



Canada Border
Services Agency

Agence des services
frontaliers du Canada



Evaluation of the Immigration National Security Screening Program

Internal Audit and Program
Evaluation Directorate

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Acronyms and abbreviations

AMER	Americas GeoDesk
ASOC	Asia and Oceania GeoDesk
BOC	Border Operations Centre
BRTAP	Backlog Reduction and Transformation Action Plan
CBSA	Canada Border Services Agency
CIT	Core Induction Training
COB	Country of Birth
CSIS	Canadian Security Intelligence Service
DCO	Designated Country of Origin
EAI	Europe, Africa and Iran GeoDesk
FY	Fiscal year
FESS	Front-End Security Process
GBA+	Gender-Based Analysis
IEO	Inland Enforcement Officer
IBQ	Integrated Border Query
I&E	Intelligence and Enforcement
ICAP	Intelligence Collection, Analysis and Production Division
IIM	Increased irregular migration
INSS	Immigration National Security Screening Program
IRCC	Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
IRPA	Immigration and Refugee Protection Act
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NSSD	National Security Screening Division
OPI	Office of Primary Interest
OSI	Office of Secondary Interest
OSR	Operation Syrian Refugee
OT	Overtime
PED	Program Evaluation Division
PPE	Public Policy Exemption
PR	Permanent Resident
RC	Refugee Claimant
RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
SSA	Security Screening Automation
STS	Secure Tracking System
TR	Temporary Resident
TSSD	Trilateral Security Screening Diagnostic

Executive summary

Evaluation purpose and scope

The evaluation examined the performance (effectiveness and efficiency) of the Immigration National Security Screening (INSS) Program (the Program), between fiscal years (FY) 2014–2015 and 2018–2019, in accordance with the 2016 Treasury Board *Policy on Results*. The evaluation was undertaken between September 2019 and February 2021.

Program description

The Program is delivered by the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA)'s National Security Screening Division (NSSD) within the Intelligence and Enforcement (I&E) Branch. The NSSD collaborates with Immigration Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) to deliver on the Government of Canada's security screening objectives. Ultimately, the NSSD helps prevent inadmissible foreign nationals or permanent residents from entering or remaining in Canada, while facilitating the entry of admissible individuals. The IRCC receives and performs an initial assessment of applications for temporary residence (TR) or permanent residence (PR) and refers applicants who potentially pose security concerns to the CBSA and/or CSIS for in-depth security screening. In addition, all refugee applicants who submit their claims at a CBSA or IRCC inland office in Canada, and whose claims are deemed eligible, are referred to the CBSA and/or CSIS for security screening. In its role, the NSSD assesses potential inadmissibility concerns under the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (IRPA) section 34 (espionage, subversion, terrorism, danger to the security of Canada, membership in an organization that engages in the aforementioned acts, or violence), and/or section 35 (crimes against humanity, war crimes, genocide, sanctions) and/or section 37 (organized criminality). After completing a screening, the NSSD sends an admissibility recommendation to the IRCC, in the case of TR and PR applicants, or notifies the Immigration and Refugees Board (IRB) on the recommendation issuance in the case of refugee claimants. IRCC or the IRB then decides whether to grant the applicant entry to, or permission to remain in, Canada.

Evaluation methodology

Data collection and analysis for this evaluation were conducted between January and September 2020; both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used. The evaluation team interviewed stakeholders from the CBSA, IRCC and CSIS, reviewed key documentation, analyzed operational and financial data, and administered surveys to NSSD analysts and IRCC officers.

Evaluation findings

The NSSD is required to provide legally defensible and timely recommendations on the results of their security screening assessments to decision-makers. Between 2014 and 2019, the NSSD delivered legally defensible recommendations. However, most of the time, these recommendations were not issued within the established timelines (i.e. did not meet service standards) as a result of external events such

as Operation Syrian Refugee (OSR) and increased irregular migration (IIM), as well as other workload pressures.

The NSSD's recommendations were well-grounded in legislation. This was evidenced by a low proportion of cases in which applicants challenged the legality of IRCC's or IRB's decisions to reject applications or asylum claims based on security grounds. However, the usability of the information contained in the NSSD's inadmissibility briefs could be improved. NSSD analysts had regular access to legal advice during the evaluation period, although the legal defensibility of their assessments could be strengthened.

In terms of timeliness of recommendations, the NSSD did not meet its related performance target for most of the evaluation period for a number of reasons. Two major events caused significant increases in the NSSD's workload: OSR in 2015–2016 and IIM at the Canada-US border beginning in mid-2017. A major backlog of referrals ensued, which adversely affected the NSSD's ability to issue timely recommendations. In May 2018, after the adoption of a comprehensive suite of backlog reduction measures, the NSSD started meeting service standards again. In addition to OSR and IIM, the steady growth in the number of TR and PR applications submitted to IRCC (amounting to a 70% increase over the 5-year period between FY 2014–2015 and 2018–2019) led to a corresponding increase in the number of referrals submitted to the NSSD and further added to the increasing workload. By the end of the evaluation period, the NSSD had significantly reduced its backlog. In this regard, the Division's Surge Capacity Plan could be improved to better support the Agency in the event of sudden surges of referrals in the future.

The NSSD's performance measurement was relatively limited during the evaluation period; measurements centred primarily on monitoring the Division's inventory and backlog trends. Certain key performance variables and the Program's outcomes are yet to be fully defined and/or meaningfully measured. Internal policies and procedures have been enhanced in recent years, but opportunities exist to help ensure analysts are kept fully up-to-date on events of concern around the world. The NSSD provided learning and training opportunities to analysts, particularly upon joining the Division. Analysts would benefit from better access to Privy Council Office (PCO) intelligence-related courses and from further training and/or support in determining inadmissibility related to organized crime.

In response to its rapidly rising workload, the NSSD, in collaboration with CSIS and IRCC, started revising the security screening indicators used by IRCC officers to guide what applications should be referred for in-depth screening. The goal of these revisions was to improve the referrals made by IRCC, by reducing the number of unnecessary referrals and enhancing their quality overall. By August 2020, 16 new indicator packages were in place; however, their impact on referral quantity and quality had yet to be determined as of the end of the evaluation period. A number of IRCC missions and CBSA regions submitted a significant proportion of incomplete referrals during the evaluation period, which required follow up by the NSSD and also added to its workload.

Overall, the NSSD, IRCC and CSIS had a good working relationship over the evaluation period; partners felt that roles and responsibilities were clearly defined. The Program would benefit from leveraging the new trilateral Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to both enshrine the specific tasks fulfilled by each partner and to articulate the interdependencies between key partner activities. Ways to obtain more information and intelligence to support NSSD analysts' assessments of inadmissibility due to organized criminality should continue to be pursued, such as re-engaging with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) in the federal INSS Program. Additionally, there are opportunities to improve communication and coordination between the NSSD and CBSA regional investigations units in terms of screening refugee claimants, an activity both entities carry out.

In terms of information technology and management, the case management systems used by the NSSD, IRCC and CSIS were not designed to be inter-operable. The lack of interoperability has been a long-standing issue in the Program; nonetheless, NSSD analysts felt they had the information they needed to perform screenings. Throughout the evaluation period, NSSD's screening activities were largely dependent on manual tasks performed by analysts. Manual work not only limited the processing ability of the Division, but is also more prone to human error. Automation is the future vision of the Program, but is several years away from being fully implemented and has associated risks.

In terms of efficiency, the Division managed to double the number of recommendations issued over the evaluation period. However, these gains were to some extent offset by the decline in the average number of recommendations issued per hour, and by the rise in the average cost per recommendation. According to the NSSD, these trends may be explained by a shift to higher quality and more robust recommendations in recent years, which are typically more time consuming to research and document.

[redacted] Such analysis could assist in further refining the security screening indicators, which, in turn, could result in greater Program effectiveness, by focusing screening on applicants who are most likely to pose a security concern.

Recommendations

The findings of the evaluation led to the following recommendations:

1. The VP of I&E should strengthen the measurement of the Program's performance. This includes:
 - a) Revising the logic model to ensure that the immediate and intermediate outcomes fully capture the Program's intended objectives and include logical flow from one outcome to the other.
 - b) Revising the key performance indicators (KPIs) to align with the objectives in the revised Logic Model and assist the NSSD's leadership with performance management accountability and decision-making. The new KPIs should include establishing internal processing times that are independent from service standards communicated to the IRCC.

2. The VP of I&E should enhance the NSSD's Surge Capacity Plan, so as to develop additional capacity within CBSA to support a sudden surge in referrals. This includes the consideration of:

- a) Identifying staff within CBSA, including Regional staff, who are able to conduct screenings and who can quickly be deployed on a part-time or full-time basis, and for an extended period if necessary.
- b) Providing regular training and refresher training to the above identified staff.
- c) Applying quality assurance to security screenings conducted by the above identified staff.

3. The VP of I&E should advocate for clearer articulation of the objectives of the new thematic indicators and their expected impact on the security screening process, and for the establishment of mechanisms to track the achievement of these objectives. This includes:

- a) Advocating for the IRCC to develop and implement a standardized mechanism to track the specific security indicator(s) that trigger referrals to the NSSD; this should allow for regular monitoring of their usage by IRCC missions and of the impact on the number of referrals made.
- b) Advocating for the development and implementation of a strategy to measure the ongoing effectiveness of the new thematic indicators in terms of their impact on the quality of referrals sent to the NSSD.

4. The VP of I&E should engage in systematic outreach and communication activities with CBSA regional hearings and investigations units to increase mutual understanding of the HQ and regional roles and responsibilities in the Front-End Security Screening (FESS) process, with a view to minimizing duplication and enhancing collaboration. This could include:

- a) Establishing a working group at the managerial level to regularly exchange information on new trends and events of concern within countries, regions and globally, as well as best practices, lessons learned and challenges in screening claimants and in preparing well-documented cases for IRB hearings.
- b) Establishing a mechanism giving NSSD analysts and regional officers access to relevant intelligence (such as via subscription databases), and systematically share intelligence obtained (such as emerging trends seen with claimants from a specific country, or information shared by local police services) to enhance each other's work.
- c) Enhancing communication to raise awareness of the NSSD's processes and procedures, including the procedures to follow when regions need to ask the NSSD for more time before a referral is closed and IRB is notified about the completed screening.

5. The VP of I&E should advocate to address a number of key interdepartmental issues through the fora referenced in the trilateral MoU, including:

- a) The roles and responsibilities in performance measurement across the continuum.
- b) The need for interdepartmental training.
- c) Adopting a whole-of-government approach to setting service standards, taking into account of inter-dependencies in service delivery.
- d) The development and implementation, by IRCC, of a monitoring mechanism to determine whether all applicants who should be referred for screening are being referred.

6. The VP of I&E should ensure that NSSD analysts have reliable and up-to-date information on country- and region-specific concerns and that all GeoDesks and teams apply policies, procedures and processes consistently. This includes:

- a) Conducting an internal exercise to map current security screening practices in each GeoDesk and teams within GeoDesks, and assessing whether improvements have been made in implementing a harmonized approach to security screening across the NSSD.
- b) Introducing a standardized approach to collecting, storing and updating information on countries' social, political, economic changes, and to communicating such changes to analysts across GeoDesks in a timely manner.

7. The VP of I&E, in collaboration with the VP of ISTB, should develop a plan to:

- a) Assess program priorities and, accordingly, make adjustment to the Secure Tracking System (STS) and the future replacement system (Security Referral Request Service), to start collecting additional data to support performance measurement.
- b) Ensure that the Security Screening Automation (SSA) is fully operational with all its advanced functionalities, including the text-query reading capability before retiring STS; this is in view of mitigating major risks associated with the transition to the new system.

I. Introduction

1. Evaluation approach and program background

1.1. Evaluation purpose and scope

This report presents the results of the evaluation of the Immigration National Security Screening (INSS) Program (the Program or the Security Screening Program) and fulfills the requirements of the 2016 Treasury Board Policy on Results. The evaluation focused on the five-year period of fiscal years 2014–2015 to 2018–2019 and examined the achievement of expected outcomes and the efficiency of the Program. Table 1 **Error! Reference source not found.** indicates areas that were in and out of scope of this evaluation.

Table 1. Scope of the INSS Program evaluation

In scope	Out of scope
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Activities, outputs and results achieved during FYs 2014–2015 to 2018–2019, including how the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) is meeting service standards;▪ Achievement of outcomes related to the CBSA immigration national security screening program;▪ Assessment of process efficiency and utilization of resources;▪ Assessment of interconnections between CBSA and its partners (Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada – IRCC – and Canadian Security Intelligence Service – CSIS) as well as their impact on CBSA’s ability to deliver expected program results; and▪ GBA+ analysis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Assessment of the INSS Program’s relevance; and▪ Independent assessment of the performance and efficiency of partners and decision-makers.

The evaluation team consulted the INSS Program Logic Model (Appendix B: INSS logic model) and developed evaluation questions that focused on the following:

- Program’s ability to adhere to service standards and to provide legally defensible recommendations to IRCC;
- Program’s ability to prevent inadmissible foreign nationals from entering or remaining in Canada;
- The impact the Program has on diverse groups of applicants throughout the security screening process;
- Adequacy of CBSA policies, processes and resources to support the implementation of the INSS Program;
- Effectiveness of the working relationship among program partners to achieve expected outcomes; and
- Extent to which program processes are efficient and resources are used optimally.

1.2. Evaluation methodology

The evaluation methodology comprised qualitative and quantitative research methods and data collection that spanned multiple sources. These included legislation and program-related documents; case management data; CBSA financial data; semi-structured interviews with 46 key program representatives from CBSA (HQ and Regions), IRCC, CSIS, and the Department of Justice Canada (JUS); and survey responses from 66 CBSA security screening analysts and 130 IRCC officers based in overseas missions. Details on the evaluation methods used are provided in **Error! Reference source not found.**

IRCC and CSIS supported this evaluation by identifying key stakeholders in their respective organizations for interviews. IRCC, in addition, supported the implementation of the survey conducted among IRCC officers, and provided case management data on the number of immigration applications over the five-year evaluation period and other data related to IRCC's assessment and decisions issued on Temporary Resident (TR), Permanent Resident (PR), and Refugee Claimant (RC) applications.

Two main limitations were identified during the evaluation. First, the timelines for data collection were extended due to delays in obtaining the required case management data. Also, the data collection process was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, as the survey with IRCC officers had to be postponed for several months and the target population was reduced.

1.3. Background: immigration security screening

1.3.1. Immigration security screening – the Government of Canada approach

Foreign nationals seeking entry to Canada are screened against specific sections of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (IRPA) to identify potential security concerns. Security screening of foreign nationals is a joint collaboration between IRCC, CBSA and CSIS. TR and PR applications are processed by IRCC through a network of missions abroad, as well as processing centres located within Canada. IRCC assesses applicants' personal information and history against a set of criteria – the security screening indicators – to determine whether applicants may pose a potential security risk. If IRCC officers¹ have inadmissibility concerns over a PR or TR application, they refer it for an in-depth security screening to the CBSA and, depending on the nature of the concern, also to CSIS. The CBSA and CSIS screen all adult RC applicants (see Section 1.3.3).

The CBSA screens applicants for potential inadmissibility concerns under section 34 (espionage, subversion, terrorism, danger to the security of Canada, membership in an organization that engages in

¹ Unless otherwise stated, the term "IRCC officers" is used to refer to IRCC officers that process TR, PR, and RC visa applications, both in IRCC missions overseas and in IRCC offices located in Canada. The evaluation survey targeted only IRCC officers who were based in missions overseas.

the aforementioned acts, or violence), and/or section 35 (crimes against humanity, war crimes, genocide, sanctions) and/or section 37 (organized criminality). CSIS only screens applicants for concerns under the *Canadian Security Intelligence Service Act*, related to determining inadmissibility under section 34 of IRPA. Here, CSIS provides input to the CBSA, who then finalizes the screening with additional searches and information. Upon completing the screening of an application, the CBSA provides a recommendation and any CSIS security advice to IRCC in case of TR and PR applicants, and sends a notification on the recommendation issuance to the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) in case of in-Canada refugee claimants². IRCC or IRB then makes a decision on the outcome of the application. The process for assessing refugee claimants is detailed in Section 1.3.3.

1.3.2. Immigration national security screening³ – CBSA responsibilities

Security Screening is listed in the 2018–2019 CBSA Departmental Results Framework under the Border Management core responsibility. Applications requiring security screening are assessed by the CBSA's National Security Screening Division (NSSD) within the Intelligence and Enforcement Branch. As of July 2015, the NSSD was organized around Geographic Desks (GeoDesks)⁴, with analysts processing security screenings from countries within a designated region. If needed, analysts are assigned to process referrals from other GeoDesks.

NSSD is responsible for conducting security screening for all three business lines — temporary residents, permanent residents and refugee claimants. Referred cases are reviewed to determine if all the required information has been provided; afterwards, a security screening is conducted by an NSSD analyst. A screening results in one of the following outcomes:

- **Favourable** - If no security concerns are found, NSSD issues a favourable recommendation.
- **Non-favourable** - If initial checks or research reveals security concerns, the case is referred to a senior analyst who reviews the information and conducts additional research. If the derogatory information meets IRPA's threshold of *reasonable grounds to believe*, NSSD prepares a brief to accompany the non-favourable recommendation that will be issued.
- **Inconclusive** - In some cases, NSSD may close a referral with an inconclusive result, whereby the admissibility of an applicant could not be determined due to insufficient information or due to some other circumstances.
- **No recommendation required** - Occurring mostly in the RC business line, this outcome is entered if a referral was made in error, the applicant was under the age of twelve with no indication of inadmissibility, or otherwise if an assessment was no longer required.

² CBSA also shares recommendations with CBSA Regional offices for in-Canada PR applicants for the purpose of enforcement action, as required.

³ Throughout this report, the INSS, "the Security Screening Program" and "the Program" all refer to the components of security screening delivered by the CBSA. The entirety of security screening activities conducted by IRCC, CBSA and CSIS is referred to as the "security screening process" or the "security screening continuum".

⁴ Three Geographic Desks were created in July 2015, and a fourth Geographic Desk was created in October 2018.

In addition, NSSD briefs known as “Favourable with Observations” and “Inconclusive with Observations” are also shared with decision-makers, where the reasonable grounds to believe threshold for inadmissibility was not met, but where it was deemed that information encountered during security screening could impact the final decision.

NSSD shares its admissibility recommendations with decision-makers (either IRCC or IRB), incorporating security advice from CSIS for all applicants screened for potential inadmissibility under section 34 of IRPA. For TR and PR applicants, NSSD sends the recommendations to the relevant IRCC office, where the NSSD’s assessment is considered in the decision to allow or deny the applicant’s stay or entry into Canada. In case of refugee claimants, the recommendation is transferred to CBSA Regional Offices for further processing (see Section 1.3.3), and the NSSD notifies the IRB on the recommendation issuance.

1.3.3. Front-end security screening of refugee claimants

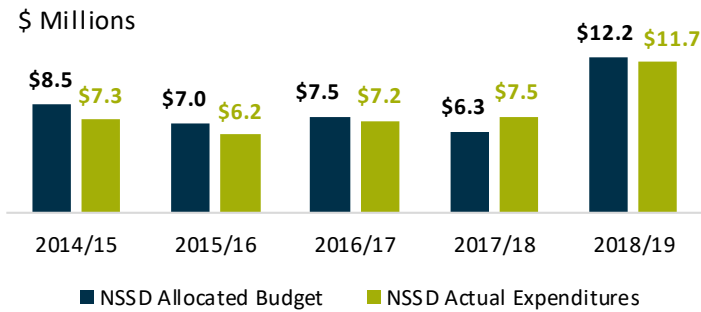
Since Refugee Reform in 2012, all adult individuals who submit a refugee claim in Canada aged 18 years and older are subject to the Front-End Security Screening (FESS) process. Upon completion of the claim intake process, the intake officer⁵ will refer the claim to the NSSD and CSIS, and to one of three refugee claim triage centres, for processing. Once the security screening has been completed, the NSSD sends a notification to the IRB. The Division also shares the screening result with the CBSA hearings unit and inland office in the region where the claim is being processed. In addition, the triage centres in each region assess all in-Canada refugee claimants independently from the NSSD to determine whether there are security concerns. If so, the case will be referred to the regional investigations unit and, if deemed meritorious, the hearings unit will be engaged to determine if an intervention is warranted at the IRB hearing.

1.3.4. NSSD budget

The NSSD’s budget and expenditures were relatively stable for the first four years of the evaluation period, before increasing in the final year. From 2014–2015 to 2017–2018, the budget fluctuated within the \$6 to \$8.5 million range. The NSSD’s budget then almost doubled from 2017–2018 to 2018–2019 to respond to the increasing workload experienced in the preceding years. In terms of expenditures, the NSSD spent within its allocated budget in every year except for 2017–2018 (see Figure 1).

⁵ The intake officer could be from IRCC or CBSA, depending on where the refugee claim was submitted.

Figure 1: NSSD's annual budget (salary and non-salary) was in the range of \$6 to \$8.5 million annually for most of the evaluation period



Source: Compiled by the evaluation team using CBSA's Corporate Administrative System (CAS) data.

II. NSSD's achievement of INSS objectives

NSSD seeks to provide timely and legally defensible recommendations to decision-makers. Over the five-year evaluation period, NSSD delivered legally defensible recommendations that contributed to preventing inadmissible individuals from entering or remaining in Canada. However, for most of the period, these recommendations were not provided within the service standards. The NSSD's workload (i.e. the number of referrals it receives for screening every month) is determined by factors beyond its control, with two significant and unforeseen events — Operation Syrian Refugee (OSR) and Increased Irregular Migration (IIM) — having had a major impact on the NSSD's ability to issue timely recommendations.

2. Legal defensibility of recommendations

A key challenge with assessing legal defensibility is that it has not been specifically defined by the CBSA and/or partners, and there is no concrete agreement on what constitutes a legally defensible recommendation. Legal defensibility is also not regularly tracked or discussed with partners.

The evaluation focused on two specific areas relating to the legal defensibility of admissibility recommendations — the number of legal challenges to immigration decisions submitted by applicants and NSSD's application of the law in its security screening assessments.

2.1. Applicants' legal challenges of immigration decisions

Finding 1: Only a small proportion of immigration decisions denied on security grounds were challenged by applicants, and only a few were successful from the applicant's standpoint.

Under IRPA, a foreign national can ask the Federal Court of Canada to review immigration decisions issued by IRCC or IRB. Although the CBSA's role is to issue security screening recommendations and not to decide on the application, if the decision is being challenged because of security inadmissibility, the Agency's Litigation Management Unit (LMU) may become involved alongside the Department of Justice Canada. However, the majority of cases are handled by IRCC's legal team.

A total of **292 challenges by applicants** to decisions based on security inadmissibility were registered between 2014–2015 and 2018–2019, which represents 4% of all the 7,673 non-favourable recommendations issued. The majority of these challenges (76%) were from overseas applicants, and handled by the IRCC litigation team. More than 80% of all the challenges were from PR applicants, the majority of whom were denied their applications based on section 34 concerns.

Of the 292 challenges, **51%** (148) were allowed to **proceed to a Judicial Review**. Of those cases:

30% (45) were decided in favour of the government

24% (36) were decided in favour of the applicant

35% (51) resulted in IRCC consenting to re-determine its original decision (the legal challenge was discontinued)

11% (16) were withdrawn or still ongoing at the time of the evaluation

Only 36 of the 292 challenges were decided in favour of the applicant, which represents less than 0.5% of all non-favourable recommendations issued by NSSD. Considering that NSSD processed close to half-a-million of referrals over the evaluation period, 36 successful legal challenges could be considered a low number. However, there is currently no established benchmark or performance indicator to determine what rate of legal challenges and/or applicant's success rate is desirable.⁶

It is also important to recognize that legal challenges most commonly resulted in the decision-maker (almost exclusively IRCC) consenting to re-determine the original decision without waiting for the Court's decision either on the Leave stage or Judicial Review. When both phases of the legal challenge are considered, half (50%) of challenges were "settled" out-of-court (79 cases in the Leave phase and 33 during Judicial Review). The fact that the decision-maker agrees to re-determine a decision on an application does not mean that the decision will change; instead, the government entity in the decision-maker role acknowledges that there may have been some administrative or procedural faults and asks a different staff (IRCC officer or IRB member) to review the case and render a fresh decision.

