. In fiscal year 1998, in response to an INS request, OMB recommended an enhancement of 15 positions and \$7 million to support the agency's statistical analysis program. Also, OMB recommended that the INS statistical program provide the baseline and annual measurements/ estimates to support the agency's performance measurement system. INS currently estimates the number of illegal aliens residing in the United States and the increment of new illegal aliens arriving annually. Both the total number of illegal aliens and the rate of illegal entry can be useful in measuring the success of INS performance in deterring illegal entry at the borders and in effectively removing those who attempt to remain illegally. INS is in the process of improving its statistical models to begin to measure performance at both local levels and in the aggregate for the illegal immigrant population as a whole.</p> <p>INS' statistical program is required to support decisionmaking by providing data that measures the scope of illegal immigration and that can be used by the administration and Congress to recommend policy options. OMB fully supports this central role for the INS statistical policy operation.</p> <p>According to OMB, its responsibility under the Paperwork Reduction Act is to ensure that all data collected maximize practical utility and minimize burden, thus providing broad level of quality assurance. OMB added that it is not responsible for conducting quality evaluations.</p>	<p>Substantially implemented.</p> <p>OMB reviews the INS statistical activities as part of its annual budget review and is to ensure that all data collected meet the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act.</p>

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Recommendation	Action taken	GAO's categorization
<p>Recommendation 12: OMB should require and establish an interagency review group responsible for direction and coordination in the field of immigration and emigration data; the group would examine consistency and comparability in concepts and definitions used by individual organizations in the collection of such information and oversee the introduction and use of standardized approaches.</p>	<p>OMB: An Interagency Task Force has been advising INS on data-related issues since December 1991. INS reports that the other agencies have been very active. The accomplishments of the Task Force have been substantial.</p>	<p>Partially implemented.</p> <p>While OMB relied on INS to advise it on immigration data issues, OMB did not establish an interagency review group to carry out the duties specified in the NAS recommendation.</p>
<p>Recommendation 13: OMB should actively encourage and support the timely publication and dissemination of data on immigration and emigration; the ready availability of fully documented public-use data tapes, including samples of individual records without identifiers where feasible; and data summaries.</p>	<p>OMB: Since 1985, there have been significant improvements in the data provided by INS. In 1986, the Yearbook was improved by including text describing data quality and analysis of trends, preparing the publication via desktop publishing, and making it more timely. Fully documented public-use tapes have been available since about 1990; more recently, data are being made available on the Internet.</p>	<p>Substantially implemented.</p> <p>INS is publishing an annual statistical publication. Also, public-use tapes are available.</p>

Source: GAO classification of the status of NAS recommendations.

Table 2: Implementation Status of the 1996 NAS Recommendations

Recommendation	Action taken	GAO's categorization
<p>Recommendation 1: NAS urged that INS work with other federal agencies and Census, under the overall direction of OMB, to include key immigration questions on future censuses, including a question on nativity and parental nativity, based on the requirements of the Immigration Act of 1990.</p>	<p>OMB: The Interagency Task Force on Immigration consists of representatives of federal agencies with an interest in immigration (including Census). It has been meeting regularly since December 9, 1991, under the sponsorship of INS. Two OMB representatives attended the initial meeting, and received the minutes of each meeting for several years thereafter. The Interagency Task Force was not directed by OMB; rather, it was chaired and guided by INS. OMB monitored the progress of the Interagency Task Force and its accomplishments. The Task Force has developed ideas and programs to improve immigration statistics in a variety of ways, such as including data on temporary migrants, using data from longitudinal surveys, adding immigration data in the Current Population Survey, and increasing exploitation of administrative data.</p> <p>The proposed Census 2000 questionnaire does include a question on nativity, but does not include a question on parental nativity. The contents of the 2000 Census have been restricted to items that are required by law. While nativity is required according to the Immigration Act of 1990, that law does not require parental nativity. The Task Force did ensure that information on nativity and parental nativity is collected in the Current Population Survey.</p> <p>INS: Current plans call for the respondent's nativity, but not their parental nativity, to be collected in the Census 2000. INS stated that while parental nativity is useful for identifying the children of immigrants, the Immigration Act of 1990 does not specifically require that this information be collected.</p> <p>Census: Questions on citizenship have appeared on the decennial census form on a continuous basis since 1890. Place of birth, year of entry (for those born outside the United States), and citizenship will be subjects on the Census 2000 questionnaire. However, other questions that relate to parental nativity will not be included on the proposed Census 2000 questionnaire. Beginning in December 1992, OMB, in conjunction with Census, asked federal agencies to provide information describing their data needs. In the summer of 1994, Census completed its review of the responses from the agencies. Each data need was classified using a rather narrow legalistic topology to determine if a subject should be classified as mandatory, required, or programmatic. Only subjects for which federal laws explicitly mandated or required decennial census data were recommended to Congress by Census for inclusion in Census 2000. Some subjects, such as parental nativity, were not recommended since the review found that these subjects were needed only for program planning, implementation, or evaluation and that there were no explicit requirements for the use of the census data in federal law.</p>	<p>Substantially implemented.</p> <p>While not under OMB guidance, the Interagency Task Force, consisting of representatives from various federal agencies, (including INS and Census, with some OMB participation) worked to have nativity and parental nativity questions put on the Current Population Survey. While including a question on nativity, a question on parental nativity will not be included on the Census 2000 questionnaire. According to OMB, INS, and Census, the Immigration Act of 1990 does not specifically require that parental nativity information be collected. The contents of the Census 2000 have been restricted to items that are required by law.</p>