⁶ Legal challenges should not necessarily be interpreted as a consequence of the quality of NSSD's assessments and recommendations, as the issues being challenged by applicants could be related to how the IRCC officer presented the information of concern. Presently, the Program does not collect data on the reasons for legal challenges.

2.2. Application of the law in security screening

Finding 2: NSSD's admissibility recommendations were well grounded in legislation, although the usability of the information contained in inadmissibility briefs could be improved.

Views on legal defensibility of recommendations

NSSD managers generally considered the Division's recommendations to be based on solid legal evidence and to be legally defensible. They cited some recent high-profile cases whereby the NSSD's recommendation was challenged by partners in IRCC and/or another department supporting the applicant's visit to Canada, but the initial screening recommendation was upheld. In addition, the generally low number of cases where IRCC disagrees with NSSD's screening recommendation (i.e. contrary outcomes⁷) was also seen as an indication of their legal defensibility.

However, the same stakeholders also admitted that it is difficult to assess what constitutes legally defensible recommendations and to develop associated performance measures. Both NSSD and LMU/JUS stakeholders agreed that Court decisions are unlikely to be a reliable measure, as even a well-founded case can be decided either way on a given day by a given judge. In addition, on rare occasions, NSSD may wish to proceed with Court review to obtain more clarity on a specific case, regardless of what the outcome of the legal challenge is going to be. Consequently, **legal defensibility is better thought of as NSSD doing its due diligence and legal counsels finding the case solid and deciding to defend it in the Court, rather than the actual Court's decision.**

External stakeholders had a less favourable view of the legal defensibility of NSSD's recommendations. This stems primarily from the low usability of the information included in NSSD briefs, which can jeopardize procedural fairness. NSSD briefs accompany a non-favourable recommendation and allow the IRCC officer or CBSA inland/hearings officer to get acquainted with the evidence substantiating the recommendation. However, the briefs are often based on classified information and, depending on the sensitivity level of the contents, the derogatory information may or may not be disclosed to the applicant⁸. Even if a brief is not based on classified information, CSIS and/or the CBSA can still request that the complete brief not be shared with the applicant. If such a request is granted, not disclosing the reasons for an application refusal denies the applicant the possibility to fairly participate in the process, which is a core principle of procedural fairness. Procedural fairness requires that applicants be provided with a fair and unbiased assessment of their application, be informed of the decision-maker's concerns and have a meaningful opportunity to provide a response to concerns about their application⁹.

⁷ From 2014–2015 to 2018–2019, 8% of all non-favourable recommendations issued by NSSD that were recorded as having been later approved by IRCC resulted in a contrary outcome (177 of 2,277 referrals). There is currently no expected or desirable rate with regards to contrary outcomes as a proportion of all non-favourable recommendations issued.

⁸ In some cases, CSIS may hold a screening interview with the applicant, and the information collected during this interview may be sufficient to explain the grounds for an application refusal. This practice may contribute to achieving procedural fairness on a case by case basis.

⁹ IRCC, 2018, accessed from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/operational-bulletins-manuals/service-delivery/procedural-fairness.html>.

Access to legal advice

NSSD analysts had access to legal advice on a regular basis throughout the evaluation period through bi-weekly legal counselling sessions provided by LMU and/or JUS counsels. These sessions allowed analysts to discuss their current referrals, or recurring issues in their screening activities more generally. Some NSSD managers indicated that this regular access to legal advice helped to ensure recommendations were legally defensible. However, as participation in the legal counselling sessions is voluntary, legal knowledge/application among analysts may be uneven.

In terms of other support, JUS provided an updated document on relevant jurisprudence relating to IRPA to NSSD analysts on a semi-annual basis, which provided specific IRPA definitions, such as "reasonable grounds to believe", "espionage" and "subversion". For each of these terms, there were citations from past court decisions with additional links to other relevant court rulings.

2.2.1. Strengthening the legal defensibility of recommendations

There were several areas for which the legal defensibility of recommendations could be strengthened:

Classification of information and Procedural Fairness. NSSD sometimes has to base its inadmissibility recommendation solely on classified information received from CSIS or from its own research. In the absence of open-source or unclassified information, IRCC cannot disclose the reason for application refusal to the applicant, therefore denying the applicant procedural fairness. In some such cases, the IRCC officer may believe that visa issuance is required in order to meet procedural fairness.

[redacted]

3. Contribution to preventing inadmissible individuals from entering or remaining in Canada

By providing well-substantiated admissibility recommendations, NSSD seeks to provide all relevant information to support decisions on who is issued a visa and who is allowed to stay in Canada in favour of maintaining public safety. To assess this, the evaluation looked at the alignment between the NSSD's recommendations and decisions on applications by IRCC.¹⁰ The evaluation also examined the extent to which NSSD's assessments correctly identified individuals who were, in fact, admissible. If NSSD conducted all checks and came up with a well-researched admissibility recommendation that was followed by IRCC, there should be a low probability of that person being later identified as having committed an activity related to their inadmissibility, and being detained, issued a removal order and/or effectively removed from Canada. The evaluation tested this hypothesis by comparing favourable security screening recommendations with CBSA data on enforcement actions based on sections 34, 35 and 37 of IRPA.¹¹

¹⁰ Note that IRB's decisions were outside the scope of this evaluation.

¹¹ This comparison was used as a proxy measure of the quality of NSSD's screening. However, it needs to be acknowledged that there are factors beyond NSSD's control, which may contribute to individuals engaging in criminal activities after they arrived/were allowed to stay in Canada.

3.1. Extent to which recommendations are followed by IRCC

In the case of TR and PR applications, IRCC is the decision-maker, and officers use the result of NSSD's screening to guide their decisions¹². However, there may be other factors that affect a decision on an application, such as requests by other federal departments for applications to be approved in the national interest for high-profile foreign nationals who are inadmissible under IRPA. In such instances, the decision on the application may not correspond to the NSSD admissibility recommendation.

Finding 3: Due to multiple factors and considerations, IRCC authorized entry or permission to stay in Canada to a significant proportion of applicants who had received a non-favourable recommendation or an inconclusive screening result from NSSD.

As can be seen from Figure 2, between 2014–2015 and 2018–2019, the NSSD issued 7,673 non-favourable recommendations; of those applicants who received a decision, IRCC authorized entry to or permanence in Canada in a little under half of cases (46%).

The two most common scenarios under which IRCC authorizes entry for applicants who received a non-favourable recommendation are as follows:

- **Public Policy Exemption (PPE).** An applicant who is deemed inadmissible may receive a public policy exemption that is based on a National Interest Letter from a federal entity (usually other than IRCC), which deems that the entry of this person to Canada is in the country's national interest.
- **Contrary Outcome.** An instance where IRCC disagrees with NSSD's assessment of an applicant's inadmissibility and decides to approve the application.

Figure 2. IRCC authorized entry or permission to stay for 46% of applicants who received a non-favourable recommendation

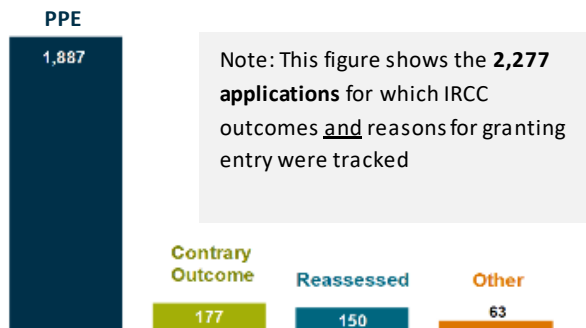


Source: Compiled by the evaluation team based on IRCC GCMS and NSSD STS data.

¹² Ultimately, IRPA specifies under which circumstances a foreign national is deemed inadmissible based on security grounds

According to data compiled by NSSD, the vast majority of inadmissible individuals were authorized entry to Canada by IRCC due to national interest reasons (PPE). Of the applicants who received a non-favourable recommendation from NSSD and were issued a visa, four out of every five were granted entry due to a PPE (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Most applicants who were granted entry/permission to stay in Canada despite receiving a non-favourable recommendation were authorized due to a PPE



Source: Compiled by the evaluation team based on data collected by NSSD from GCMS and quarterly IRCC reports. Refers to applications screened between 2014–2015 and 2018–2019 and those with decisions rendered by June 30, 2020.

NSSD may also issue an **Inconclusive Finding** result on an application. While there are various scenarios under which this could occur (e.g. missing information, application withdrawn, applicant referred in error)¹³, interviewees indicated that the most common reason is because NSSD [redacted]. Of the 14,290 referrals closed as inconclusive between 2014–2015 and 2018–2019, **the vast majority (81%) were granted entry by IRCC**; only 10% were refused. The remaining applications were withdrawn or were pending decision.

In cases where applications were incomplete, the missing information often could not be requested by IRCC officers due to bilateral irritants. Given that NSSD only issues inconclusive results *when concerns may exist and cannot be ruled out*, NSSD managers and some analysts note that inconclusive screenings should indicate a warning to IRCC rather than a “green light” to proceed with the application. On the other hand, without specific information indicating inadmissibility, the IRCC officers generally do not have sufficient grounds on which to deny the application¹⁴.

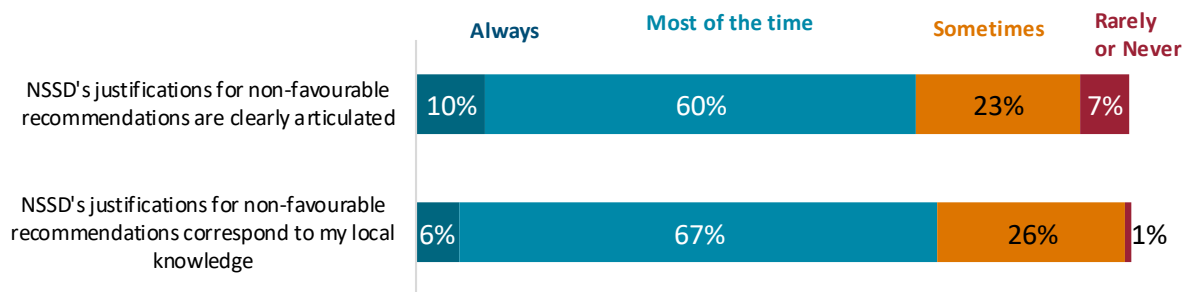
¹³ NSSD. *Standard Operating Procedures. Volume Two: Stage Two Assessment*. September 9, 2019.

¹⁴ IRCC officers can, however, deny an application based on IRPA’s section 16 if the applicant did not provide all relevant evidence and documents required for a complete assessment of admissibility (IRPA (2001), S.C. 2001, c.27, s.16).

3.1.1. IRCC officers' views on the quality of recommendations and their actions in case of disagreements

Overall, mission-based IRCC officers who responded to the evaluation survey were satisfied with the quality of recommendations issued by NSSD. 70% of officers felt the NSSD's reasons for issuing non-favourable recommendations were clearly articulated always or most of the time; nonetheless, a sizeable proportion (30%) only "sometimes" or "rarely or never" found this to be the case. Almost three quarters (73%) of IRCC officers thought that the NSSD's justifications for issuing non-favourable recommendations were always or most of the time in line with their own knowledge of the local context; however, almost three in ten did not (see Figure 4.).

Figure 4. The majority of IRCC officers felt that NSSD's non-favourable recommendations were clear and corresponded to their knowledge of local context at least most of the time



Source: Compiled by the evaluation team based on data from survey of IRCC officers in overseas missions.

The vast majority of overseas IRCC officers (89%) had disagreed at some point with a non-favourable screening result issued by NSSD. According to the *Immigration Control (IC) Manual*, before making a decision contrary to NSSD's recommendation, the IRCC officer should engage in a consultation process with NSSD which, in turn, engages CSIS. The responses of almost half (46%) of IRCC officers were in line with the official guidance, whereas just under one-quarter (23%) indicated that they would request guidance from IRCC headquarters as a next step.

3.2. Enforcement actions against approved applicants with non-favourable recommendation

If a foreign national with TR or PR status in Canada is found to have engaged in activities of concern related to IRPA sections 34, 35 or 37, they may become subject to an enforcement action by the CBSA. To quantify¹⁵ if, and to what extent, individuals with a non-favourable recommendation or inconclusive screening result were later determined to be inadmissible, the evaluation looked into enforcement

¹⁵ Currently, beyond enforcement actions, there is no way to capture the risk posed by individuals who received a non-favourable recommendation, but who were nevertheless granted entry to or allowed to remain in Canada.

actions associated with these individuals. The analysis of data revealed that most applicants admitted or allowed to stay in Canada despite a non-favourable or inconclusive screening result had no enforcement actions taken against them:

- **Applicants screened as non-favourable and received a PPE**
No applicants who entered Canada under PPE permits were subsequently subject to any of the above-mentioned enforcement actions.
- **Applicants screened as non-favourable, but IRCC disagreed (“contrary outcomes”)**
No applicants whose visas were issued based on a contrary outcome were subsequently subject to any of the above-mentioned enforcement actions.
- **Applicants screened as inconclusive, but approved**
[redacted] applicants with an inconclusive security screening result and who were authorized by IRCC were in the removal inventory as of August 2020. This represents [redacted] of all application with inconclusive screening results that were approved. [redacted] of the applicants faced allegations under paragraph 35(1)(a) – crime against humanity – and two under paragraph 34(1)(f) – membership in a terrorist organization. The immigration decisions for these applicants were issued in 2017 and 2018, but it took until 2020 for the inadmissibility exam reports for all [redacted] of them to be finalized. All [redacted] were in the Monitoring Inventory (i.e. not readily removable) at the time the data was collected.

While the data shows that foreign nationals screened as non-favourable who were authorized to enter or stay in Canada did not face any enforcement actions, it should be noted that not all risk is captured through enforcement actions, nor can it be fully monitored through surveillance. As a few interviewees pointed out, having these individuals in Canada could have negative consequences for the country’s reputation or result in actions that are more difficult to intercept and act on (e.g. business espionage or threatening Canadian residents), particularly as most of these individuals are short-term visitors. Some stakeholders also noted that not following admissibility recommendations issued by security partners has had a significant negative impact on the morale of NSSD’s analysts and undermines the integrity of the security screening process.

While the proportion of applicants screened as inconclusive with an enforcement action against them was low, there are associated risks to the security of Canada, as well as to program integrity. One individual with an inconclusive screening result was authorized entry to Canada but was later alleged to be a member of a terrorist organization and ended up in the Removal inventory; as such, the risk to public safety of this individual being in Canada was potentially very high. However, NSSD is not the decision-maker on applications, so the enforcement actions against these applicants do not reflect the Division’s effectiveness in terms of the screenings it performed.

3.3. Enforcement actions against applicants or claimants who were screened favourably

Finding 4: A negligible proportion of applicants who were screened favourably by NSSD were subsequently subject to an enforcement action.

A total of 295 applicants who received a favourable screening recommendation from NSSD and were admitted to, or allowed to remain in Canada were subsequently subject to an enforcement action. This represents 0.07% of all those who received a favourable recommendation during the evaluation period. Most (83%) were in the removal inventory at the time of the evaluation, while a few (11%) had been removed from Canada. Additionally, of the 295 individuals, the [redacted] refugee claimants (83%), close to one quarter (24%) were [redacted], and almost half (48%) were alleged members of an organization that engages in acts of terrorism (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Almost half of individuals with a favourable screening recommendation who were later subject to an enforcement action received a removal order due to membership in a terrorist organization



Note: Total number of applicants screened as favourable between 2014–2015 and 2018–2019 = 433,133

Source: Compiled by the evaluation team based on STS and NCMS data.

It should be noted that an enforcement action on an individual who was screened favourably by NSSD could be due to factors that were not present or known at the time NSSD completed their screening. The Agency currently does not collect data that separates such instances from those where NSSD did not conduct its screening thoroughly.

4. Timeliness of NSSD's recommendations

In addition to legal defensibility, the NSSD aims to issue *timely* recommendations that adhere to established service standards. Each business line has its own service standards, which specify the number of days it should take NSSD to process a referral, and each GeoDesk receives a unique case mix¹⁶. **NSSD's performance target is to process 80% of all referrals in each category within the established service standard** in any given month^{17,18}.

TR and PR service standards are jointly-agreed upon between IRCC, NSSD, and CSIS. For RC service standards, the timeline for processing referrals is adjusted based on the legislated timeline within which the IRB is required to schedule a hearing¹⁹. Service standards also vary depending on the urgency or purpose of the application²⁰, and on the IRCC mission where the application was submitted. The evaluation used the service standards that were in effect from 2014–2015 to 2018–2019 (see Appendix D: NSSD's service standards).

4.1. Relevance of and ability to meet current service standards

Finding 5: While service standards support the timely delivery of admissibility recommendations and set expectations as to the length of the screening process, NSSD did not meet its related performance target for most of the evaluation period.

Without doubt, the service standards used by NSSD support the delivery of the INSS Program by providing decision-makers with an expected timeframe for receiving admissibility recommendations. Both NSSD management and Program partners who were consulted agreed that NSSD's service standards were helpful. This is because they allow NSSD to prioritize its workload based on the urgency and priority of referrals²¹; support Program partners in setting timelines for their own processes that happen concurrently or in dependence on NSSD's security screening; and function as a measure of overall Program performance. While the service standards are considered helpful, the evidence in recent years indicates that they were not consistently met.

¹⁶ For example, some GeoDesks receive many cases with shorter service standards, which increases pressure to work through cases quickly.

¹⁷ NSSD, Standard Operating Procedure, volume 0, section 6

¹⁸ The remaining 20% of screenings that may not be processed within the service standard generally comprise referrals that are more complex, where the screening takes longer and/or where there are interdependencies with partners.

¹⁹ *Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations* (2002), SOR/2002-227, s. 159.9.

²⁰ E.g., VIP application, electronic travel authorization

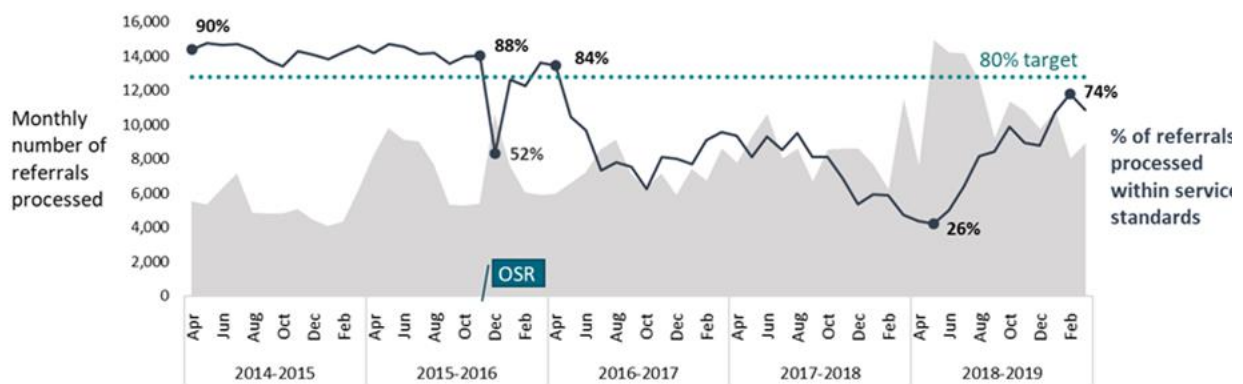
²¹ For example, a TR permit should get processed faster so the applicant can travel to Canada for the intended purpose.

Operation Syrian Refugee (OSR): Through OSR, Canada resettled 26,172 Syrian refugees from December 2015 to February 2016 (Audit of OSR, 2017). OSR resulted in the addition of a large number of referrals to NSSD’s workload. OSR refugees were pre-assessed at missions abroad and applied to come to Canada as permanent residents rather than refugee claimants.

Increased Irregular Migration (IIM): Between July 2017 and March 2020, 55,677 irregular migrants crossed the Canada–U.S. border and claimed refugee protection status in Canada. As per the FESS policy, all adult claimants were referred to NSSD for security screening. (Source: [IRB](#))

Between 2014–2015 and 2018–2019, NSSD mostly did not meet its 80% performance target (see Figure 6. The NSSD mostly did not meet the service standards performance target after OSR). The major cause of this trend was **Operation Syrian Refugee (OSR)** in 2015–2016, while **increased irregular migration (IIM)** at the Canada–U.S. border beginning in 2017–2018 caused a new surge in referrals that further hindered NSSD’s ability to meet its performance target. It was not until mid-2018, and after the adoption of a comprehensive suite of backlog reduction measures (see Section 4.2.2), that the NSSD moved closer to achieving its target again.

Figure 6. The NSSD mostly did not meet the service standards performance target after OSR



Source: Compiled by the evaluation team based on the CBSA’s STS case management data.

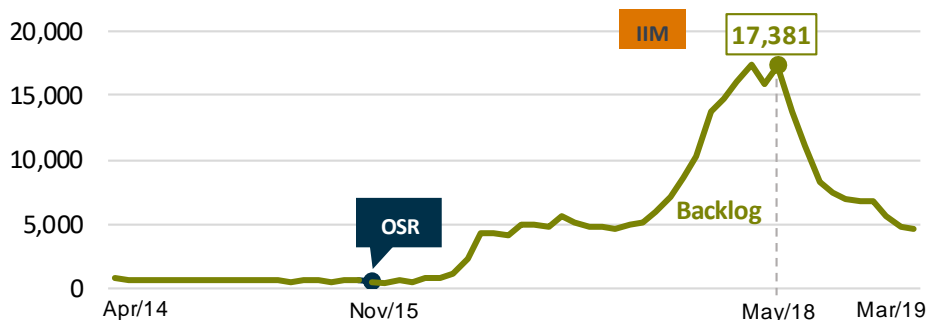
The feasibility of achieving the service standards was questioned by NSSD analysts. **Error! Reference source not found.** According to the survey, only 9% of analysts felt the current service standards could be met in all circumstances; half (51%) of analysts considered them feasible only for referral received with all the required information, while an additional 38% felt they were feasible only for simple, complete referrals.

4.1.1. OSR and IIM as key factors in meeting the NSSD’s performance target

OSR led to a steep increase in PR referrals for which NSSD was not sufficiently resourced to process. Between November 2015 and February 2016, NSSD processed 10,605 PR referrals as part of OSR, which represented 56% of all PR referrals processed during that period. The surge in referrals from OSR led to a sustained backlog growth, which was exacerbated by additional unanticipated referrals, particularly from IIM. By May 2018, the majority of screenings (61%), all business lines combined, had not been

processed within their service standard. After implementing the Backlog Reduction and Transformation Action Plan, the backlog fell significantly; by March 2019, it had decreased by 73% (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. NSSD's backlog grew after OSR, peaked in Spring 2018, and then fell dramatically after implementation of the BRTAP.



Source: Calculated by the evaluation team based on CBSA case management data (STS).

4.1.2. Rising referrals due to increased immigration

In addition to OSR and IIM, applications in other immigration streams gradually increased throughout the evaluation period. Between 2014–2015 and 2018–2019, the number of PR and TR applications submitted to IRCC grew by 70%. At the same time, the number of PR and TR referrals to NSSD grew by 84% (see Table 2). These trends are projected to continue, as Canada prepares to accept increasing numbers of immigrants in the years to come.²²

Table 2. The number of PR and TR referrals to the NSSD increased each FY, except in 2018–2019

Fiscal Year	TR and PR Applications	TR and PR Applications Referred for Security Screening	TR and PR Referrals as a % of all PR and TR Applications
2014–2015	2,442,855	63,567	2.6%
2015–2016	2,729,742	94,551	3.5%
2016–2017	3,072,181	96,487	3.1%
2017–2018	3,552,102	117,451	3.3%
2018–2019	4,170,904	117,189	2.8%
Total	15,967,784	489,245	3.1%

Source: Compiled by the evaluation team based on IRCC and CBSA case management data.

²² Government of Canada (2020). *Notice – Supplementary Information 2020-2022 Immigration Levels Plan*. Accessed from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/notices/supplementary-immigration-levels-2020.html>

4.2. NSSD’s strategies to manage its workload

4.2.1. NSSD’s initial response to OSR and IIM

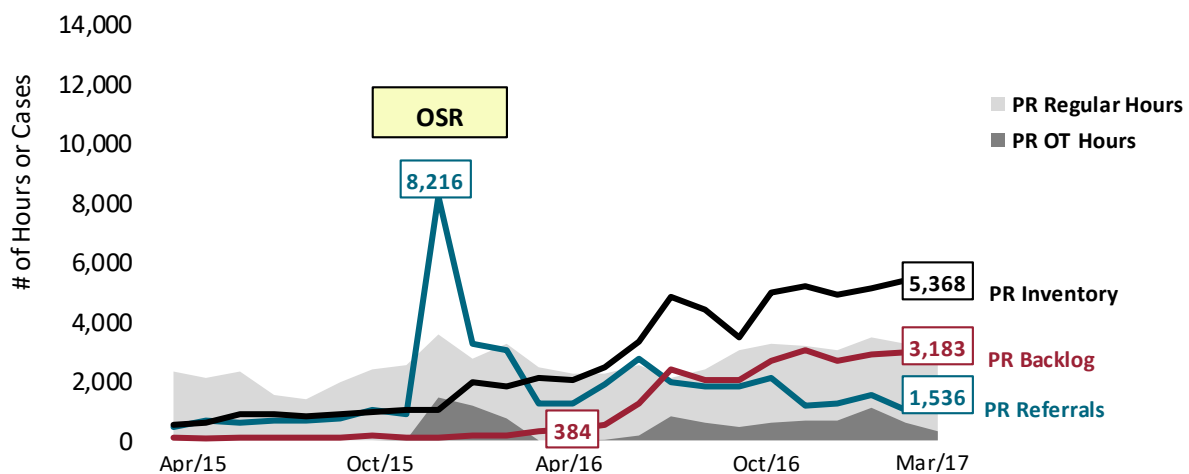
Finding 6: NSSD reallocated human resources and relied heavily on overtime (OT) to increase processing capacity when referrals grew, but these measures alone were not sufficient to overcome the backlog.

Inventory consists of all referrals received by NSSD that have not been completed (i.e. all “active” cases waiting to be processed)

Backlog consists of all referrals received by NSSD that have not been completed and are past their service standard

In response to OSR, NSSD increased staff hours dedicated to PR referrals, which included a substantial amount of OT. While OT had almost never been used from the start of the evaluation period up until then, an average of 840 OT hours were logged per month during OSR. Nonetheless, a steady rise in PR inventory and backlog continued from April 2016 onward (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: Despite the use of OT hours during OSR, the spike in referrals triggered a backlog buildup that accelerated through 2016–2017 and beyond



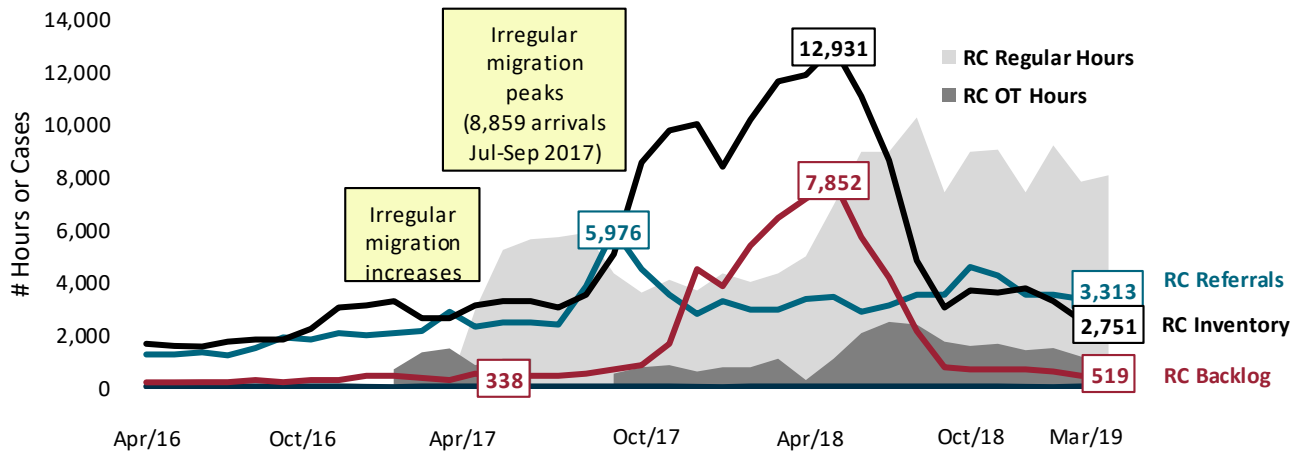
Source: Compiled by the evaluation team using STS and NSSD HR data.

Even as PR backlog continued to increase significantly after 2015–2016, NSSD’s PR salary expenditures between 2016–2017 and 2017–2018 decreased due to the sudden increase of refugee screening referrals resulting from IIM. Essentially, NSSD did a further reallocation of staff to the RC business line, where the need was even more pressing.

Appendix I contains additional data on NSSD’s response in terms of salary expenditures and overtime hours.

In fact, **in response to IIM**, NSSD significantly increased both regular and OT hours in the RC business line. In the 12 months after irregular migration first spiked in mid-2017, an average of 5,183 RC hours were logged per month, a 1,027% increase from twelve months prior. Despite this substantial increase, NSSD’s RC backlog climbed from a few hundred cases before IIM to close to 8,000 in April 2018—an increase of over 2,000%. After the BRTAP was enacted, the RC backlog fell sharply (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. RC regular and OT hours increased at the beginning of IIM, but RC backlog only declined after an additional surge in these hours, along with the implementation of other BRTAP measures



Source: Compiled by the evaluation team using STS and NSSD HR data.

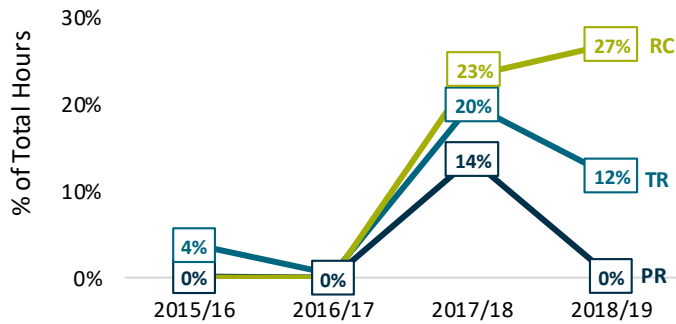
In terms of salary and allocation of staff hours, **NSSD responded to IIM proportionally to the increased workload resulting from the event**. In 2017–2018, the proportional growth in RC salary expenditures almost exactly matched the proportional growth in the RC backlog; further salary expenditure increases followed in 2018–2019. NSSD’s response to IIM was driven by multiple pressures, including an inter-dependency with the IRB and the attention media accorded to the phenomenon.^{23,24}

A notable difference in the response to IIM compared to OSR was the recruitment of **a significant number of students** starting in 2017–2018. As can be seen from Figure 10, the proportion of all NSSD’s hours worked by students increased across all business lines in 2017–2018. Students worked mostly on RC referrals (helping to reduce IIM backlog) and TR referrals. On the contrary, with the exception of 2017–2018, no students worked on PR referrals, despite a residual backlog from OSR. In addition to increasing processing capacity, student hires were also less costly compared to regular staff.

²³ For example: Keung, N. (Feb 5, 2019). *Concerns raised over national security amid refugee screening backlog*. The Star. Accessed from <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2019/02/05/concerns-raised-over-national-security-amid-refugee-screening-backlog.html?rf>

²⁴ For example: Wright, T. (May 16, 2019). *Fact check: Has every single refugee claimant in Canada been screened?* Accessed from <https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/fact-check-has-every-single-refugee-claimant-in-canada-been-screened-1.4424685>

Figure 10. The proportion of all NSSD's hours worked by students increased across all business lines in 2017–2018



Source: Compiled by the evaluation team using NSSD HR data.

4.2.2. Backlog reduction and transformation action plan

Finding 7: Measures enacted through the Backlog Reduction and Transformation Action Plan (BRTAP) were effective in reducing the severe backlog.

The **BRTAP** was enacted in May 2018 in response to the unrelenting growth of NSSD's backlog. Of the 64 BRTAP measures, 80% were implemented as of April 2020. These measures, listed in Appendix G: Backlog reduction and transformation action plan (BRTAP) measures enacted by April 2020, included internal operational and procedural changes, recruitment actions, and collaboration with partners to manage referrals and increase screening quality. In particular, the NSSD started collaborating with IRCC to manage the number of referrals it was receiving (e.g. via training IRCC officers and embedding an NSSD analyst within the Case Processing Centre in Ottawa) and to eliminate some of the unnecessary low-risk referrals being received²⁵.

NSSD regularly conducted analyses of the impact of the BRTAP measures through its Backlog and Referral Analyses and other pilot studies (see Section 5 and Appendix F: Inter-partner initiatives). Overall, these measures were effective in helping to reduce the backlog and in gradually improving the Division's ability to meet its performance target related to service standards. By the end of the evaluation period, the NSSD had significantly reduced its backlog. NSSD stakeholders reported that this trend continued, and that the backlog was eliminated by April 2020.

4.2.3. Surge capacity

Finding 8: While a Surge Capacity Plan exists, the NSSD remains vulnerable to future sudden increases in referrals.

²⁵ For example, Home-Maker applicants with no travel or employment history.

The NSSD developed a **Surge Capacity Plan** to manage future surges in referral numbers, which was one of the measures included in the BRTAP. The plan is built around five basic steps, including the targeted use of overtime by NSSD and other agency staff²⁶ and hiring students. However, additional measures could strengthen the plan, such as identifying and training a ready-to-deploy pool of employees across the Agency who could support the division at a short notice, and jointly considering possible courses of action with CSIS²⁷.

Even without future referral surges, the base number of referrals is projected to increase in line with higher immigration targets. This will be challenging for the NSSD to manage both from a human and material (e.g. workstations) resource perspective; a fundamental adjustment to its current business model is likely required. To this end, NSSD is pursuing the Security Screening Automation (SSA) initiative, which should help the Division better manage its workload in the future; in the interim, NSSD is also pursuing implementation of Robotic Process Automation measures (see Section 9.2).

5. Performance measurement

Finding 9: NSSD's performance measurement is relatively limited; key variables have yet to be defined and outcomes are not yet fully articulated.

Performance measurement is key in defining the program's objectives and strategies to measure their achievement. NSSD's performance measurement largely focused on monitoring the Division's inventory and its ability to reduce a backlog of cases. Considering that the backlog and overall referral numbers were on the rise for most of the evaluation period, monitoring the Division's immediate processing capacity seemed like an obvious and inevitable performance measurement task. However, significant emphasis on the Program's activities and outputs may have come at the expense of longer-term objectives.

Despite the existence of multiple levels of outcomes in the Program's logic model (see Appendix B: INSS logic model), the current key performance indicators (KPIs) only cover the timeliness aspect of the NSSD's recommendations, measuring the intermediate outcome. The three KPIs are the proportions of recommendations completed within service standards as a percentage of all cases in the inventory in each month, for TR, PR, and RC cases, respectively. Each KPI has an associated target of 80%.

NSSD has adopted a largely quantitative approach to its performance monitoring, measuring the numbers of referrals processed on a weekly, monthly and quarterly basis. Specifically, NSSD produces **Statistical reports** (capturing the current inventory, the ability to meet the KPIs, and number of

²⁶ For example, former NSSD staff still employed by CBSA or staff within the Agency with specific language skills.

²⁷ Given that the NSSD in most cases must obtain CSIS' input before finalizing its assessments, the two partners should coordinate planned actions in anticipation of referral surges.

recommendations issued by type) and **Backlog and Referral Reports** (focusing on backlog reduction efforts, fluctuations to inventory, the rate of the different types of recommendations issued, and changes in referral numbers from certain offices).

While this data is important for the day-to-day management of the Program, there are key areas in performance measurement that have yet to be addressed. Specifically, there is no definition of a legally defensible recommendation and corresponding indicator(s) to capture this aspect of NSSD's work (see Section 2). Defining the outcome and formulating corresponding indicators would help in measuring the logic model's immediate outcome. There is also no systematic way of collecting feedback from decision-makers to determine if they consider NSSD's recommendations to be either timely or legally defensible. NSSD maintains an informal system for tracking whether their recommendations were followed by IRCC but there is no similar system in place to monitor the decisions made on inland cases (refugee claims).

The evaluation team identified additional areas for which data is not currently being collected, including the number of "Favourable with Observations" and "Inconclusive with Observations" recommendations issued, the number of incomplete referrals received, and the percentage of inconclusive findings attributed to incomplete referrals.

III. Factors impacting the achievement of objectives

A number of factors had an impact on the extent to which the NSSD was effective in its role, such as internal policies and procedures and training provided to NSSD analysts. In addition screening partners' own workloads and processes impacted both the quantity and quality of referrals made, and in turn the NSSD's ability to meet its performance target for service standards. NSSD and its partner took steps to increase the program's effectiveness over the evaluation period.

6. Internal policies and training

6.1. Policies and procedures

Finding 10: NSSD's policies and procedures have been enhanced, but opportunities exist to better equip analysts, such as by ensuring they are kept fully up-to-date on events of concern around the world.

Over the evaluation period, NSSD made significant efforts to introduce new policies and procedures and to update existing guidance, which was in response to the challenges NSSD faced in managing its workload. Additionally, there was collaboration via the CSIS-led Fusion Centre initiative to ensure that the information CSIS provides is useful to, and useable by, NSSD analysts.

NSSD analysts generally viewed the internal policies and procedures positively. Most survey respondents considered the Division’s current policies and procedures to be readily accessible (91% of analysts), clear and concise (86%), and up-to-date (77%).

Despite the progress made in updating and introducing new policies and procedures, a number of gaps remain. Close to two-thirds (62%) of NSSD analysts agreed that internal security screening policies and procedures needed to be improved. 37% identified internal policies and procedures such as NSSD’s SOPs, FESS and duplication with regions or making reading Basis of Claim mandatory as a key area requiring improvement. In addition, only half of surveyed analysts felt there was a process in place to continuously monitor and communicate events of concern²⁸ around the world to staff. One-quarter (26%) also highlighted the need for enhancing or standardizing processes involving IRCC, such as the steps for obtaining missing information on referrals in a timely manner. A minority of analysts (16%) also indicated a lack of consistency in procedures across GeoDesks, including the thresholds applied for writing inadmissibility recommendations (i.e., what information is sufficient to initiate the process). In addition, SOPs do not fully articulate how analysts are to maximize the use of high-quality, open source information in such a way that it will serve as a solid basis for a recommendation. Relying on open source (versus classified) information helps ensure procedural fairness, although this is not always feasible.

6.2. Training of NSSD analysts

Finding 11: NSSD analysts received a wide variety of job-specific training; however, some gaps were identified.

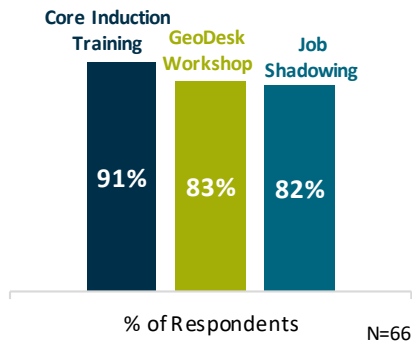
Security screening processing is knowledge and information-intensive. NSSD analysts are required to navigate numerous databases; to acquire, absorb and apply information to critically assess applications for inadmissibility concerns; and to make defensible judgments in a timely manner. The nature of analysts’ work requires a significant amount of training at the onset, as well as continuing professional development and guidance.

NSSD provides substantial training to its analysts, particularly upon joining the Division. The week-long Core Induction Training (CIT), which includes in-class and on-the-job training, is offered on a regular basis and when significant recruitment has taken place. Team Leads are responsible for providing mentoring and job shadowing opportunities both during induction and afterward, which are considered essential to building analysts’ skills and expertise. Occasional GeoDesk/regional-specific training is also provided by subject matter experts. A large proportion of analysts reported participating in all these

²⁸ The term “event of concern” includes any event related to an applicant that could indicate a potential inadmissibility as per NSSD’s mandate (IRPA sections 34, 35, 37).

types of training (see Figure 11). In addition to legal training that is part of the CIT, NSSD analysts have the opportunity to participate in regular legal training sessions provided by JUS and the CBSA’s LMU.

Figure 11: Most NSSD analysts took part in a wide variety of training



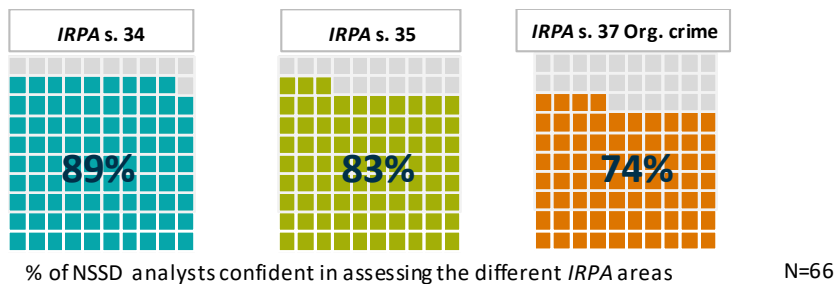
Source: Compiled by the evaluation team using NSSD Analyst Survey data, April 2020.

6.2.1. Training on recognizing inadmissibility under IRPA

According to the NSSD analyst survey, almost all NSSD analysts (97%) reported that they had received specific training, coaching or job shadowing on recognizing inadmissibility under sections 34 and 35 of IRPA; 94% had received specific training for section 37. Approximately 4 in 10 analysts indicated they had received JUS training specifically focusing on each section of IRPA, while one-fifth of analysts had also taken advantage of the CBSA LMU consultations on determining IRPA inadmissibility.

Generally, NSSD analysts reported feeling confident in assessing applicant’s potential inadmissibility. As can be seen from Figure 12, they were most confident in assessing inadmissibility based on IRPA section 34 (89%) and somewhat less confident with regards to IRPA section 37 (74%). [redacted]

Figure 12. NSSD Analysts were most confident in assessing s. 34



Source: Compiled by the evaluation team based on NSSD Analyst Survey.

6.2.2. Training gaps

Despite the variety of training available to NSSD analysts, there are areas where additional training or guidance is needed. Most prominently, NSSD analysts have experienced challenges when trying to access Privy Council Office (PCO) intelligence-related courses, which are highly relevant to analysts' work. These courses have limited seats and are costly. Seat allocation occurs at the Agency level, and employees in the regions tend to be prioritized, with very few NSSD analysts obtaining seats (only 12% of surveyed NSSD analysts reported having taken a PCO course). In response, NSSD developed a National Training Standard (NTS), which made certain PCO courses mandatory for junior (FB-02) and senior (FB-04) NSSD analysts²⁹. However, the NTS on its own is unlikely to ensure access to these intelligence courses due to their limited availability in general.

Furthermore, as NSSD analysts reported less confidence in assessing applicant's inadmissibility based on IRPA section 37 relative to other sections, there is a need for more comprehensive training on recognizing inadmissibility concerns related to organized criminality.

7. Quality and quantity of referrals

7.1. Security screening indicators as a tool to manage referrals

The quality and quantity of referrals sent to NSSD is largely determined by IRCC officers who review TR and PR applications and decide who to refer. Their decisions are guided by security screening indicators, which assist IRCC officers in identifying applicants who may be inadmissible to Canada in light of security concerns. The indicators cover [redacted] that could indicate inadmissibility and ultimately lead to an applicant being found inadmissible based on security grounds.

Since August 2018, some security screening indicators have been updated into new thematic indicator packages. [redacted], with indicators reflecting potential concerns associated with [redacted]. As of August 2020, there were 16 valid thematic indicator packages³⁰. The goal is to develop thematic indicator packages [redacted], to ensure that 95% of all TR and PR applications are screened using thematic indicators.

The new thematic indicator packages seek to fulfill **two broad objectives**:³¹

- To improve the quality of application referrals made by IRCC; and
- To reduce the number of unnecessary application referrals made by IRCC.

²⁹ An NTS that outlines mandatory training for Team Leads (FB-06) was being developed at the time of writing of this report.

³⁰ Security screening indicator packages are listed at [redacted]

³¹ NSSD. (2020). *NSSD Annual Report 2019-2020*, p.10; NSSD Action Plan Task List, p.3, 4, 7, 9.

When the new thematic indicators were released, the key distinguishing feature was the discretion accorded to IRCC officers. Unlike the original indicators, the new packages allowed them to use their own judgement and consider all the criteria to determine whether further screening is required or whether they have enough information to approve or reject application without the input from security screening partners. The original indicators continue to be used by IRCC to screen applicants from countries for which no new thematic indicators exist; however, since December 2019, the original indicators no longer require mandatory referrals³². For more on IRCC officers' use and assessment of security screening indicators, see Appendix J.

Assessing referral quality in a comprehensive manner remains a challenge for the Program. The quality of referrals could potentially be measured by the proportion of incomplete referrals or unnecessary referrals (i.e. applications that could have inadmissibility determined by IRCC without security screening from partners). However, currently the INSS program does not consistently track the occurrence of incomplete or unnecessary referrals³³. Therefore, the extent to which referrals did not meet expectations in terms of quality remains unclear. IRCC maintains that, after a number of recent consultations with NSSD on this issue, few referrals were identified by NSSD as having not been warranted.

7.1.1. The impact of new thematic indicators on referrals

Finding 12: The new thematic indicators have the potential to improve security screening referrals, but as yet this impact has not been realized.

Security screening indicators are intended to support IRCC officers in making informed, quality referrals to security screening partners and to reduce the number of unnecessary referrals. However, as of the end of the evaluation period, the usage of the new indicator packages had yet to be tracked, so the evaluation team was not able to fully assess the use or effectiveness of these indicators.

Upon release of the new thematic indicators, the IRCC did not have a means to systematically record which indicator(s) triggered each referral, leaving NSSD with no indication as to whether the new indicators were being applied and whether they were being applied correctly and consistently. While the need to record the usage of new indicators was recognized soon thereafter, the indicators are classified as Secret/Canadian Eyes Only, [redacted]. Therefore, partners had to first design a numbering system to be able to refer to these indicators without actually revealing their contents³⁴. Updates to the CBSA's and IRCC's tracking systems are underway, and should be in place by June 2021.

³² IRCC. (December 10, 2019). *Operational Bulletin 666*. Accessed from: [redacted]

³³ CBSA's case management data system tracks "case status updates", including fields such as "communication required" or "on hold communication required" that indicate more information is needed before NSSD can make a recommendation. But these status updates do not indicate the reason or type of information required (whether the matter to resolve is trivial, such as one missing date in a military table, or outside of IRCC's control, such as requiring information IRCC cannot easily obtain).