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Recommendation	Action taken	GAO's categorization
<p>Recommendation 2: NAS recommended that Census consider ways to add local-area contextual data in the Public Use Microdata Sample files. Contextual data on such variables as local employment, income, education, and racial and ethnic composition would measurably improve this important data set for academic and policy research on immigrants.</p>	<p>Census: Census considered creating a Public Use Microdata Sample for the 1990 census containing local-area contextual data. An informal working group investigated the issue and concluded that (1) the disclosure avoidance procedures used in the 1990 census to ensure confidentiality of respondents would have been compromised by adding local-area data, which could lead to identifying specific individuals; and (2) although the Russell Sage Foundation was willing to fund the inclusion of contextual data, formal research was needed to resolve the technical issues, which would have required additional staff, time, and resources that Census did not have at the time. Census decided that contextual data such as local employment rates, income, and educational attainment will not be available in the Public Use Microdata Sample files of Census 2000 data. According to Census, a key reason for not including these types of contextual variables in the Census 2000 Public Use Microdata Sample is that addition of these variables could compromise the confidentiality of census data.</p>	<p>Fully implemented.</p> <p>Census has considered ways to add local-area contextual data in the Public Use Microdata Sample for the 1990 census.</p>
<p>Recommendation 3: NAS applauded the introduction of key questions on nativity as a regular part of the Current Population Survey. Questions on nativity, parental nativity, citizenship, and year of entry into the United States provide information essential to the understanding of immigration in this country. NAS urged Census to retain these key immigration-related topics on the Current Population Survey.</p>	<p>Census: Beginning in 1994, information on nativity, parental nativity, year of entry, and citizenship was collected for all members of the Current Population Survey households in the initial interview. Census plans to continue collecting this information.</p>	<p>Fully implemented.</p> <p>Census has indicated that it plans to retain key immigration-related questions on the Current Population Survey.</p>

(continued)

Recommendation	Action taken	GAO's categorization
<p>Recommendation 4: NAS recommended that Census, in consultation with federal agencies and immigration researchers, review the possibility of adding special immigration questions to the Current Population Survey. Additional, more detailed immigration-related questions would enhance the value of the Current Population Survey data for immigration policy research. Such questions might be included on the Current Population Survey on a special basis, perhaps on one of the special monthly supplements, or on a periodic basis, depending on the purpose and usefulness of the data.</p>	<p>Census: Census is currently exploring the feasibility of conducting a special supplement to the Current Population Survey about emigration (that is, about persons who leave the United States). Emigration is one of the key components required for estimates and projections of the U.S. population. Census officials believe that the earliest feasible date for incorporating a supplement on emigration on the Current Population Survey is early 2000. Census plans to continue its efforts to determine if funding and staff can be made available for the conduct of this supplement.</p>	<p>Partially implemented.</p> <p>Census is currently reviewing the possibility of adding special immigration questions to the Current Population Survey, but has not completed the effort.</p>
<p>Recommendation 5: NAS recommended that federal statistical agencies meet with their counterpart institutions in Mexico to discuss the potential for establishing joint surveys on immigration. Such a meeting should include key immigration researchers from both countries.</p>	<p>Census: Census has been in contact with its counterpart institution in Mexico (the National Institute for Statistics, Geography, and Data Processing) regarding issues that relate to population flows between the United States and Mexico. In November 1997, demographers and other technicians from the National Institute for Statistics, Geography, and Data Processing met with Census' staff in Suitland, Maryland, to discuss potential exchange of data and other information pertaining to population flows between the United States and Mexico. Census will continue working with this agency. However, a joint survey on immigration will not occur in the foreseeable future unless additional funding can be found for this effort.</p> <p>INS: U.S. and Mexican scholars collaborated on a joint report on Mexican immigration to the United States. The Commission on Immigration Reform published the Binational Study of Migration between Mexico and the United States in September 1997. INS and Consejo Nacional de Población (National Population Council), which is the Mexican Statistical Agency, have also begun discussions to develop a memorandum of understanding to consult with each other on various projects and to share information.</p>	<p>Fully implemented.</p> <p>Census officials met with their Mexican counterparts to discuss exchanging immigration data.</p>

(continued)

Recommendation	Action taken	GAO's categorization
<p>Recommendation 6: NAS recommended that INS establish the design and usefulness of a survey of green card applicants. A survey of new immigrants appears to be feasible, using the relatively accurate addresses that are provided by immigrants in order to receive their permanent resident visa.</p>	<p>INS: INS is a major cosponsor with the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development of the New Immigrant Survey, which is a pilot study to identify whether the immigrant's address on the green card application can be used to locate recent immigrants. If proven successful, this pilot may lead to a longitudinal study of immigrant adaptation in the United States. The study will also collect baseline information describing the characteristics of the immigrants when they enter the United States.</p>	<p>Partially Implemented.</p> <p>INS is cosponsoring a pilot study to determine the usefulness of using the immigrant's address on the green card application to locate recent immigrants.</p>

Source: GAO classification of the status of NAS recommendations.

Agency Comments

To obtain agency comments on a draft of this report we met separately with officials from OMB, including the Assistant Branch Chief, Human Resources and Housing Branch, Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs; Justice, including the Director, Statistics Branch, OPP, INS; and Census, including the Associate Director for Demographic Programs. These officials said that they agreed with our report. They provided additional information, which we incorporated as appropriate. On the basis of discussions with OMB officials and the additional information they provided, we changed our original categorization of three recommendations.

We are providing copies of this report to the Chairmen and Ranking Minority Members of other committees with jurisdiction over immigration issues; the Attorney General; the Commissioner, INS; the Director, OMB; the Secretary of Commerce; and the Commissioner, Bureau of the Census. We will also make copies available to others on request.

Major contributors to this report are James M. Blume, Assistant Director, and Mary B. Hall, Evaluator-in-Charge. Please call me on (202) 512-7997, if you or your staff have any questions.

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