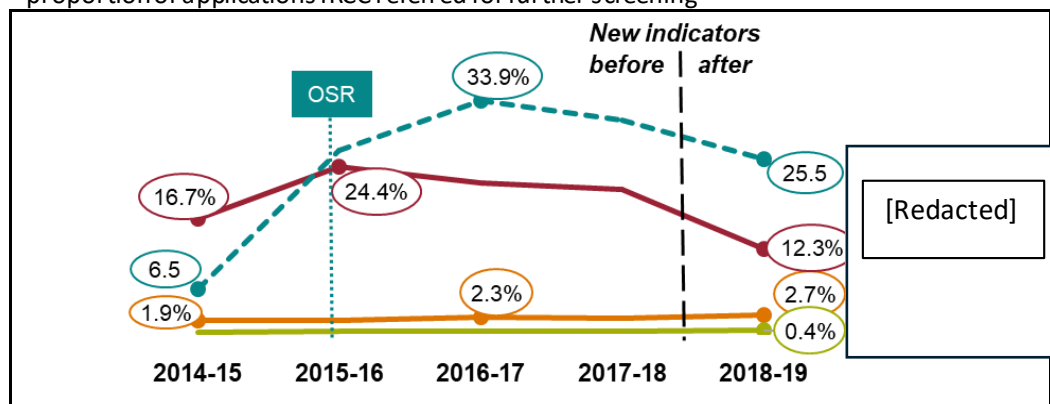
³⁴ This numbering system has only been piloted at select missions and is not widely used.

The impact of the first thematic indicator packages on the proportion of applications referred

In the absence of specific metrics to determine whether the objectives of the new thematic indicators had been achieved, the evaluation focused on comparing the quantity of referrals received by NSSD before and after the implementation of the first four packages³⁵. The goal was to determine if the implementation of the new indicator packages caused IRCC officers to refer a larger or smaller proportion of applicants [redacted]³⁶.

Overall, the percentage of applications referred after the thematic indicators were introduced appeared to follow [redacted] referral trend. This suggests that the implementation of the new thematic indicators did not have an impact on the proportion of referrals submitted to NSSD, at least until March 2019 (the end of the evaluation period). Specifically, as can be seen in Figure 13, the proportions [redacted] applicants referred for screening were on a downward trend since at least 2016–2017. This finding is consistent with the overall decrease of new referrals for [redacted] applicants after the OSR surge, as well as a change in screening indicators used for [redacted]. Meanwhile, the percentage of referrals for applicants from [redacted], historically very low, increased marginally, with no noticeable change after the new indicators were applied.

Figure 13. The new indicators did not result in a measurable increase or decrease in the proportion of applications IRCC referred for further screening



Sources: IRCC report from Cognos (MBR), extracted as of February 21, 2020. CBSA data from the Secure Tracking System, extracted as of February 4, 2020.

The impact of new indicators on the use of discretion and on reducing unnecessary referrals

³⁵ The analysis focused on PR and TR referrals. The period “before” comprised referrals submitted between 2014–2015 and 2017–2018, and the period “after” referrals submitted in 2018–2019. All four packages were launched in August 2018, i.e. mid-way through 2018–2019. The number of applications received was aggregated by Fiscal Year, so the division into pre- and post-periods needs to be interpreted as approximate.

³⁶ The focus on proportions of all applications received rather than on the absolute number of referrals sent to NSSD is key for correctly accounting for the continuous gradual increase in the overall application intake.

In the context of the new thematic indicators, **unnecessary referrals** are either those that NSSD would not expect to receive based on IRCC officers using their greater discretionary power to not refer, or are referrals that did not correspond to relevant thematic indicators^{37,38}. According to IRCC data, IRCC officers did not start exercising greater discretion afforded to them with the new indicators. An analysis of the number and percentage of TR applicants rejected by IRCC officers in their initial assessment (i.e., without referring the applications to security partners) based on security inadmissibility indicated no significant change following the introduction of the new indicators.

Conversations with stakeholders coupled with survey results identified several key reasons why IRCC officers may be hesitant or unable to exercise their new discretionary power to not refer:

- Lack of timely, sufficient training on the new thematic indicators;
- Very few applicants are believed to honestly declare clear inadmissibility information such as a membership in a group engaging in terrorist activities or organized criminality;
- IRCC officers feel more comfortable having the opinion of security partners when making a decision on inadmissibility, particularly given the consequences of such a decision;
- Decisions concerning inadmissibility based on security grounds are heavily scrutinized, and IRCC officers prefer, if possible, to reject an application based on other grounds; and
- Some long-standing IRCC officers continue assessing applications under the former approach of simply referring without necessarily relying more on their own judgement.

In terms of reducing these unnecessary referrals, there is currently no systematic way to identify which referrals were previously considered unnecessary and therefore whether the overall number of unnecessary referrals decreased with the introduction of the new thematic indicators. NSSD, in collaboration with IRCC, undertook several initiatives to assess the effectiveness of the new thematic indicators, but the results were inconclusive (see Appendix F: Inter-partner initiatives

Initiatives to develop and refine security screening indicators

Indicator review inter-departmental working group (IRIWG). Led by the CBSA, the IRIWG has brought together representatives of the CBSA, CSIS and IRCC, and also consulted with Global Affairs Canada. The working group sought both to develop and update [redacted] thematic indicator packages as well as to ensure [redacted] information in the *IC Manual – Chapter 2* and Indicator Packages were complete and up-to-date. Sixteen new thematic indicator packages were developed by the IRIWG in 2018 and 2019.

Pilot study to track the use of the new indicators. In 2019–2020, the CBSA and IRCC launched pilot projects to improve the tracking of the usage of security screening indicators by IRCC officers. The first small-scale pilot was followed by a larger one; however, it was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

³⁷ The lack of an indicator tracking system means it is not currently possible to calculate the number of referrals that did not correspond to any relevant indicators.

³⁸ Another type of unnecessary referral is one that is sent to NSSD despite lacking enough information for the Division to make a recommendation; however, these referrals often occur for reasons not directly related to indicators.

Once evaluated, the results will inform the development of an expanded, full-scale project to track how IRCC officers use security screening indicators in assessing every application (for more information, see **Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference.**).

NSSD analysts advising IRCC officers in CPC-Ottawa. Historically, the CPC-Ottawa has generated large numbers of referrals to NSSD, but has a low percentage of non-favourable recommendations. Since 2018–2019, and with a view to improving the quality of referrals, the NSSD has been sending a couple of its analysts to the CPC-Ottawa on a regular basis, to work alongside IRCC case processing officers. Feedback has indicated that having direct access to NSSD analysts has assisted the CPC’s case processing officers in correctly understanding and applying the security screening indicators in the initial assessment of applications.

Initiatives to measure the effectiveness of indicators and improved quality of referrals

NSSD alone or in collaboration with IRCC carried out several initiatives to assess the performance of the new thematic indicators. In 2019–2020, the NSSD assessed the impact of the first four thematic indicator packages on the Division’s workload by comparing the number of referrals received from the respective IRCC missions and from one of the Case Processing Centres (CPC) in Canada. The goal of the initiative was to identify any new trends in numbers of referrals received from these missions and in the types of NSSD recommendations issued on these referrals. Similar to the quantitative analysis described above, NSSD compared the number of referrals for applicants [redacted] received in the one-year period before the launch of the indicator packages (August 2017 to July 2018) to the one-year period after (August 2018 to July 2019). However, this initiative did not consider the increasing numbers of applications seen by IRCC in that same period. The patterns varied across the four groups, meaning that no specific impact of the new indicator packages could be determined. Multiple factors may have contributed to the varied results of the trend analysis, including:

- New business line for the CPC located in Ottawa;
- Suspension of one mandatory indicator [redacted] shortly before the implementation of the new thematic indicator package; and
- End of OSR family reunification applications.

Regarding the type of NSSD recommendations issued on these referrals, there was an increase in the proportion of Non-Favourable recommendations for referrals [redacted] and from two missions with large numbers of applications that process applicants [redacted]. On the other hand, the proportion of Non-Favourable recommendations decreased for TR referrals [redacted] and from two other missions with large numbers of applications that process applicants [redacted].

Other, more targeted initiatives were carried out jointly by the CBSA and IRCC, and aimed at assessing the impact of security screening indicators on the quality of referrals:

1	In 2019–2020, the CBSA (Europe, Africa and Iran Geographic Desk) participated in a three-month project where IRCC officers were required to record into a notes field in GCMS which indicators led to their decision to refer applications to the NSSD. According to NSSD, the results from this assessment were shared and discussed with IRCC, leading to an increased quality of referrals. However, it was also noted that recording this information into an unstructured field in the system and conducting any follow-up analysis is labour intensive.
2	An ongoing program initiative led by the IRCC and supported by the CBSA (NSSD) is working to develop, test, and implement a numbering system that will enable IRCC officers to systematically track and record security screening indicators that led to the referral of applications to NSSD and CSIS. The numbering system will be accompanied by a change to available GCMS fields, which will facilitate the entry of such data through a drop-down menu of the codes.
3	In 2018–2019, the CBSA (Asia and Oceania Geographic Desk) completed a review of referrals received based on the first version (August 2018) of the thematic indicator package developed [redacted]. The NSSD’s assessment of these referrals informed the development of a new version (January 2019) of the thematic indicator package [redacted], designed to reduce the number of unnecessary referrals received from applicants [redacted].

Overall, the initiatives carried out by the CBSA and IRCC do not provide a conclusive assessment of how effective the thematic indicators are. The pre-post analysis conducted by NSSD did not confirm any quantitative or qualitative patterns that could be clearly attributed to the introduction of the new indicators. The other initiatives, while modest in scope, allowed the NSSD to better understand how IRCC officers used the thematic indicators. This resulted in the update of one thematic indicator package [redacted] and in the revision and improvement of how referrals are identified in one specific IRCC Mission. The project that aims at tracking how thematic indicators impact referrals, once implemented, will allow for a more comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of security screening indicators.

Initiatives to improve policies and procedures

Some of the key efforts by stakeholders to improve Program policies and procedures are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. NSSD engaged in several significant efforts to improve its policies and procedures

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)
NSSD updated its SOPs as part of its backlog reduction efforts in 2018. These procedures provided detailed instructions on how to conduct screenings and specified the roles and responsibilities of the different staff involved.
Business Mapping Report
In 2018, a trilateral business mapping exercise was conducted in which NSSD was heavily involved. A formal report resulted, along with recommendations; some of these were found feasible to implement while others were not.
Backlog Reduction and Transformation Action Plan (BRTAP)

NSSD introduced a suite of policy and procedural adjustments in 2018–2019 (see Section 4.2.2 for more information) that served as the catalyst for reducing inventory and backlog in 2018–2019.

Trilateral Security Screening Diagnostic (TSSD)

In the midst of rising numbers of referrals and growing inventory and backlog in 2017–2018, NSSD, IRCC, and CSIS conducted the TSSD to identify inefficiencies in the security screening continuum and to propose solutions. The most notable of these were:

- Developing new thematic screening indicators (see Section 7.1).
- Eliminating incomplete referrals from IRCC (referrals that do not contain all the required information to conduct the screening).
- Allowing Non-Favourable recommendations to be valid indefinitely.

CBSA National Security Screening Business Enhancement Review (NSS BER)

In 2016, the CBSA Business Enhancement Initiative conducted a workflow review of Permanent Resident and Temporary Resident processes to identify program improvement opportunities. The NSS BER produced recommendations that, if implemented, would support NSSD in delivering screenings in a more efficient and effective manner. Some of the recommendations were implemented in the context of NSSD's BRTAP in 2018–2019.

There were also measures introduced under the BRTAP (see 4.2.2) that specifically aimed at reducing low-risk referrals. According to NSSD management, BRTAP measures, such as no longer referring low-risk homemakers, had a noticeable impact on reducing the number of unnecessary referrals.

Finally, there is no monitoring in place to determine the extent to which applicants are not being referred to NSSD despite presenting potential security concerns (through applying the security screening indicators or otherwise). This is especially important given that the previous version of indicators used by IRCC officers for TR and PR applications contained indicators which triggered mandatory referrals, whereas decisions to refer applicants are now discretionary.

7.1.2. IRCC officers' use and assessment of the indicators

In order for security screening indicators to be effective, they need to be readily accessible and regularly used by authorized IRCC officers. Security screening indicators are classified Secret/Canadian Eyes Only, which requires that they be stored securely in locked cabinets in secluded areas of the mission. Therefore, their retrieval may be onerous and thus discourage officers from consulting them when required. Nonetheless, according to survey results, most (79%) IRCC officers working at missions overseas did not report experiencing issues with accessing the indicators³⁹. The survey further indicated that most officers (72%) consult the indicators on a regular basis and generally find them quite useful

³⁹ Note that IRCC officers could have been referring to either the old or new indicators in their responses depending on what countries of origin their mission processes. The classification of both the original and the new thematic sets of indicators is the same, which indicates that any potential barriers to access should be identical.

(78%). The IRCC officers who did not find the indicators to be particularly useful cited the following challenges:

- indicators are broad, making it difficult to apply them (38%);
- indicators require information on the applicant that is not easily accessible (21%); and
- there are a large number of indicators to be consulted (17%).

Involvement of locally engaged staff in processing applications

IRCC missions abroad hire local employees who typically are not Canadian citizens, known as locally engaged staff (LES)⁴⁰. The roles and responsibilities of LES vary by mission, ranging from clerical support to decision-making. As per the *IC Manual – Chapter 1*, LES may be tasked with preparing and transmitting security screening requests only when the request does not contain any classified or sensitive material (clerical support), whereas IRCC officers review TR and PR applications to ensure they are complete and to make admissibility and eligibility decisions (which involves accessing the security screening indicators)⁴¹. Any LES who are not Canadian citizens and not in possession of a valid secret security clearance are not authorized to view the security screening indicators that are used in the initial screening of applications. However, according to the evaluation survey, 16% of IRCC officers (located in 15 different IRCC visa offices) indicated that LES at their missions were engaged in the actual processing of applications. Furthermore, 4% (6 individuals, located in 4 different IRCC missions) specified their LES were using the security screening indicators. Fundamentally, the involvement of LES in processing applications, even if not widespread, poses specific risks and challenges to the integrity of the security screening process. LES who screen applications without consulting the security screening indicators do not have all the information they need to determine potential security concerns, while non-Canadian LES who access the indicators are committing a security violation.

Consideration: The Program is encouraged to engage its INSS partners on the involvement of LES in the processing of applications at missions abroad, to ensure they are performing tasks in accordance with operational policy and procedures.

7.1.3. Training provided to IRCC officers

Finding 13: While most IRCC officers had received indicator training from the NSSD and found it useful, additional guidance on assessing inadmissibility is still required.

In 2019, NSSD subject matter experts provided tailored thematic indicator training sessions to IRCC officers, and in some cases to LES⁴², at several overseas missions. The ultimate goal was to increase the

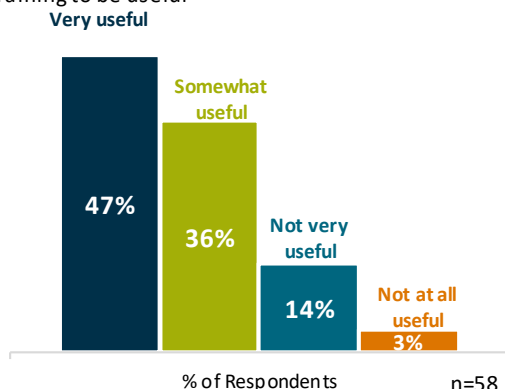
⁴⁰ According to the IRCC, LES are residents of the country where the mission is located, and are often, but not always, citizens of that country.

⁴¹ *IC Manual – Chapter 1, Security Screening Process Manual*, version: August 30, 2016 (section 7.2, p.13; 8.1, p.14).

⁴² Note that LES training focused on a very high-level summary of security concerns.

quality of referrals from IRCC missions. The vast majority (88%) of IRCC officers who responded to the survey had experience with using the new thematic indicators. Of those officers, half indicated they had received thematic indicator training given by NSSD staff. Most (83%) of this subset of officers found the training very or somewhat useful (see Figure 14 **Error! Reference source not found.**).

Figure 14: Most IRCC officers found the thematic indicator training to be useful



Source: Compiled by the evaluation team using IRCC officer survey data

NSSD management views the training of IRCC officers as key to receiving high-quality referrals, including only referrals that warrant screening. While the surveyed IRCC officers considered the training useful, there is little data available to demonstrate the impact of the training on the number and quality of referrals sent to NSSD. In addition, this training is costly for NSSD in terms of the staff time and travel costs. Therefore, before continuing further with this training, NSSD should first collect more data to demonstrate its actual impact.

Overall, almost 40% of IRCC officers felt they required further training and/or guidance to support them in assessing applicants' inadmissibility on security grounds, with the most frequently cited areas being the regional context (e.g. changing social, economic, or political conditions; 36%) and ongoing/refresher training on indicators (34%).

7.2. Incomplete referrals from IRCC missions and CBSA regions

NSSD stakeholders indicated that a significant number of referrals were received without all the required information, which impacts the Division's ability to issue recommendations within the service standard performance target. From the IRCC's perspective, the lack of guidance and definitions as to what constitutes a complete referral up until recently was a contributory factor. If a referral is incomplete, NSSD has to follow up with the IRCC officer at the mission (or regional CBSA officer in the case of refugee claims) to request the missing information, with the time taken to obtain the information counting towards NSSD's processing time.

An analysis of the case management data indicated that the proportion of referrals submitted to NSSD which lacked all the required information declined over the evaluation period, except for TR referrals. While most IRCC missions sent complete referrals, some missions were submitting significant proportions of referrals that were incomplete. Between 2014–2015 and 2018–2019, one quarter (26%) of Chandigarh’s referrals were incomplete, as were 18%-19% of referrals from Guangzhou and Ho Chi Minh missions. Among the CBSA regions, 16% of the GTA’s referrals were incomplete, as were 13% of those submitted by the Southern Ontario Region. While the proportion of incomplete referrals decreased over time, wait times for receiving missing information increased. On average, NSSD waited about 1-2 weeks longer for partners to provide missing information in 2018–2019 than they did in 2014–2015. However, the data also showed that, overall, incomplete referrals were processed faster than those received with all the required information (for more information, see Appendix E: Trends in incomplete referrals).

NSSD has been working with IRCC to address the issue of incomplete referrals at the specific missions of concern. In this context, IRCC officers have now been provided with the required guidance through the existing IRCC Program Delivery Instructions and the IRCC has also launched a pilot project targeting these specific missions to reduce incomplete referrals.

8. Collaboration with partners and within the CBSA

CBSA, CSIS and IRCC work in partnership to deliver the INSS. The extent to which partners work together effectively significantly influences the overall integrity and success of the security screening continuum and the ability to achieve government-wide outcomes.

8.1. Working relationships among federal partners

Finding 14: NSSD has effective working relationships overall with IRCC and CSIS. The involvement of RCMP in the security screening process would be highly beneficial.

The roles and responsibilities of security screening partners are clearly articulated in multiple documents such as IRPA, the bilateral Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) between partners, and program policies and procedures⁴³. While partners generally shared the view that the roles and responsibilities were clear, some areas requiring further improvement were identified. Notably, the lack of a trilateral MoU, during the period under evaluation, was a recognized issue, as was the lack of involvement of the RCMP in the security screening process.

Trilateral MoU between the CBSA, IRCC and CSIS

⁴³ For example, the IRCC *IC Manual - Chapter 1* and the NSSD’s Standard Operating Procedures.

Stakeholders from all three partner entities felt that the new trilateral MoU would benefit the security screening process by defining and describing the specific tasks fulfilled by each partner, and the interdependencies between partners' key activities. Developed at the end of 2020–2021, the MoU can be leveraged by partners to bring improvements to several areas, by:

- Assigning responsibilities for performance measurement across the security screening continuum;
- Establishing a monitoring mechanism to determine whether all applicants who should be referred for screening are being referred;
- Supporting collaboration to deliver regular training to IRCC officers; and
- Adopting a whole-of-government approach to setting service standards.

The intention to develop the MoU was approved by all three organizations in mid-2020; it was in the approval process at the time of the writing of this report.

Missing intelligence from the RCMP to assess organized criminality

The RCMP is notably absent from the security screening process. Until about 10 years ago, the RCMP used to be involved in screening activities, and provided valuable assistance in determining inadmissibility due to organized criminality. Security screening partners, and NSSD in particular, have agreed that re-engaging RCMP should be considered. A planned tabletop exercise between the NSSD and RCMP was scheduled in early 2020, but was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Following this exercise, the NSSD and partners will be better informed on the opportunities for collaborating with the RCMP, and the implications, benefits and drawbacks this would have. There may also be other options to obtaining more information and intelligence to support NSSD analysts' assessments of inadmissibility due to organized criminality, besides re-engaging the RCMP⁴⁴.

Communication between NSSD and its partners⁴⁵

During the evaluation period, in NSSD's opinion, effective mechanisms were in place to facilitate communication between NSSD and its security screening partners. Several senior management oversight committees met regularly and provided partners with a platform to discuss program performance and challenges. Such oversight committees are regarded as central to early identification of issues that could impact the effectiveness of the security screening process, such as surges in PR or TR applications from specific regions.

⁴⁴ In this regard, NSSD noted specific training for NSSD analysts on determining inadmissibility related to organized criminality and involving other potential partners such as the Criminal Intelligence Service of Canada (CSIC).

⁴⁵ Communications among partners was from the NSSD viewpoint; as this was not a horizontal evaluation, communication between IRCC and CSIS was examined.

8.2. Inter-Partner improvement initiatives with IRCC

During the evaluation period, a number of joint initiatives were implemented to improve program delivery. These included inter-departmental working groups to develop and update screening indicators, pilot studies to assess the use of screening indicators, and knowledge sharing between NSSD analysts and IRCC officers (for more information, see Appendix F: Inter-partner initiatives). While these initiatives sought to fulfill various needs across the security screening continuum, most of these efforts focused on the initial assessment of applications by IRCC officers to ensure that IRCC officers are referring only applicants who should be screened.

8.3. Interdependencies with CSIS

Applications referred for IRPA s.34 inadmissibility concerns have to be screened by both NSSD and CSIS. Between April 2014 and March 2019, [redacted] of all referrals fell into this category and were screened by both partners. While NSSD and CSIS receive and assess each referral simultaneously and follow the same service standard, NSSD must wait for CSIS' input before finalizing and issuing the recommendation. Therefore, NSSD's ability to meet the service standards depended, to a certain degree, on CSIS' ability to complete its screening on time. The average number of calendar days CSIS took to process referrals increased over the evaluation period for all three business lines, but particularly for PR referrals. CSIS' timelines for PR screenings increased more than 15-fold between 2016–2017 and 2018–2019. As of March 31, 2019, the end of the evaluation period, 52% of NSSD's inventory (5,790 referrals) comprised cases that were already processed by NSSD, but were awaiting CSIS' assessment.^{46,47}

Importantly, NSSD and CSIS have different responsibilities; CSIS provides intelligence on security concerns, while NSSD is the partner that develops the admissibility recommendation. Further, the two partners use different thresholds and investigative techniques for their assessments, as established by their relevant Acts. NSSD applies *reasonable grounds to believe* (as determined by IRPA), while CSIS uses *reasonable grounds to suspect* (as established by the *Canadian Security Intelligence Service Act*). Since CSIS' threshold is lower than NSSD's, information gathered during CSIS' screening may not be sufficient for NSSD to find the applicant inadmissible. For this and other reasons, NSSD and CSIS formally launched the Fusion Centre Initiative in 2018–2019, whereby NSSD analysts from three of the four GeoDesks worked in person alongside their CSIS counterparts once or twice a week. This arrangement has allowed for in-person discussions of specific cases, ensuring that CSIS provides the useful and usable information to NSSD.

⁴⁶ NSSD (2019). *National Security Screening Referral and Backlog Analysis: Building on Success*. October 2018 – March 2019.

⁴⁷ By June 2020, CSIS managed to reduce the number of pending cases to 2,684, representing 44% of NSSD's inventory at that time (NSSD, 2020. *National Security Screening Referral and Backlog Analysis: By the Numbers*. October 2019 – March 2020).

8.4. Collaboration between NSSD and CBSA regions in screening refugee claimants

Refugee claimants are screened through the Front-End Security Screening (FESS) process, which is conducted by NSSD with the support of the regional hearings and investigations units (see Section 1.3.3 and Appendix H for more information on areas of overlap/duplication). The major difference in the security screening performed by each entity is that NSSD screens all adult refugee claimants, while regions only conduct screening and investigations on selected individuals, most often those who were flagged by regional triage or (less frequently) during refugee claim intake.

If the NSSD finds serious security concerns, it will send the file to the regional investigations unit and hearings unit for further investigation. In practice, however, regional investigations into potential concerns posed by refugee claimants and preparation for IRB hearing often commence before NSSD completes its screening and has sent the result to the region. Because regions do not wait for NSSD's screening result and use their own triage criteria, they may also conduct investigations on refugee claimants who were screened as favourable by the NSSD.

Finding 15: There is a lack of coordination and communication between NSSD and regions, resulting in misalignment between their respective screening activities.

The NSSD and the regions operate more or less independently, with each collecting data from different sources for their own purposes. Some NSSD analysts expressed frustration over the lack of coordination between NSSD and regional screening activities. Specifically, they felt that NSSD's recommendations were being ignored by regional CBSA officers, who instead relied on their own screenings. Regional hearings and inland enforcement officers (IEOs), on the other hand, were not clear on what was involved in NSSD's screening process, nor how reliable it was. Regions reported typically receiving only the result of NSSD's screening (e.g. favourable or non-favourable) and limited information in the case of non-favourable screenings, although NSSD maintains that they send a full brief when the result is non-favourable. As a result, regions often conduct some or all of the same checks, including a scan of social media.⁴⁸

In regions with fewer refugee claimants and/or a higher processing capacity, investigations may begin immediately after the regional triage stage, and may conclude before NSSD is finished its screening. Some regional representatives argued that, in such instances, the NSSD screening result is received too late and does not add value. This was particularly the case during the height of NSSD's backlog in 2017–2018. In one region, stakeholders felt that, during the backlog period, the quality of NSSD screenings was lower or less predictable, which led some regional hearings and IEOs to lose trust in NSSD's security

⁴⁸ Note that repeating these checks may be warranted if significant period of time has passed since the NSSD completed its screening, as there might be new information that provides additional evidence.

checks. Despite improvements in quality and processing (as perceived by these stakeholders), some officers continue to rely on their own screenings rather than on those provided by NSSD.

The lack of coordination has been highlighted in previous studies (2018 CBSA Hearings Program Evaluation; 2017 Deloitte review of the FESS process). The areas of overlap identified by the Deloitte study were reviewed and updated through stakeholder consultations as part of this evaluation, and are listed in Appendix H: Unique and overlapping screening activities between NSSD and Regions.

While communication channels between NSSD and regions exist, they are used on an ad hoc basis, either by NSSD to request that regions collect additional information from claimants or by the regions to inquire about the status of a security screening for which an IRB hearing has already been scheduled. There is no regular communication between NSSD and the regions to provide updates on the screening processes, to exchange information on trends or best practices, or to better understand each other's roles and responsibilities and operating procedures. There is also a lack of strategic engagement between NSSD and regional leadership. Regions further identified the need to share tools and/or receive more support from NSSD to access key resources such as subscription databases to query individual claimants.

9. Data systems and IT infrastructure

Effective and efficient processing of security screening referrals across the security screening continuum is dependent on the capacity of partners to transfer data from one organization to another, and to be able to share information quickly and reliably. Considering that each organization uses a different case management system, systems interoperability is a key factor in ensuring effective screenings. In addition, the NSSD's own IT infrastructure plays a major role in how quickly the Division is able to process referrals, specifically in times of high workload.

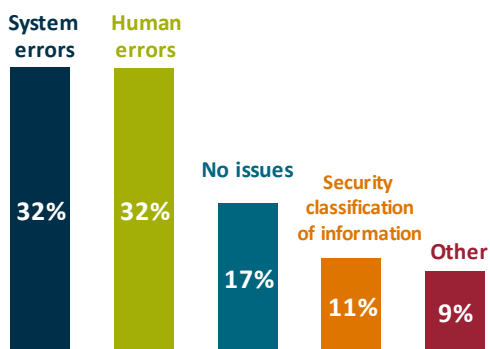
9.1. Data systems used by partners

Each security screening partner uses its own case management system: IRCC uses the Global Case Management System (GCMS), NSSD uses the Secure Tracking System (STS), and CSIS has its own secure system. However, as the activities of IRCC, NSSD, and CSIS happen in a continuum, there is a need for a smooth, timely, and efficient flow of data and information between the different systems.

Finding 16: While the lack of interoperability among partners' data systems has been a long-standing issue, NSSD analysts felt they had the information they needed to perform screenings.

As each data system used in the security screening process is primarily designed to meet the objectives of the organization that uses it, functions are not necessarily designed to enable a smooth transfer of information between systems. According to the survey results, system and human errors were the most common causes of incomplete data transfer, cited by 64% of NSSD analysts (see Figure 15).

Figure 15: NSSD analysts most commonly attributed data interoperability issues to system and human errors



Source: Compiled by the evaluation team using NSSD analyst survey data, April 2020

While some system upgrades have been put in place, several challenges remain, including:

- **Data transfer is one-time in nature.** NSSD analysts have to manually search GCMS to verify if any changes to the file have been made by IRCC between the time of the referral and when NSSD finishes its screening.
- **IRCC attachments are not readable by the other systems.** IRCC's attachments (e.g. interview notes in a PDF format) are not readable by the NSSD's and CSIS' data systems, and therefore require manual review to be analyzed. [redacted].⁴⁹
- **Current systems do not record instances of faulty information transfer.** Quality Assurance (QA) on data transfer and integrity across the systems remains limited⁵⁰. Although partners are aware of specific issues, the extent to which data transfer errors occur is unknown.

Issues with data transfer and interoperability of partners' data systems have been documented previously, including in the 2011 OAG report on issuing visas, the 2017 internal audit of OSR, and the 2019 OAG report on processing asylum claims. However, according to survey results, most NSSD analysts felt, at least to some extent, that data transfer among the different systems was both accurate (86%) and prompt (77%)⁵¹.

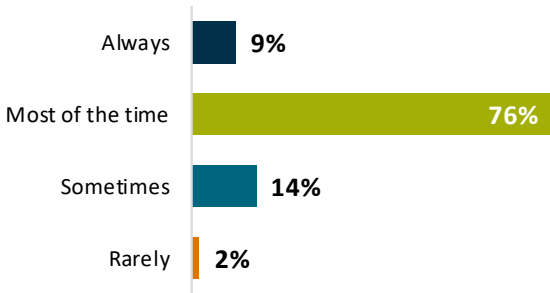
In fact, despite system challenges, most NSSD analysts (85%) indicated they always or most of the time received the information they needed from data systems to be able to conduct security screenings (see Figure 16).

⁴⁹ [redacted]

⁵⁰ CBSA ISTB receives reports of cases rejected by CSIS' case management system due to data validation issues.

⁵¹ The exact extent to which data transfer is accurate and prompt would require a systems audit to verify.

Figure 16: Most NSSD analysts received the required information from data systems always or most of the time



Source: Compiled by the evaluation team using NSSD analyst survey data, April 2020

9.2. Security screening automation initiative

Throughout the evaluation period, NSSD’s screening was largely dependent on a number of manual tasks performed by analysts. Manual processing not only limits the processing ability of the Division but is also more prone to human error. To this end, the CBSA is currently pursuing a SSA initiative.

Finding 17: Automation is the future vision of the Program, but has associated risks and is not expected to be fully implemented until fiscal year 2023–2024 at the earliest.

The SSA initiative is a \$40-million investment that will automate NSSD’s triage function “by enabling a systematic review of screening and threat indicators against each application”⁵². The objective is to develop and deploy automation to allow NSSD to refocus analysts’ efforts on cases with higher risk profiles. The specific goals are to achieve greater system and indicator precision, to promote adaptation in screening to changing country and regional conditions, to reduce human error, and to generate more objective recommendations.

The SSA is scheduled to be implemented over a three-year period between FY 2020–2021 and FY 2023–2024 and will fundamentally change the NSSD’s business model. As with any other large-scale IT project, there are numerous risks, which are being monitored and managed to ensure the achievement of project outcomes. These risks include ongoing funding that has yet to be secured for the project maintenance after its initial roll-out, potential IT procurement delays, and dependencies between SSA and other initiatives, such as the IRCC-led Asylum Interoperability Project. The SSA includes plans to integrate text analytics for subjective risk assessment by leveraging a Cloud-based advanced analytics platform⁵³. It will be important to ensure that this capability is functioning as intended before NSSD fully switches to the new automated environment, to eliminate the risk of clearing cases where derogatory

⁵² NSSD (2020). *2019–2020 NSSD Annual Report 2019–2020 Final for Translation*. p. 19. Accessed from NSSD (not publically available).

⁵³ The subjective risk assessment will provide the CBSA with the ability to identify risks found in unstructured text information in security screening case files, including notes fields and PDF files, as well as certain intelligence files and open data sources.

information is only included in unstructured text. Finally, once implemented, the SSA may increase pressure on CSIS to finish its assessments faster, since NSSD will be able to conduct its screening activities faster. If CSIS is not able to keep pace, NSSD will ultimately see backlog growth.

Note: In October 2019, NSSD began pursuing the acquisition of [Robotic Process Automation](#) software as an interim solution to help bridge the current systems gaps. Robotic Process Automation is supposed to speed up the screening process, allowing NSSD officers to focus more on analysing information and determining risk.

IV. Program efficiency and GBA+

The evaluation examined the Program's efficiency and conducted a GBA+ analysis of how the Program impacts different demographic groups. In terms of efficiency, the evaluation looked at the extent to which the INSS Program was efficient in using its resources to produce admissibility recommendations⁵⁴. The GBA+ analysis responded to the Treasury Board *Directive on Results* requirement that evaluations take into account government-wide policy considerations such as gender-based analysis.

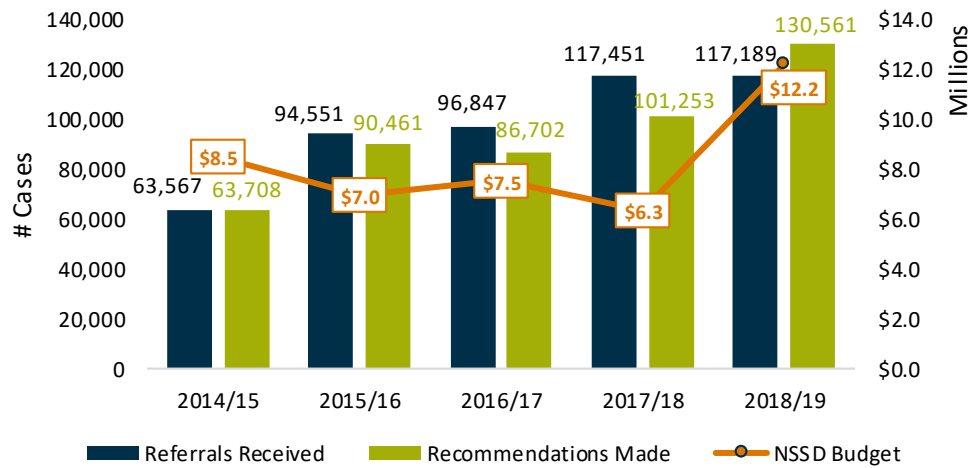
10. Efficiency of the security screening processes

Finding 18: NSSD doubled the number of recommendations issued per year between 2014 and 2019; at the same time, the number of recommendations issued per hour decreased.

During the evaluation period, the NSSD was under pressure to be more efficient with its processes and resources. The number of recommendations issued by NSSD showed a steady upward trend over the evaluation period; in fact, twice as many were issued in 2018–2019 compared to 2014–2015. After enacting the BRTAP in 2018–2019, NSSD processed 11.4% more referrals than it received (see Figure 17). This was the first time recommendations had outpaced incoming referrals since 2014–2015, and an indication that NSSD was regaining control of its inventory and backlog.

⁵⁴ Note that the Division's efficiency in using available human resources in areas of highest workload is discussed in Section 4.2 and Appendix I as part of NSSD's response to the two major events which resulted in major surges of referrals (OSR and IIM).

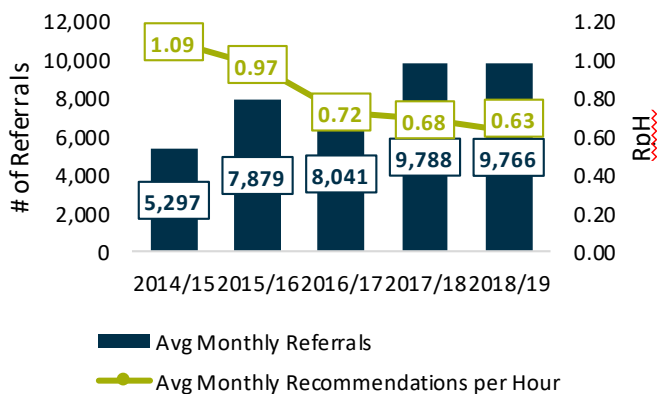
Figure 17: In 2018–2019, NSSD processed more referrals than it received for the first time since 2014–2015



Source: Compiled by the evaluation team using STS data.

Despite the increase in the number of completed screenings, the average number of recommendations issued per hour of screening (RpH)⁵⁵ by each NSSD analyst decreased by 42% over the evaluation period (see Figure 18). In practice, this meant that NSSD produced fewer recommendations per every staff hour spent on screening activities. While this trend suggests decreasing efficiency, there are contextual factors to consider. NSSD maintains that higher quality and more robust recommendations have been issued in recent years, which have typically been more time consuming to research and document.

Figure 18. NSSD's RpH rate declined 42% across the evaluation period in the wake of rising referrals



Source: Compiled by the evaluation team using STS and NSSD HR data

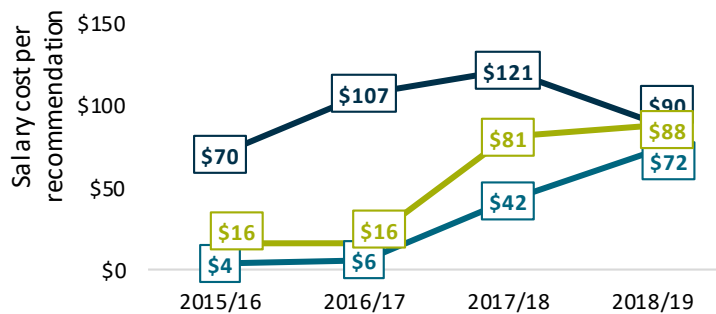
The average cost per recommendation (CpR) in terms of salary spent on screening activities allowed for a measure of how costly it was for NSSD to issue each recommendation. After 2015–2016⁵⁶, CpR

⁵⁵ RpH is a measure of an analyst's productivity; the higher the RpH, the higher the productivity. Calculating RpH for NSSD as a whole allowed for a measure of how constant NSSD's output (i.e., issuing recommendations) was over time.

⁵⁶ 2014–2015 data is excluded due to gaps in certain salary data.

generally increased, although the trend differed across business lines (see Figure 19. NSSD's CpR showed an upward trend after 2015–2016. By 2018–2019, CpR had converged across business lines, with PR declining slightly Figure 19). The increase in CpR is at least partly attributable to the increased use of OT later in the evaluation period.

Figure 19. NSSD's CpR showed an upward trend after 2015–2016. By 2018–2019, CpR had converged across business lines, with PR declining slightly



Source: Compiled by the evaluation team using STS and NSSD HR data

11. GBA+ analysis of referred applicants

A Gender-Based Analysis Plus⁵⁷ (GBA+) was conducted as part of the evaluation to assess how groups of women and men of diverse ages and nationalities may have been impacted by the INSS Program. The GBA+ analysis assesses whether certain groups are disproportionately over- or under-represented in programs and services. The security screening indicators applied to TR and PR applicants⁵⁸ (see Section 7.1) focus on various individual characteristics, so there is the potential that certain GBA+ groups may be inadvertently or purposefully impacted more than others. These same characteristics could also result in a higher likelihood of an applicant being found inadmissible. As such, the referral rate of each concerned group and the type of recommendation each group is most likely to receive were considered.

Importantly, considering the nature of the security screening process and how areas of concerns are identified, the targeting of specific groups may be justified if these characteristics effectively point to higher applicant risk profiles. This is because individuals are not typically referred for screening solely on one factor. Instead, program guidance⁵⁹ instructs that applicants' characteristics are not to be considered in isolation, but as one of multiple characteristics that could indicate an inadmissibility

⁵⁷ Status of Women Canada explains that GBA+ provides a means to assess how diverse groups of people may experience policies and programs, considering identity factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age, mental or physical disability, as well as the interactions between these characteristics. More information can be accessed here: <https://cfc-swc.gc.ca/gba-acs/index-en.html> (Accessed on October 16, 2020).

⁵⁸ RCs were not considered in this analysis due to the 100% screening policy. When all adult RC have to be screened, there is no selection process that could introduce a GBA+ bias.

⁵⁹ *IC Manual – Chapter 2*, including non-thematic and thematic indicator packages

concern. Therefore, the over or under representation by a specific group could be the result of a combination of factors at play.

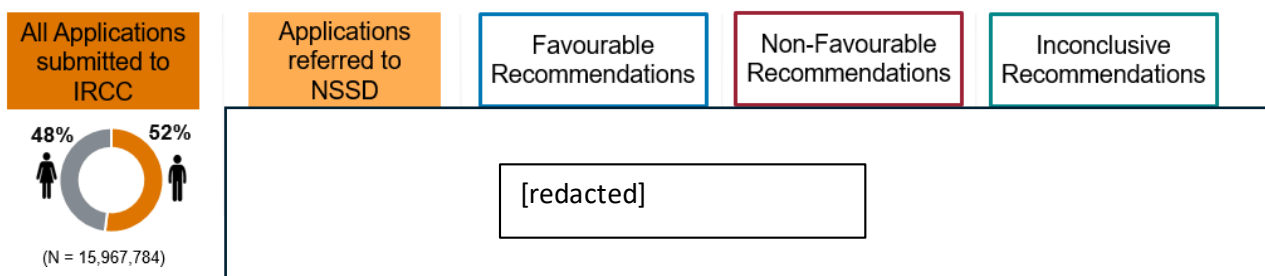
11.1. GBA+ characteristics of applicants and their risk profile

Finding 19: Applicants who were most likely to be selected for security screening were also generally those who were found to pose security concerns.

11.1.1. Gender of applicants

Between 2014–2015 and 2018–2019, individuals that submitted a TR or PR application to IRCC were almost equally distributed between males (52%) and females (48%). [redacted]

Figure 20. [redacted]



Source: Compiled by the evaluation team based on CBSA case management data (Secure Tracking System). Includes PR and TR referrals processed between April 2014 and March 2019.

Meanwhile, Table 3 displays the percentages of favourable, non-favourable, and inconclusive recommendations among applicants by gender. [redacted]

Table 3. [redacted]

Applicant's gender	Favourable	Non-Favourable	Inconclusive
Male	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
Female	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]

Source: Compiled by the evaluation team based on CBSA case management data (Secure Tracking System). Includes PR and TR referrals processed between April 2014 and March 2019.

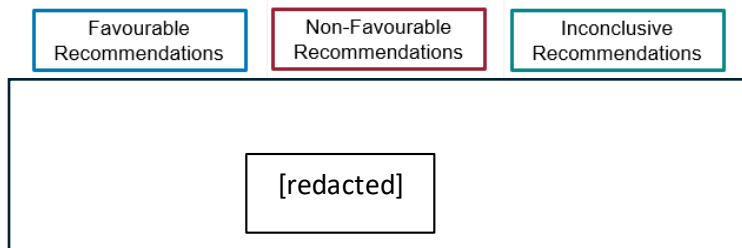
11.1.2. Age of applicants

Overall, the age group distribution of individuals who applied for a PR or TR visa was similar to the age group distribution of those referred for security screening. Individuals aged [redacted] were both most likely to submit an application to IRCC ([redacted] % of all applicants) and to be referred for security screening ([redacted] %), followed by those aged [redacted]

However, [redacted] is aligned with the expectations and experience of the security screening partners. Applicants aged [redacted] are considered more likely to have been involved in activities of concern to Program partners, [redacted] applicants are more likely to have [redacted] that fall under section 35 of IRPA. As well, there are often delays between the occurrence of an event of concern and the availability of sufficient information on the parties involved in the event and the specific role they played. These same factors may lead to [redacted] applicants among those who received inconclusive screening results, with the exception that in those cases, NSSD was [redacted]

Closer examination of the age distribution of applicants who received an inconclusive screening result indicated that the distribution was [redacted]. When these two groups were excluded from the calculations, the age distribution of applicants with inconclusive recommendations was similar to that of applicants who received favourable recommendations. This analysis highlights the importance of considering GBA+ factors in combination (e.g. gender, age and country of birth combined) as well as in a broader context of the Government of Canada’s priorities and how these impact the INSS program.

Figure 21. Applicants who received Non-Favourable and Inconclusive recommendations [redacted] Favourable recommendations



Source: Compiled by the evaluation team based on STS case data. Includes PR and TR referrals processed between April 2014 and March 2016.

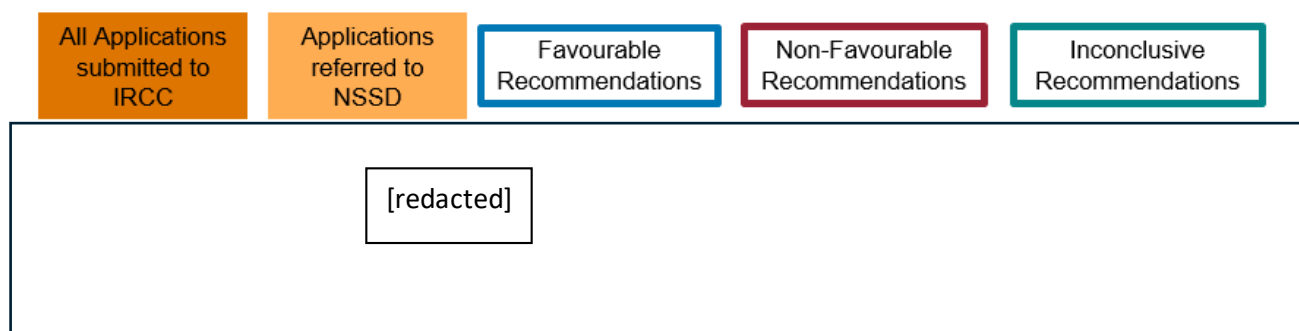
11.1.3. Country of birth of applicants

In terms of country of birth (COB), there was a notable difference between the general population of TR and PR applicants to IRCC and those referred for security screening, [redacted].⁶⁰ Applicants born in [redacted] were amongst those who most frequently received non-favourable recommendations (a combined total of [redacted]%), despite accounting for less than [redacted] % of all referrals to NSSD. On the other hand, while applicants born in [redacted] accounted for [redacted] % of all referrals, only [redacted] % of non-favourable recommendations were issued to [redacted]-born individuals. In terms of applicants who received inconclusive screening results, [redacted] % were born in [redacted], despite

⁶⁰ [redacted]

the fact that [redacted] -born applicants accounted for only [redacted] % of all referrals made to the NSSD (see Figure 22).

Figure 22. Aside from [redacted], applicants referred for screening were typically born in countries different than the [redacted] COB for submitted applications



Source: Compiled by the evaluation team based on IRCC and STS case data. Includes PR and TR referrals processed between April 2014 and March 2019.

The percentages of different recommendation types for applicants born in the countries that generated the most applications ([redacted]) and/or referrals ([redacted]) are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. A large proportion of [redacted] -born applicants received a Favourable recommendation, while applicants born in [redacted] were most likely to receive an Inconclusive screening result

Applicant's CoB	Favourable	Non-Favourable	Inconclusive
[redacted]	90%	3%	7%
[redacted]	98%	0%	1%
[redacted]	35%	5%	59%

Source: Compiled by the evaluation team based on CBSA case management data (Secure Tracking System). Includes PR and TR referrals processed (e.g. with a recommendation issued) between April 2014 and March 2019.

The large proportion of referred [redacted]-born applicants who were mostly screened as favourable may be explained by a very broad security screening indicator that mandated all [redacted] applicants of [redacted] born in [redacted] be referred. Program stakeholders acknowledged that the indicator generated a large number of unnecessary referrals, and was eliminated in May 2018. In turn, the large representation of applicants born in [redacted] among those receiving inconclusive screening results can be attributed to a bilateral agreement between Canada and [redacted] for NSSD to obtain the information needed to make conclusive inadmissibility decisions.

In summary, it is clear that the INSS Program impacts different GBA+ groups of applicants [redacted]. From the analysis, [redacted] to be referred for screening [redacted], which was aligned with their risk profile. For COB, the GBA+ analysis showed potential for program effectiveness improvement. Overall, it was recognized that risk assessment is based on multiple factors and certain groups of people may be more negatively impacted as a result of the combination of factors, rather than a single factor (such as age or COB alone). The Program would benefit from a thorough analysis of the alignment (or lack

thereof) between applicants' GBA+ characteristics and their actual risk profiles, including the combination of different characteristics (e.g. [redacted]). Such analysis could assist in further refining the security screening indicators, which, in turn, could result in greater Program effectiveness ([redacted]).

12. Conclusions

The NSSD's workload is at the mercy of fluctuating referrals; increases in workload can and do occur at various times due to changing Government of Canada priorities. During the evaluation period, the NSSD experienced two instances of unanticipated, significant increases in referral numbers — OSR and IIM — which adversely impacted the Program's ability to achieve its objectives of providing legally defensible recommendations to decision-makers in a timely manner. NSSD responded by adopting new policies and procedures, securing additional staff and staffing hours, and by enhancing inter-partner collaboration. Nonetheless, there was a large backlog in NSSD for a prolonged period, during which time the Division fell short of meeting the service standards and providing timely recommendations.

The evaluation concluded that the NSSD's recommendations are well-grounded in legislation. This is evidenced by the small proportion of legal challenges to immigration decisions based on security inadmissibility and a low success rate of applicants who do litigate their decisions. NSSD analysts have had access to legal advice and expertise on an ongoing basis and receive comprehensive training to be effective in their roles.

In terms of measuring performance, key variables such as legal defensibility have yet to be defined and outcomes are insufficiently articulated. Performance measurement, overall, is limited.

There are good working relations between NSSD, IRCC and CSIS in the security screening continuum, but all participating partners would benefit from leveraging the trilateral agreement to strengthen inter-departmental engagement and collaboration. The RCMP is noticeably absent from the process, and could bring much-needed information and intelligence to support NSSD in assessing inadmissibility related to organized criminality. There are opportunities to better coordinate the refugee claimant security screening activities internal to the CBSA, namely between NSSD and regional hearings and investigations units.

NSSD and its partners sought to improve the effectiveness of the referral process by refining the security screening indicators, but the impact of the new indicator packages remains unknown. There is a general lack of clarity among partners as to the intended objectives of the new indicator packages and how they could be measured. While not widespread, the involvement of locally-engaged staff in the initial screening of applications in IRCC missions is of concern and warrants further examination.

NSSD's policies and procedures were enhanced over the evaluation period, but internal procedures were not always being applied consistently across GeoDesks. In addition, analysts reported not being

kept up-to-date on changing country and region-specific conditions, including new and emerging events of concern. Writing briefs to accompany non-favourable recommendations so as to protect classified information, but so as not to jeopardize procedural fairness, is a challenge for NSSD analysts, and current SOPs do not provide explicit guidance in this regard.

Despite notable improvements in the Program's performance in 2018–2019, there remain areas of improvement to ensure the Program is in a better position to respond to future referral surges. Even without any significant events, referral numbers are expected to continually increase as overall immigration applications increase. Program adjustments could include greater flexibility with service standards, further refining security screening indicators, and developing a robust surge capacity plan, including the ability to readily access additional trained staff when necessary.

12.1. Recommendations

- 1.** The VP of I&E should strengthen the measurement of the Program's performance. This includes:
 - a) Revising the logic model to ensure that the immediate and intermediate outcomes fully capture the Program's intended objectives and include logical flow from one outcome to the other.
 - b) Revising the KPIs to align with the objectives in the revised Logic Model and assist NSSD's leadership with performance management accountability and decision-making. The new KPIs should include establishing internal processing times that are independent from service standards communicated to the IRCC.

- 2.** The VP of I&E should enhance the NSSD's Surge Capacity Plan, so as to develop additional capacity within CBSA to support a sudden surge in referrals. This includes the consideration of:
 - a) Identifying staff within CBSA, including Regional staff, who are able to conduct screenings and who can quickly be deployed on a part-time or full-time basis, and for an extended period if necessary.
 - b) Providing regular training and refresher training to the above identified staff.
 - c) Applying QA to security screenings conducted by the above identified staff.

- 3.** The VP of I&E should advocate for clearer articulation of the objectives of the new thematic indicators and their expected impact on the security screening process, and for the establishment of mechanisms to track the achievement of these objectives. This includes:
 - a) Advocating for the IRCC to develop and implement a standardized mechanism to track the specific security indicator(s) that trigger referrals to NSSD; this should allow for regular monitoring of their usage by IRCC missions and of the impact on the number of referrals made.
 - b) Advocating for the development and implementation of a strategy to measure the ongoing effectiveness of the new thematic indicators in terms of their impact on the quality of referrals sent to NSSD.

4. The VP of I&E should engage in systematic outreach and communication activities with CBSA regional hearings and investigations units to increase mutual understanding of the HQ and regional roles and responsibilities in the FESS process, with a view to minimizing duplication and enhancing collaboration.

This could include:

- a) Establishing a working group at the managerial level to regularly exchange information on new trends and events of concern within countries, regions and globally, as well as best practices, lessons learned and challenges in screening claimants and in preparing well-documented cases for IRB hearings.
- b) Establishing a mechanism through which NSSD analysts and regional officers have access to relevant intelligence (such as via subscription databases), and systematically share intelligence obtained (such as emerging trends seen with claimants from a specific country, or information shared by local police services) to enhance each other's work.
- c) Enhancing communication, to raise awareness of NSSD's processes and procedures, including the procedures to follow when regions need to ask NSSD for more time before a referral is closed and IRB is notified about the completed screening.

5. The VP of I&E should advocate to address a number of key interdepartmental issues through the fora referenced in the trilateral MoU, including:

- a) The roles and responsibilities in performance measurement across the continuum.
- b) The need for interdepartmental training.
- c) Adopting a whole-of-government approach to setting service standards, taking into account of inter-dependencies in service delivery.
- d) The development and implementation, by IRCC, of a monitoring mechanism to determine whether all applicants who should be referred for screening are being referred.

6. The VP of I&E should ensure that NSSD analysts have reliable and up-to-date information on country- and region-specific concerns and that all GeoDesks and teams apply policies, procedures and processes consistently. This includes:

- a) Conducting an internal exercise to map current security screening practices in each GeoDesk and teams within GeoDesks, and assessing whether improvements have been made in implementing a harmonized approach to security screening across NSSD.
- b) Introducing a standardized approach to collecting, storing and updating information on countries' social, political, economic changes, and to communicating such changes to analysts across GeoDesks in a timely manner.

7. The VP of I&E, in collaboration with the VP of ISTB, should develop a plan to:

- a) Assess program priorities and, accordingly, make adjustment to STS and the future replacement system (Security Referral Request Service), to start collecting additional data to support performance measurement.

- b) Ensure that SSA is fully operational with all its advanced functionalities, including the text-query reading capability before retiring STS; this is in view of mitigating major risks associated with the transition to the new system.

Appendix A: Management response and action plan

RECOMMENDATION 1	
<p>1. The VP of I&E should strengthen the measurement of the Program’s performance. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Revising the logic model to ensure that the immediate and intermediate outcomes fully capture the Program’s intended objectives and include logical flow from one outcome to the other. b) Revising the KPIs to align with the objectives in the revised Logic Model and assist NSSD’s leadership with performance management accountability and decision-making. The new KPIs should include establishing internal processing times that are independent from service standards communicated to the IRCC. 	
<p>Management response</p> <p>The VP of I&E agrees with the recommendation to strengthen the measurement of the Program’s performance. The National Security Screening Division has introduced many improvements to performance measurement over the last four years, but remains limited by an aging case management system and database of security screening activity. Planned improvements to the program’s IT infrastructure will enhance tracking of immigration security screening activities and support greater sophistication in performance measurement.</p> <p>The Finance and Corporate Management Branch has already been engaged to revise the logic model to improve alignment of performance outcomes.</p>	
Management action plan	Completion date
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Undertake internal consultations to establish internal service standards for case processing times. 2. Review and revise the immigration security screening program’s Performance Information Profile (PIP), including Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. May 31, 2021 2. June 30, 2021

RECOMMENDATION 2

2. The VP of I&E should enhance the NSSD's Surge Capacity Plan, so as to develop additional capacity within CBSA to support a sudden surge in referrals. This includes the consideration of:

- a) Identifying staff within CBSA, including Regional staff, who are able to conduct screenings and who can quickly be deployed on a part-time or full-time basis, and for an extended period if necessary.
- b) Providing regular training and refresher training to the above-identified staff.
- c) Applying QA to security screenings conducted by the above-identified staff.

Management response

The VP of I&E agrees with the recommendation to enhance its surge capacity. The most recent surge support in 2018 was successfully supported by members within the National Targeting Centre (NTC) and the Border Operations Centre (BOC), given their familiarity with the required enforcement systems. A three-day (refresher) to five-day (full instruction) training course was provided on the refugee business line, the most probable business line to experience a surge. The NTC, BOC and recent former NSSD employees employed within other areas of the Agency are viewed as the optimum target groups to support with a surge. The NSSD will also conduct a preliminary feasibility study to consider regional staff its surge plan.

Given the likelihood of a significant time gap between the need for surge support, staffing turnover within these areas make it impractical to implement a regular/recurring training schedule, and to identify staff too far in advance of the need. The VP of I&E will, however, work to enhance the readiness of a surge capacity plan by ensuring that a tailored training product remains updated and ready to deploy when required.

A QA framework exists. The applicable geographic desks within the NSSD will conduct systematic quality assurance reviews of the work being completed by surge support members using the NSSD's existing QA framework to ensure adherence to NSSD processes.

Management action plan	Completion date
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The NSSD will update its tailored training products for the refugee stream so that it is ready to deploy when the need arises. 2. The NSSD will conduct a preliminary feasibility assessment of incorporating regional staff in its surge plan, including the impact of training, IT scalability, and information security; to be approved by the VP. 3. Review and update the QA framework if there are changes to the surge response posture as a result of the feasibility assessment. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. July 31, 2021 2. July 31, 2021 3. September 30, 2021 (if required)

RECOMMENDATION 3

3. The VP of I&E should advocate for clearer articulation of the objectives of the new thematic indicators and their expected impact on the security screening process, and for the establishment of mechanisms to track the achievement of these objectives. This includes:

- a) Advocating for the IRCC to develop and implement a standardized mechanism to track the specific security indicator(s) that trigger referrals to NSSD; this should allow for regular monitoring of their usage by IRCC missions and of the impact on the number of referrals made.
- b) Advocating for the development and implementation of a strategy to measure the ongoing effectiveness of the new thematic indicators in terms of their impact on the quality of referrals sent to NSSD.

Management response

The VP of I&E agrees with the need for thematic indicators and an indicator tracking mechanism. Thematic indicators combined with a tracking mechanism is a cornerstone in the integrity and sustainability of the national security screening program.

The Intelligence Collection, Analysis & Production (ICAP) Division has responsibility for developing and maintaining thematic indicators and country profiles for the national security screening program. ICAP has established a priority list and has begun developing the initial thematic indicators and country profiles.

Management action plan

1. Establish a process to identify the demonstrable change expected from the thematic indicators.
2. Collaboration with IRCC to build indicator numbering and tracking functionality in GCMS continues. Presently IRCC advises the probable earliest deployment in GCMS would be in Q2-Q3 2022–2023.
3. IRCC, CSIS, NSSD and ICAP will collaborate in the quality assurance mechanisms to determine the effectiveness of indicators. This will be dependent upon (1) regular publication of thematic indicators by ICAP, (2) implementation of thematic indicator numbering and tracking across all IRCC networks, and (3) sufficient number of cases to be referred to accurately assess the specific indicator's effectiveness.

Completion date

1. June 30, 2021
2. December 31, 2022
3. March 31, 2024

RECOMMENDATION 4

4. The VP of I&E should engage in systematic outreach and communication activities with CBSA regional hearings and investigations units to increase mutual understanding of the HQ and regional roles and responsibilities in the FESS process, with a view to minimizing duplication and enhancing collaboration. This could include:

- a) Establishing a working group at the managerial level to regularly exchange information on new trends and events of concern within countries, regions and globally, as well as best practices, lessons learned and challenges in screening claimants and in preparing well-documented cases for IRB hearings.
- b) Establishing a mechanism through which NSSD analysts and regional officers have access to relevant intelligence (such as via subscription databases), and systematically share intelligence obtained (such as emerging trends seen with claimants from a specific country, or information shared by local police services) to enhance each other's work.
- c) Enhancing communication, to raise awareness of NSSD's processes and procedures, including the procedures to follow when regions need to ask NSSD for more time before a referral is closed and IRB is notified about the completed screening.

Management response

The VP of I&E agrees with the recommendation and commits to continuing to strengthen its existing relationships with CBSA regional colleagues across Canada. The NSSD has determined that capitalising on existing Manager/working-level groups to be the most effective mechanism for collaboration, as the regions are directly represented or represented by their HQ counterparts at these forums.

Management action plan

Completion date

- | Management action plan | Completion date |
|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The NSSD will actively highlight opportunities for collaboration through the Operational Issues Working Group (IRB-IRCC-CBSA), the Asylum Business Integration Group (IRB-IRCC-CBSA), the Integrated Claims and Assessment Centre (ICAC) Design and Implementation Working Group (IRB-IRCC-CBSA-CSIS) and the Taskforce for Less Complex Claims (IRB-CBSA-IRCC). This will also include exploring opportunities for collaboration with the new Refugee Unit within IEB in order to ensure coordination with the regions. 2. Through the Immigration Investigations and Hearings program management tables, the NSSD and Inland Enforcement will ensure integration by establishing a consultative committee of NSSD Advisors, Hearings Officers, Hearings Advisors and IEOs involved in immigration investigations to improve understanding of processes and to identify opportunities for program efficiencies and coordination with the Regions. The NSSD will also be invited to participate at the Director level Inland Enforcement Program Management meeting. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. September 29, 2021 2. May 5, 2021 3. March 8, 2021 4. July 9, 2021 5. September 31, 2021 |

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">3. The NSSD will appoint an FB-06 resource to serve as a centralized point of contact for FESS related matters, including as a subject matter expert for regional liaison and representation at meetings.4. NSSD and Inland Enforcement Division will develop a strategy for better information sharing of information and case law on serious inadmissibility cases including evidence that has been collected and sourced for NSSDs inadmissibility assessments and for use in preparing and presenting section 44 reports or refugee interventions in the Regions.5. The Enforcement Directorate will initiate consultations with key IEB stakeholders, proposing the acquisition of a CBSA enterprise license to products such as JANES, a key intelligence database subscription that both HQ and the regions would benefit from. | |
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RECOMMENDATION 5

5. The VP of I&E should advocate to address a number of key interdepartmental issues through the fora referenced in the trilateral MoU, including :

- a) The roles and responsibilities in performance measurement across the continuum.
- b) The need for interdepartmental training.
- c) Adopting a whole-of-government approach to setting service standards, taking into account of inter-dependencies in service delivery.
- d) The development and implementation, by IRCC, of a monitoring mechanism to determine whether all applicants who should be referred for screening are being referred.

Management response

The VP of I&E agrees with the recommendation. The MoU has been finalized and only requires ADM-level signatures from CBSA, CSIS, and IRCC.

Service standards are not included in the MoU, as transformative initiatives such as Robotic Process Automation and the Security Screening Automation (SSA) project are expected to have a significant positive effect on CBSA's ability to consistently meet service standards, even during surge times. Future consideration will be given to adding service standards as a separate annex once transformative measures such as thematic indicator tracking and SSA are implemented and a whole-of-government strategy on service standards has been jointly developed and approved by CBSA, CSIS, and IRCC. The lead on a service standards strategy would be IRCC as Citizenship screening service standards would also be included and CBSA is not involved in that activity.

There is no existing mechanism for IRCC to determine whether all applicants who should be referred for screening are being referred. This is a major undertaking which has not yet been identified to IRCC at this time, so it does not appear in the MoU. This initiative would be dependent upon implementation of thematic indicator tracking and would be an IRCC responsibility. Future consideration will be given to adding this as a separate annex once thematic indicator tracking is implemented in GCMS and a process for carrying out this work has been developed and implemented by IRCC.

Management action plan

Completion date

<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Interdepartmental training, a whole-of-government approach to setting service standards, and performance measurement across the continuum will be tabled and addressed through existing governance fora for the program in a progressive manner, commencing first with Tri-lateral Director Management meetings, before ending at the Permanent Body of Senior Officials.2. CBSA will advocate IRCC to consider implementing a mechanism to determine whether all applicants who should be referred for screening are being referred.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. February 11, 20222. May 19, 2021
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RECOMMENDATION 6

6. The VP of I&E should ensure that NSSD analysts have reliable and up-to-date information on country- and region-specific concerns and that all GeoDesks and teams apply policies, procedures and processes consistently. This includes:

- a) Conducting an internal exercise to map current security screening practices in each GeoDesk and teams within GeoDesks, and assessing whether improvements have been made in implementing a harmonized approach to security screening across NSSD.
- b) Introducing a standardized approach to collecting, storing and updating information on countries' social, political, economic changes, and to communicating such changes to analysts across GeoDesks in a timely manner.

Management response

The VP of I&E agrees with this recommendation. The NSSD will review current procedures and assess where improvement can be made, and will leverage existing tools and develop new mechanism to collect, store and update information related to national security screening.

NSSD performs quality assurance to ensure analysts are following policies, procedures and processes.

3. The NSSD holds regular meetings between supervisors from all GeoDesks to discuss practices.

Recurring/systematic sharing of relevant intelligence products occurs across GeoDesks on a regular and ad hoc basis, including on regular and secret networks.

Management action plan

1. NSSD will update its Standard Operating Procedures in consultation with all GeoDesks.
2. The NSSD will pilot basic and advanced functionalities of Apollo to collect, store and update country specific information to facilitate centralised storage of information.
3. The Intelligence Collection, Analysis and Production Division (ICAP) has completed its first priority setting exercise and has identified 30 countries as the first tranche to be developed/updated.

Completion date

1. December 30, 2021
2. September 30, 2021
3. March 31, 2023

RECOMMENDATION 7

7. The VP of I&E, in collaboration with the VP of ISTB, should develop a plan to:

- a) Assess program priorities and, accordingly, make adjustments to STS and the future replacement system (Security Referral Request Service), to start collecting additional data to support performance measurement.
- b) Ensure that SSA is fully operational with all its advanced functionalities, including the text-query reading capability before retiring STS; this is in view of mitigating major risks associated with the transition to the new system.

Management response

The VP of I&E and ISTB Branches agree with these recommendations.

Changes that can be made to STS to support performance measurement using existing data received from GCSM and collected by NSSD have been requested. Additional data required to support performance measurement is not being transmitted from GCMS; in order to receive the data, IRCC needs to change the information stored in GCMS and transmitted to STS.

STS will remain as a repository of legacy files, cases, and documents. A new case management system to replace STS for processing national security screening cases will be implemented while the automated functionalities of SSA are being developed, tested, and approved.

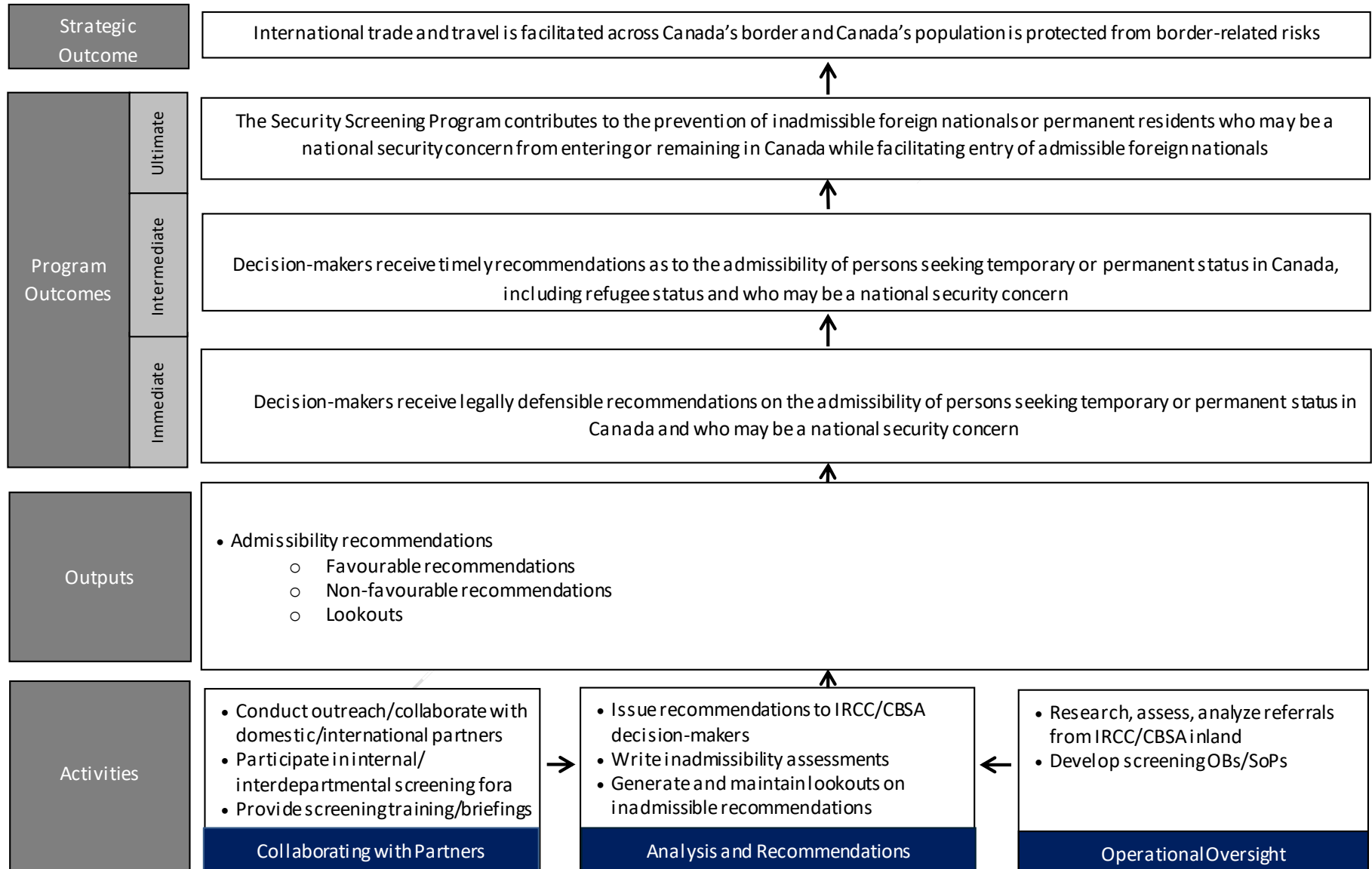
Management action plan

1. Request new elements in existing data fields of STS to capture national security screening steps.
2. Ensure the additional data fields to be transmitted from GCMS are included in the SSA business requirements.
3. Implement a new case management system for national security screening cases that incorporates advanced functionalities, and the ability to track sub-tasks and sub-processes of the national security screening continuum.
4. Embed a quality control function in the new case management system to allow NSSD officers to confirm if SSA returned the correct assessment before its full implementation, which includes evaluating if the text-query reading capability is working as expected.

Completion date

1. Request completed, implementation scheduled June 30, 2021 by ISTB
2. May 31, 2021
3. October 31, 2023
4. November 30, 2024

Appendix B: INSS logic model



Additional observations on the INSS Program's Logic Model

From a review of key performance measurement documents, the evaluation team identified opportunities for improvement with regards to some elements of the Program's logic model. Specifically, the logic model's immediate and intermediate outcomes are imprecise, as they mostly measure the quality of security screening recommendations, and not what the issuing of the recommendations is supposed to achieve.

A security screening recommendation, in itself, is an output listed in the logic model. A recommendation is issued within a certain time period, and with a certain rigour of research and consideration of legal precedent. As such, the immediate outcome should capture what the program expects will result from the issuance of timely and legally defensible recommendations. Similarly, the intermediate outcome should capture what the program expects will result from achieving the immediate outcome. For example, the immediate outcome could refer to decision-makers being able to make informed decisions on applicants' inadmissibility, while the intermediate outcome could address the legal defensibility of decisions based on NSSD's admissibility recommendations.

As in any real-world program or intervention, the Program only has full control over its own activities and outputs, as higher-level outcomes are influenced by external factors. However, NSSD is in a favourable position to influence the achievement of the Program's broader outcomes. For example, the Division and the IRCC benefit from an established process for resolving potential disagreements between the two departments, which impacts the achievement of higher-level objectives. As well, both NSSD and the CBSA regions process RC applications, which indicates an opportunity for an Agency-wide approach to performance measurement in this specific area. The close collaboration with IRCC and the shared mandate with CBSA regions should also facilitate NSSD's ability to collect the necessary data to be able to report on outcomes related to these partners and to objectively assess the NSSD's contribution therein.

Appendix C: Evaluation methodology and data limitations

The Security Screening Program has an approved logic model (see Appendix B: INSS logic model), logic model narrative, and a performance measurement framework. The logic model was updated in June 2019. The Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) Program Evaluation Division (PED) consulted these performance measurement tools during the development of the evaluation project scope and for the development of the evaluation plan.

The evaluation plan, which included the purpose, scope, and methodological approach for the evaluation, was developed in consultation with the Evaluation Advisory Committee. The Committee was comprised of Director Generals from key CBSA Branches as well as one Regional Director General. The evaluation plan also delineated the use of the CBSA's subject matter experts to support the evaluation team throughout the development of evaluation questions, data collection and analysis. This group of SMEs formed the Office of Primary Interest (OPI) and the Office of Secondary Interest (OSI) networks. Regular contact with OPI members, especially from the CBSA's Intelligence and Enforcement Branch, was essential to develop a good understanding of the program's activities and history.

Evaluation questions

The evaluation questions were outlined in an evaluation matrix, with corresponding sub-questions of interest, evaluation indicators, and data collection methods used. The following evaluation questions aimed at assessing the achievement of expected outcomes (effectiveness) and at demonstrating efficiency.

Achievement of Expected Outcomes:

- To what extent do decision-makers receive timely and legally defensible admissibility recommendations from the CBSA?
- To what extent has the Program contributed to preventing inadmissible foreign nationals who may be a national security concern from entering or remaining in Canada?
- How has the security screening process been experienced by diverse groups of applicants?

Demonstrating Efficiency:

- To what extent are the necessary internal policies, processes and resources in place to support implementation of the program?
- To what extent have the interconnections between the CBSA and program partners (IRCC, CSIS) supported or inhibited program integrity and the ability of the Agency to achieve intended program outcomes (e.g., clarity and appropriateness of roles and responsibilities, effectiveness and efficiency of protocols, information sharing and system interoperability)?
- To what extent are program processes efficient and optimize the use of resources?

Data collection methods/sources

Multiple data collection methods and sources were used to address the evaluation questions, including:

- Document review;
- CBSA financial and human resources data;
- CBSA case management systems data (data on referrals);
- IRCC case management system reports (data on applications and IRCC decisions);
- Semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from CBSA, IRCC, CSIS, and IRB; and
- Surveys with NSSD analysts and IRCC officers.

The evidence that was collected based on the above-mentioned methods and sources was compiled and analyzed as a whole. The common themes that emerged from multiple lines of evidence contributed to the development of preliminary evaluation findings. These findings, alongside the evidence that informed them, were presented to the OPI/OSI networks and the Evaluation Advisory Committee for review and input. The feedback from these consultations was incorporated, where relevant, into the final evaluation report and recommendations.

Document review

Document review took place throughout the evaluation project, from the planning to the examination phases. It was used to inform the evaluation scope, plan, and questions. Over 60 documents were reviewed, including CBSA internal program operational guidance, program performance reports, records of discussion from program oversight committee meetings, past evaluations and audits completed, security screening indicators, and MoUs between security screening program partners. Documents were reviewed systematically and, where appropriate, evidence was compiled and used to inform and address the evaluation questions.

Financial and human resources data

The CBSA PED collected and analyzed financial and human resources data to assess how the CBSA allocated resources towards Security Screening Program activities. The financial data was gathered through NSSD Reports, Cost Centre Hourly Reports, an Activity Monitoring Report, and a Salary History Report. The human resources data was collected through Timesheet reports, Overtime reports, and a Staff Movement Report. The analysis focused on assessing trends in the use of resources towards Security Screening Program activities each month, from April 2014 to March 2019.

Case management data

Case management data tracks the processing of applications throughout the security screening continuum and eventual enforcement actions. Considering the period scoped for this evaluation (2014–2015 to 2018–2019), the CBSA PED collected data reports from IRCC on all received PR and TR applications (reports from IRCC's Global Case Management System) and accessed data on all PR, TR, and

RC applications referred to by the NSSD (data extracted from CBSA’s Secure Tracking System, with the support of the CBSA’s Information, Science and Technology Branch). Also, the CBSA PED analyzed data reports on applicants subjected to enforcement actions (reports extracted from the CBSA’s National Case Management System). The analysis of case management data focused on identifying:

- Patterns of processing times across application types (PR, TR, RC);
- Patterns of recommendation types issued to different groups of applicants – based on gender, country of birth, and age group;
- Patterns of removals and detentions of applicants that received different recommendation types from NSSD; and
- Alignment between IRCC decisions on applications and NSSD’s recommendations issued.

Semi-structured interviews with government of Canada stakeholders

Interviews were conducted in-person or via teleconference with 46 key program representatives from the CBSA (HQ and Regions), IRCC, CSIS, and JUS (see Table 5). Some of the interviews were conducted with more than one stakeholder at a time, specifically if stakeholders held similar positions and responsibilities within an organization.

Table 5. Number of stakeholders interviewed, by stakeholder group

Stakeholder Group	Number of Stakeholders Interviewed
CBSA program representatives (Headquarters)	18
CBSA regional personnel	5
IRCC	11
CSIS	9
Department of Justice	3

In advance of the interviews, stakeholders received semi-structured interview guides with an outline of key issues and questions for discussion. The topics discussed during interviews varied based on the participant’s position (e.g. Director, Manager, Program Officer) and nature of engagement with the Security Screening Program (e.g. delivering the Program, supporting NSSD in specific areas etc.). Most interviews took place between January and March 2020 and were conducted in-person. Consultations with CBSA regional representatives were carried out via teleconference between March and August 2020. For all interviews, at least one evaluation team member took notes of interviewees’ responses and reflections.

The interview data was content analyzed by identifying common themes emerging from interviews. Results from this content analysis were discussed amongst evaluation team members to ensure that the data was interpreted in a consistent and accurate manner.

Surveys

Survey of NSSD Analysts

An online survey was administered to NSSD analysts from March 23, 2020 to April 6, 2020. The goal of this survey was to better understand the experiences of analysts while conducting screenings of PR, TR, and RC referrals, communicating and collaborating with counterparts at IRCC and CSIS. The survey was sent to analysts employed at NSSD at the time of the survey at FB-02 to FB-06 positions. Responses were received from 66 NSSD analysts, representing a 57% response rate. The structure and design of the survey ensured that respondents answered only those questions that were relevant to their roles, responsibilities, and levels of engagement with Program activities. For example, some questions were only asked of respondents that had previously issued an “inconclusive” screening result.

Survey of IRCC immigration officers based in overseas missions

An online survey was also administered to IRCC officers from August 17, 2020 to September 14, 2020. The survey was designed by the CBSA and programmed and administered with the support of the Evaluation and Performance Measurement group at IRCC. The survey was originally scheduled for March 2020 but had to be delayed because the work arrangements of the target population were heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The goal of this survey was to better understand the views and experiences of IRCC officers when screening, referring, and making decisions on the admissibility of applicants. The survey was distributed to 284 IRCC officers in overseas missions around the world. Responses were received from 130 IRCC officers, representing a 46% response rate. Similar to the survey implemented with NSSD analysts, the structure of the survey ensured that respondents answered only those questions that were relevant to their roles and responsibilities. For example, some questions were only asked of respondents that screen applicants from countries for which the Program had developed the new thematic indicator packages (see Section 7.1).

Key limitations, challenges and mitigation strategies

The evaluation timeline and data collection activities were impacted by significant delays in obtaining CBSA case management data. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic caused the IRCC survey to be delayed and meant that IRCC officers at in-Canada Case Processing Centres (CPCs) were not able to be surveyed. During the analytical phase, the evaluation team faced challenges in terms of having the required computer power to process and analyze the large case management datasets. The timeline of the evaluation was extended to account for these delays, and to ensure that the necessary data could be collected and properly processed.

Appendix D: NSSD’s service standards

Service standards are outlined in NSSD’s internal guidance document referred to as “Standard Operating Procedures.”⁶¹ The service standards vary depending on the type of application being assessed (PR, TR, or RC), the urgency or purpose of the application (e.g., VIP application, electronic travel authorization), and on the location (by IRCC mission) where the application was submitted. Table 6 presents the service standards that were in effect from 2014–2015 to 2018–2019 for TR, PR, and RC referrals respectively.

Table 6. Service standards for processing TR, PR and RC applications (2014–2015 to 2018–2019)

Service standard	Type of case / country (mission)
Temporary Resident Applications	
2 business days	Very Important Persons (VIPs)
	Urgent cases
5 business days	China (Beijing; Guangzhou; Hong Kong; Shanghai)
10 business days (also referred to as Tier 1 Missions)	Pre-Diplomatic Cases
	Haiti (Port-au-Prince)
	India (Bangalore; Chandigarh; New Delhi)
	Lebanon (Beirut)
	Pakistan (Islamabad)
	Russia (Moscow)
20 business days (also referred to as Tier 2 Missions)	Saudi Arabia (Riyadh)
	All other Missions
	Electronic Travel Authorization
Permanent Resident Applications	
2 business days	Urgent cases
110 calendar days	Cases referred and closed at Stage 2 (Assessment)
Refugee Claims	
25 calendar days	Claimants from Designated Countries of Origin (DCO)
55 calendar days	Claimants from any country, other than DCO

Source: PED, in consultation with NSSD subject-matter experts.

NSSD aims to process 80% of applications in each category within the established service standard for any given month⁶². The remaining 20% are reserved for referrals that take longer time to process due to their complexity and/or interdependencies with other partners.

⁶¹ The NSSD revised the service standards in September 2019. Considering the evaluation scoped period, from 2014–2015 to 2018–2019, the analysis considered the service standards in effect from April 2014 to March 2019.

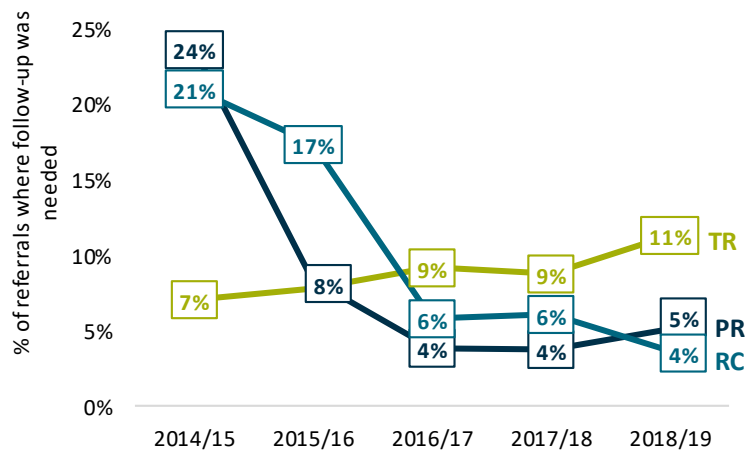
⁶² NSSD, Standard Operating Procedure, Volume 0, section 6

Appendix E: Trends in incomplete referrals

For referrals that do not contain all the information required to conduct a comprehensive screening, the NSSD reaches out to the office that made the referral to obtain the required information. The referring office could be an IRCC mission overseas or in Canada, or a CBSA region processing a refugee claim. NSSD needs to wait for a response, which generally requires the referring office to contact the applicant/claimant; this inevitably causes a delay in processing the referral.

During the evaluation period, the proportion of referrals that lacked all the required information declined steeply for PR and RC, but saw a modest increase for the TR business line (see Figure 23). This suggests the information requirements for PR and RC were streamlined and/or efforts were made to communicate the requirements to IRCC offices and CBSA regions⁶³.

Figure 23: The proportion of incomplete PR and RC referrals plummeted over the evaluation period



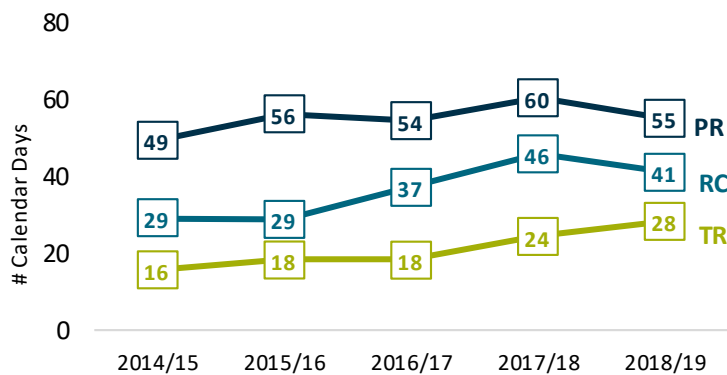
Source: Compiled by the evaluation team using STS data

⁶³ Even though the *percentage* of TR referrals submitted without all required information saw only a minor increase, this increase resulted in a much higher *actual number* of referrals for which NSSD had to follow up with partners (from an average of 291 in 2014–2015 to 566 in 2018–2019). In the same time period, the difference in the PR and RC business lines was much less significant: 55 to 62 per month for PR and 185 to 128 per month for RC.

A number of IRCC missions and CBSA regions had a significant proportion of referrals that lacked the required information for the NSSD to complete the screening. While most IRCC missions sent complete referrals, one quarter (26%) of Chandigarh’s referrals were incomplete, as were 18%-19% of referrals from Guangzhou and Ho Chi Minh missions. Among CBSA regions, 16% of GTA’s were incomplete, as were 13% of those submitted by the Southern Ontario Region.

The average number of days that NSSD waited for partners to provide missing information grew across all three business lines over the evaluation period. Waiting times were about 1-2 weeks longer in 2018–2019 than they had been in 2014–2015, although were on a downward trend for PR and RC referrals at the end of the evaluation period (see Figure 24).

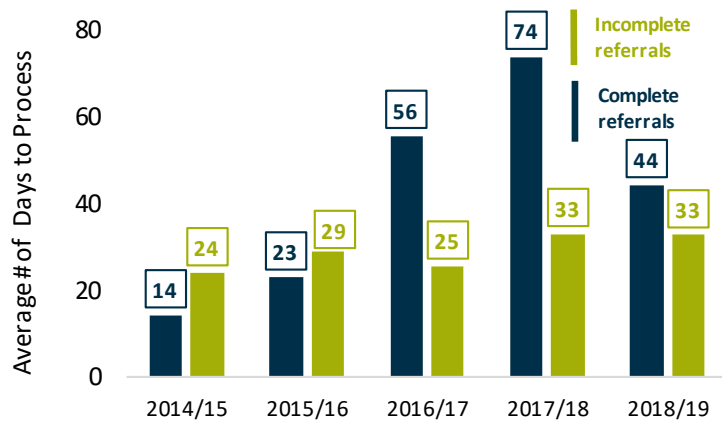
Figure 24: The time taken to obtain information increased across all business lines



Source: Compiled by the evaluation team using STS data

Data showed that incomplete referrals were processed faster than those received with all the required information. While incomplete referrals may extend the overall processing time, these referrals did not contribute to NSSD’s backlog. In addition, when the backlog fell considerably in 2018–2019, the average processing time for complete referrals fell significantly, while average processing times for incomplete referrals remained stable compared to the previous year (see Figure 25).

Figure 25. After 2015–2016 (post-OSR), processing times were significantly longer for referrals that did not involve requests for missing information



Source: Compiled by the evaluation team using STS data

Appendix F: Inter-partner initiatives

Initiatives to develop and refine security screening indicators

Indicator review inter-departmental working group (IRIWG). Led by the CBSA, the IRIWG has brought together representatives of the CBSA, CSIS and IRCC, and also consulted with Global Affairs Canada. The working group sought both to develop and update [redacted] thematic indicator packages as well as to ensure [redacted] information in the *IC Manual – Chapter 2* and Indicator Packages were complete and up-to-date. Sixteen new thematic indicator packages were developed by the IRIWG in 2018 and 2019.

Pilot study to track the use of the new indicators. In 2019–2020, the CBSA and IRCC launched pilot projects to improve the tracking of the usage of security screening indicators by IRCC officers. The first small-scale pilot was followed by a larger one; however, it was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Once evaluated, the results will inform the development of an expanded, full-scale project to track how IRCC officers use security screening indicators in assessing every application (for more information, see [Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference.](#)).

NSSD analysts advising IRCC officers in CPC-Ottawa. Historically, the CPC-Ottawa has generated large numbers of referrals to NSSD, but has a low percentage of non-favourable recommendations. Since 2018–2019, and with a view to improving the quality of referrals, the NSSD has been sending a couple of its analysts to the CPC-Ottawa on a regular basis, to work alongside IRCC case processing officers. Feedback has indicated that having direct access to NSSD analysts has assisted the CPC's case processing officers in correctly understanding and applying the security screening indicators in the initial assessment of applications.

Initiatives to measure the effectiveness of indicators and improved quality of referrals

NSSD alone or in collaboration with IRCC carried out several initiatives to assess the performance of the new thematic indicators. In 2019–2020, the NSSD assessed the impact of the first four thematic indicator packages on the Division's workload by comparing the number of referrals received from the respective IRCC missions and from one of the Case Processing Centres (CPC) in Canada. The goal of the initiative was to identify any new trends in numbers of referrals received from these missions and in the types of NSSD recommendations issued on these referrals. Similar to the quantitative analysis described above, NSSD compared the number of referrals for applicants [redacted] received in the one-year period before the launch of the indicator packages (August 2017 to July 2018) to the one-year period after (August 2018 to July 2019)⁶⁴. However, this initiative did not consider the increasing numbers of applications seen by IRCC in that same period. The patterns varied across the four groups, meaning that

⁶⁴ Note that the time periods differ between our quantitative analysis and the NSSD's initiative.

no specific impact of the new indicator packages could be determined. Multiple factors may have contributed to the varied results of the trend analysis, including:

- New business line for the CPC located in Ottawa;
- Suspension of one mandatory indicator [redacted] shortly before the implementation of the new thematic indicator package; and
- End of OSR family reunification applications.

Regarding the type of NSSD recommendations issued on these referrals, there was an increase in the proportion of Non-Favourable recommendations for referrals [redacted] and from two missions with large numbers of applications that process applicants [redacted]. On the other hand, the proportion of Non-Favourable recommendations decreased for TR referrals [redacted] and from two other missions with large numbers of applications that process applicants [redacted].

Other, more targeted initiatives were carried out jointly by the CBSA and IRCC, and aimed at assessing the impact of security screening indicators on the quality of referrals:

1	In 2019–2020, the CBSA (Europe, Africa and Iran Geographic Desk) participated in a three-month project where IRCC officers were required to record into a notes field in GCMS which indicators led to their decision to refer applications to the NSSD. According to NSSD, the results from this assessment were shared and discussed with IRCC, leading to an increased quality of referrals. ⁶⁵ However, it was also noted that recording this information into an unstructured field in the system and conducting any follow-up analysis is labour intensive.
2	An ongoing program initiative led by the IRCC and supported by the CBSA (NSSD) is working to develop, test, and implement a numbering system that will enable IRCC officers to systematically track and record security screening indicators that led to the referral of applications to NSSD and CSIS. ⁶⁶ The numbering system will be accompanied by a change to available GCMS fields, which will facilitate the entry of such data through a drop-down menu of the codes.
3	In 2018–2019, the CBSA (Asia and Oceania Geographic Desk) completed a review of referrals received based on the first version (August 2018) of the thematic indicator package developed [redacted]. The NSSD’s assessment of these referrals informed the development of a new version (January 2019) of the thematic indicator package [redacted], designed to reduce the number of unnecessary referrals received from applicants [redacted]. ⁶⁷

Overall, the initiatives carried out by the CBSA and IRCC do not provide a conclusive assessment of how effective the thematic indicators are. The pre-post analysis conducted by NSSD did not confirm any quantitative or qualitative patterns that could be clearly attributed to the introduction of the new indicators. The other initiatives, while modest in scope, allowed the NSSD to better understand how IRCC officers used the thematic indicators. This resulted in the update of one thematic indicator package

⁶⁵ CBSA, NSSD Annual Report 2019-2020, p.12.

⁶⁶ CBSA, NSSD Action Plan Task List, p.6.

⁶⁷ CBSA, NSSD Annual Report 2019-2020, p. 10.

[redacted] and in the revision and improvement of how referrals are identified in one specific IRCC Mission. The project that aims at tracking how thematic indicators impact referrals, once implemented, will allow for a more comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of security screening indicators.

Initiatives to improve policies and procedures

Some of the key efforts by stakeholders to improve Program policies and procedures are presented in Table 7. **Error! Reference source not found.**

Table 7. NSSD engaged in several significant efforts to improve its policies and procedures

<p>Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)</p> <p>NSSD updated its SOPs as part of its backlog reduction efforts in 2018. These procedures provided detailed instructions on how to conduct screenings and specified the roles and responsibilities of the different staff involved.</p>
<p>Business Mapping Report</p> <p>In 2018, a trilateral business mapping exercise was conducted in which NSSD was heavily involved. A formal report resulted, along with recommendations; some of these were found feasible to implement while others were not.</p>
<p>Backlog Reduction and Transformation Action Plan (BRTAP)</p> <p>NSSD introduced a suite of policy and procedural adjustments in 2018–2019 (see Section Error! Reference source not found. for more information) that served as the catalyst for reducing inventory and backlog in 2018–2019.</p>
<p>Trilateral Security Screening Diagnostic (TSSD)</p> <p>In the midst of rising numbers of referrals and growing inventory and backlog in 2017–2018, NSSD, IRCC, and CSIS conducted the TSSD to identify inefficiencies in the security screening continuum and to propose solutions. The most notable of these were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Developing new thematic screening indicators (see Section 7.1). ▪ Eliminating incomplete referrals from IRCC (referrals that do not contain all the required information to conduct the screening).⁶⁸ ▪ Allowing Non-Favourable recommendations to be valid indefinitely.⁶⁹
<p>CBSA National Security Screening Business Enhancement Review (NSS BER)</p> <p>In 2016, the CBSA Business Enhancement Initiative conducted a workflow review of Permanent Resident and Temporary Resident processes to identify program improvement opportunities. The NSS BER produced recommendations that, if implemented, would support NSSD in delivering screenings in</p>

⁶⁸ Interviewees indicated that this has yet to be achieved, as NSSD continues to receive referrals with incomplete applicant information from certain missions.

⁶⁹ Previously, these recommendations had a 48-month validity period, which subjected NSSD to repeat screenings that often resulted in the same recommendation. For example, someone who was found inadmissible due to an implication in a war crime (IRPA s.35) would be found inadmissible again 48 months later as that past association would not have changed.

a more efficient and effective manner. Some of the recommendations were implemented in the context of NSSD's BRTAP in 2018–2019.

Appendix G: Backlog reduction and transformation action plan (BRTAP) measures enacted by April 2020

Category	Measures
Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enhance communication between NSSD Managers and IRCCMPMs and CMB to build efficiencies, reduce the number of problem cases, and explore ceasing screening for approved national interest letters ▪ Revive the Indicator Working Group and review the risk indicators manual (IC2) with IRCC and security partners ▪ Collaborating with IRCC to reduce the number of duplicate referrals from missions (ex. Refer once for section 34 and refer again for section 35 or same in-ad concerns referred multiple times) ▪ Consult with United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand on their screening processes to identify best practices ▪ Specific positions within NSSD (Manager, Senior Program Advisor, and Senior Program Officer) are included in the list of designated officials for the 2003 Statement of Mutual Understanding with the USA for Case-by-Case Immigration Information Sharing ▪ NSSD will post four analysts on a part-time basis to the CSIS Security Screening Branch (CSIS-led Fusion Centre)
HR/training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Front-End Security Screening (FESS) assistance from the Border Operations Centre (BOC) and National Targeting Center (NTC) who will query applicants in IBQ ▪ Offer overtime to meet legislative requirements for FESS cases ▪ Overtime is extended to NTC and BOC employees ▪ Hired students through FSWEF for each desk in 2018 ▪ Obtaining PCO training for NSSD analysts ▪ Implement a divisional <i>“Mitigating the Impact of Exposure to Offensive and Horrific Material”</i> protocol ▪ Review, update, and deliver NSSD lookout training for Border Operations Centre Staff
Policy or procedural change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The NSSD will stop compiling specific risk assessments. Where CSIS information was used, the NSSD will receive the national interest letter, send CSIS the CA number, and forward the CSIS brief to IRCC with no cover note ▪ Reduce the level of approval required for low-risk briefs, such as those that are templated for known organisations (FB6 to FB4 with peer review) ▪ Streamline the screening process for refugee claimants from Haiti (low risk) by conducting screening before the BoC arrives ▪ Issue reminder of existing SOP regarding closing FESS cases as inconclusive when BoC not received within 60 days ▪ Stop reviewing paper FESS intake documents when all required information is available in GCMS ▪ Streamline security screening for Home-Maker applicants with no travel or employment history ▪ Streamline the screening process (not waiting for BoC) for refugee claimants from low risk countries, [redacted]

Category	Measures
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Modernize NSSD Standard Operating Procedures ▪ Streamline refugee claimant security screening by not waiting for the basis of claim to arrive if all queries are negative and an No Reportable Trace has been received ▪ Extend the validity of NSSD non-favourable recommendations from 48 months (4 years) to life ▪ Closing as favourable PR referrals that have been designated as No Reportable Trace and the applicant had a favourable recommendation in the last 48 months for a TRV ▪ Streamline screening of low-risk asylum claimants by utilizing IBQ to screen s.34 referrals that have been designated as No Reportable Trace by PILLAR ▪ Create fourth geographic desk (AMER) in NSSD ▪ Elimination of an artifact process that delayed closing certain referrals by 25 days ▪ Develop an NSSD surge capacity plan
<p>Referral management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Embed an NSSD employee in CPC-Ottawa on a part-time basis ▪ Pilot a sampling exercise on referrals from the top 5 volume missions every 6 months ▪ Provide training and guidance to IRCC on the application of indicators ▪ Remind missions of policy on student and homemaker visa applicants ▪ Implement a numbering system to allow quality assurance of indicators ▪ Provide “green phone” training to Beirut, Amman, Abu Dhabi, Ankara, and London to improve quality of referrals ▪ Provide training and guidance to improve quality of referrals from Tunisia ▪ Analyze referrals of COBs in the first four thematic indicator packages during the 12 months before and 12 months after TI packages were published ▪ Make all non-thematic indicators, except lookouts, discretionary ▪ Provide training and guidance to IRCC in Missions Abroad on the application of indicators ▪ Work with IRCC to improve the quality of referrals from CPC-O
<p>Review or modification of existing processes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Analysis of security screening referrals from Ankara ▪ Analysis of “Inconclusive” Recommendations ▪ Analysis of “On Hold” referrals ▪ Backlog and Referral Analysis (October 1, 2018 – March 31, 2019) ▪ Review and update 48 month resubmission policy ▪ Analysis of Pending Pillar cases more than a year overdue
<p>Use of technology / automation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pilot a WebEx training and assess if benefit to implement yearly training for the Missions that are generating a high level of referrals. Goal is to ensure that the NSSD receives quality referrals based on risks and inadmissibility ▪ Implement the use of IBQ to perform searches at the triage stage ▪ Use of IBQ Bulk Query to triage cases that have been designated as No Reportable Trace ▪ Pilot the use of Babel X software ▪ STS maintenance and upgrades ▪ Obtain ability to reset STS passwords for NSSD employees

Source: BRTAP (2018), measures grouped into categories by the evaluation team.

Note: Measures listed as In Progress, On Hold, or Discontinued are not included.



Appendix H: Unique and overlapping screening activities between NSSD and Regions

An independent FESS Review conducted in 2017 identified screening tasks that are unique to both NSSD and CBSA regions and those that are conducted by both, i.e. where there is an overlap. The evaluation team consulted the list with regional stakeholders and updated it (see Figure 26). However, it should be noted that some of this overlap may be justified or even required due to the time that in some cases passes between NSSD’s screening and the IRB hearing or for regional officers to determine if the case is strong enough to be pursued in front of IRB.⁷⁰

Figure 26. There are numerous screening activities that are being conducted both by NSSD and CBSA regions.

NSSD	Overlap	Regions
<p>Classified Sources</p> <p>CSIS Briefs (s.34) SIGINT Secure Area</p> <p>System/Database Checks</p> <p>STS-B / STS-S Jane’s World LexisNexis Open Source Enterprise Standalone Computers</p> <p>Other</p> <p>Centralized Information Sharing Unit (CISU) TUSCAN</p>	<p>Intake Document Analysis</p> <p>Identification documents Basis of Claim IMM008 Schedule A Schedule 12 Interview/Officer Notes</p> <p>System/Database Checks</p> <p>NCMS GCMS / FOSS Groups of Interest List CPIC / NCIC INTERPOL IBQ / ICES IMS MSFT Repository</p> <p>Open Source</p> <p>Google / Internet Search Social Media</p>	<p>Fingerprints</p> <p>RCMP FBI INTERNATIONAL FCC-UK FCC-AUS FCC-NZ FCC-USA</p> <p>Interviews</p> <p>Claimant</p> <p>Liaison with Partners</p> <p>Liaison Officers U.S. Consulate FBI RCMP Local Police CBP DHS</p> <p>+ Review of criteria related to immigration trends and/or projects identified by the Intelligence/Investigations and Removals teams (EIOD)</p>

Source: Adapted from Deloitte (2017). *In-Canada Refugee Claim Screening Process (FESS) Review*. Updated with information from stakeholder consultations.

⁷⁰ This may be partially determined by the fact that NSSD looks for information to satisfy its threshold *reasonable grounds to believe*, which may often not be sufficient to convince an IRB member that a foreign national effectively poses a security risk to Canada.

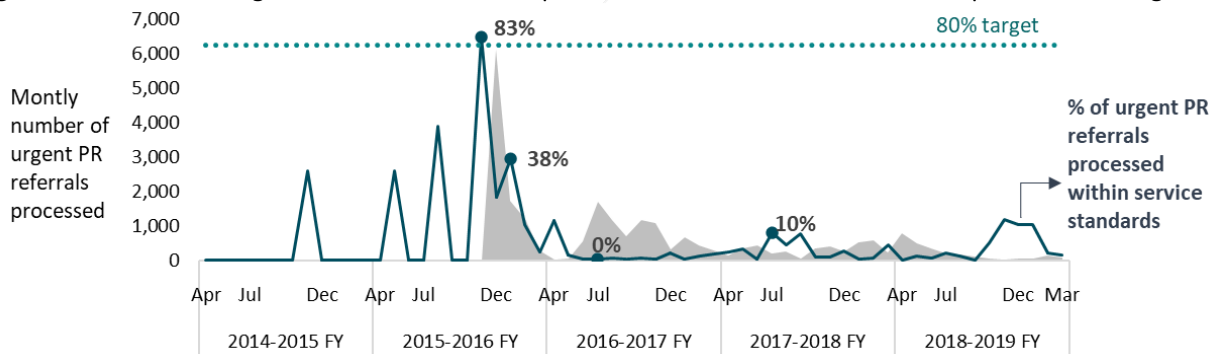
Appendix I: The impact of OSR and IIM on service standards and NSSD’s response

OSR and IIM were undeniable major causes of NSSD’s backlog seen during the evaluation period. In addition to the increased number of referrals through OSR, the mislabeling of most OSR referrals as urgent also played a role in how NSSD was managing the surge. The IIM, on the other hand, had a clear impact on the Division’s ability to process RC referrals. NSSD responded by re-allocating staff from one business line to the other and relying on unlimited overtime by staff.

The impact of OSR PR referrals mislabelled as “urgent”

In total, 83% of OSR referrals received from November 2015 to February 2016 were in the urgent category. Key Program stakeholders indicated that PR referrals under OSR were frequently submitted as “urgent” (with a service standard of 48 hours) even at times when those referrals were not urgent.⁷¹ As this issue was known to the CBSA and CSIS, urgent PR referrals were mostly screened as “standard”, typically with a service standard of 110 calendar days. However, the overuse of the “urgent” PR category made it challenging for the Program to adequately assess its performance in processing legitimately urgent referrals. As shown in Figure 27, NSSD rarely managed to meet its service standards performance target for urgent PR referrals during the evaluation period. Some interviewees suggested that the erroneous categorization of referrals as urgent continued in some missions post-OSR, which could help explain the Division’s well-below target performance from December 2015 onwards.

Figure 27. Most of the urgent PR referrals were not processed within the service standards performance target



Source: Compiled by the evaluation team based on CBSA case management data (STS)

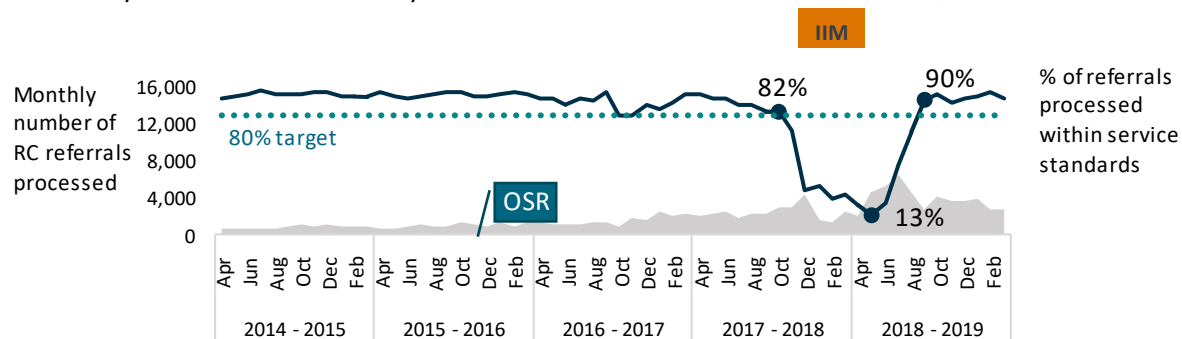
⁷¹ According to the *IC Manual – Chapter 1, Security Screening Process Manual* (Section 10.4), only extraordinary cases should justify the categorization of a referral as “urgent”. If a case is assessed as “urgent”, IRCC officers are instructed to include a “clearly articulated rationale, citing national interest or humanitarian and compassionate grounds.”

The impact of IIM on processing RC referrals

Note: Between July 2017 and March 2020, 55,677 irregular migrants at the Canada-U.S. border claimed refugee protection status in Canada. As per the FESS policy, all adult claimants were referred to NSSD for security screening. (Source: [IRB](#))

The processing of RC referrals (shown in Figure 28) was largely unaffected by OSR. During the evaluation period, NSSD met its 80% performance target for RC referrals until November 2017, when the Division started to face pressure stemming from IIM. NSSD was unable to screen the large numbers of irregular migrants then claiming asylum fast enough; by May 2018, the Division processed only 13% of RC referrals within service standards. However, NSSD was able to return to meeting its performance target by September 2018, less than a year after the initial impact of IIM and despite the fact that irregular migrants were continuing to arrive in significant numbers.

Figure 28. The NSSD’s ability to process RC referrals within its service standards performance target was affected by IIM in late 2017 and early 2018

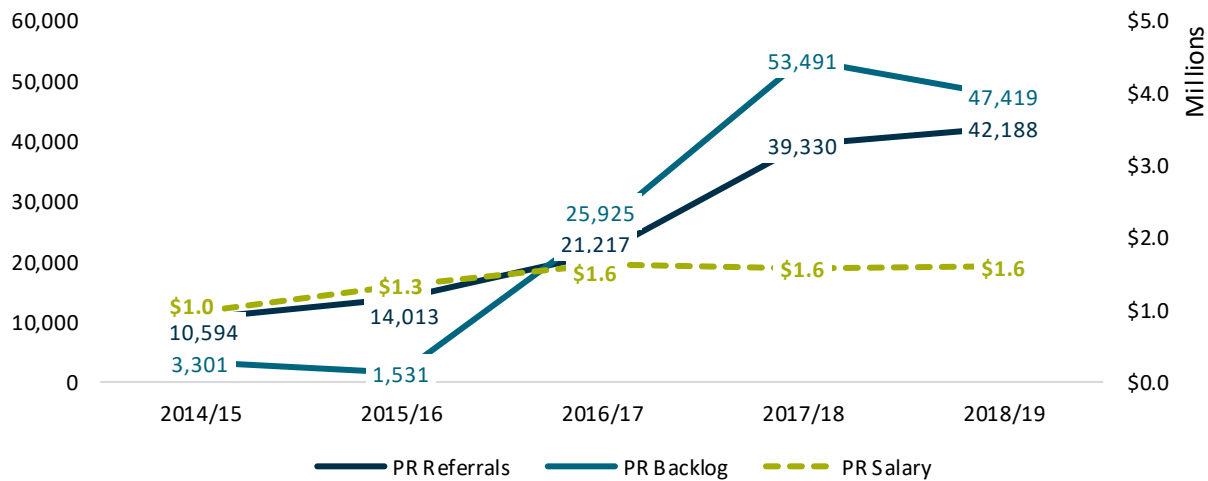


Source: Compiled by the evaluation team based on CBSA case management system data (STS).

NSSD’s response to the surges in referrals

In response to OSR, NSSD initially reallocated resources to processing PR applications. However, even as PR backlog continued to increase significantly after 2015–2016, the Division decreased PR salary expenditures between 2016–2017 and 2017–2018 (see Figure 29) as it started to face new challenges. This decrease of resources allocated to PR coincided with the sudden increase of refugee claims resulting from IIM. Essentially, NSSD did a further reallocation of staff to the RC business line, where the need was even more pressing.

Figure 29. OSR triggered a backlog buildup that accelerated through 2016–2017 and beyond. Comparatively modest increases in salary expenditures could not compensate for the additional workload



Source: Compiled by the evaluation team using STS and NSSD HR data.

Note: The percentage figures indicate the percentage change from the **previous fiscal year**, not the base year. For example, the 1,593% increase in backlog in 2016–2017 is the percentage increase from 2015–2016 backlog levels, not 2014–2015 levels.

NSSD responded to IIM proportionally to the increased workload resulting from the event. In 2017–2018, the proportional growth in RC salary expenditures almost exactly matched the proportional growth in the RC backlog; further salary expenditure increases followed in 2018–2019 (see Figure 30 **Error! Reference source not found.**). NSSD’s response to IIM was driven by the pressure to process RC screenings within legislated timelines. By law, the IRB must hold a refugee hearing within a certain timeline, and requires a completed security screening to do so. If the screening is not processed on time, the IRB is required to reschedule the hearing, as was frequently the case in 2017.^{72,73} However, the IRB may also proceed with a hearing without a security screening being completed if NSSD has not provided one within 6 months, potentially granting protection to an inadmissible person. A further pressure, cited by NSSD stakeholders, were reports in the Media on the asylum program, particularly with regards to the large numbers of irregular migrants crossing at the Canada-U.S. Border. This includes reports highlighting the possibility of having refugee claimants living in Canada while awaiting their IRB hearing for months or even years, and potentially lacking a complete security screening.^{74,75} As such, the processing of refugee claims has been prioritized by the NSSD.

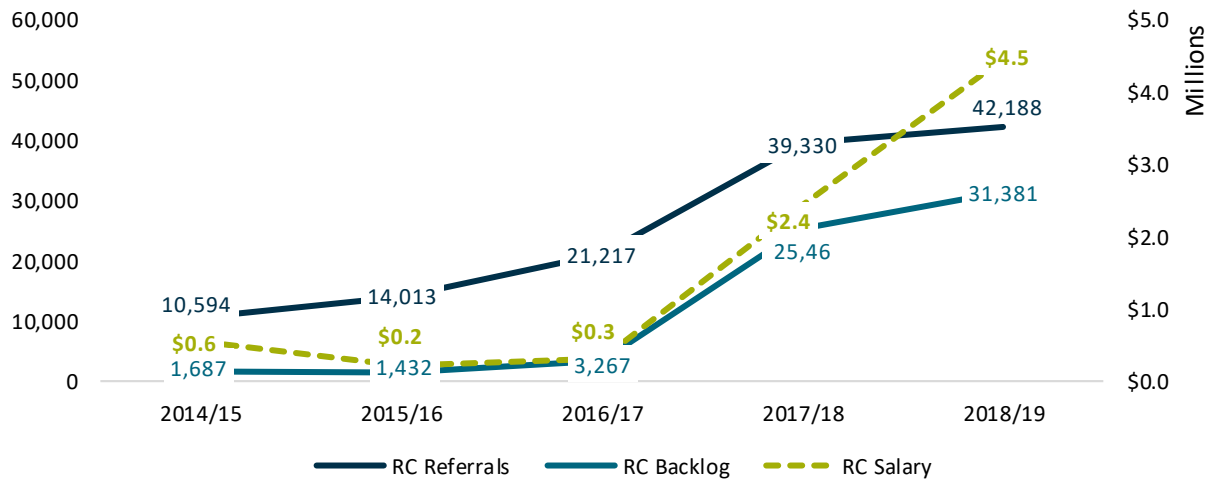
⁷² In 2017, only 18% of claimants received a hearing within the required timeline.

⁷³ Office of the Auditor General (OAG). 2019 Spring Reports of the Auditor General of Canada to the Parliament of Canada. Report 2 – Processing of Asylum Claims. Accessed from: https://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/internet/English/parl_oag_201905_02_e_43339.html

⁷⁴ For example: Keung, N. (Feb 5, 2019). *Concerns raised over national security amid refugee screening backlog*. The Star. Accessed from <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2019/02/05/concerns-raised-over-national-security-amid-refugee-screening-backlog.html?rf>

⁷⁵ For example: Wright, T. (May 16, 2019). *Fact check: Has every single refugee claimant in Canada been screened?* Accessed from <https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/fact-check-has-every-single-refugee-claimant-in-canada-been-screened-1.4424685>

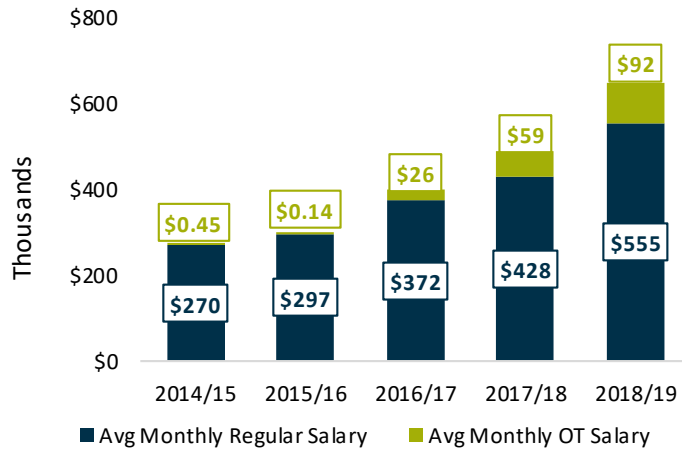
Figure 30. In response to the backlog in RC referrals that accumulated following IIM, NSSD increased RC salary expenditures proportionally, and succeeded in greatly reducing the backlog by 2018–2019



Source: Compiled by the evaluation team using STS and NSSD HR data .

Of note, **NSSD’s initial response to mobilize staff OT hours in response to OSR and IIM became a permanent measure** for the years to come. In two instances, OT increased significantly: by 376% in the first six months of 2017 and by 288% in the last eight months of the evaluation period; the latter instance was part of the BRTAP (see Section 4.2.2). By the end of the evaluation period, 14% of NSSD’s total salary expenditures were accounted for by OT (compared to just 0.2% in 2014–2015; see Figure 31). In spite of this extraordinary increase in additional time worked by NSSD staff across the Division, this measure alone was not sufficient to contain the backlog until additional, more comprehensive measures were introduced.

Figure 31. NSSD's OT expenditures (all lines of business) grew from 0.2% to 14% of total salary spending



Source: Compiled by the evaluation team using NSSD HR data.

Appendix J: IRCC officers' use and assessment of the security screening indicators

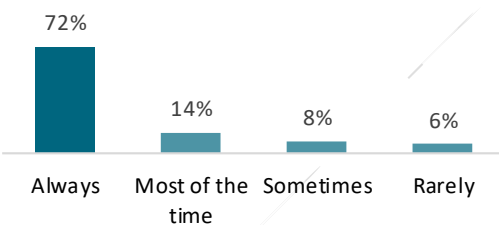
In order for security screening indicators to be effective, they need to be readily accessible and regularly used by IRCC officers. Interviews with internal and external stakeholders indicated that IRCC officers at missions abroad faced challenges in accessing and using security screening indicators due to their Secret/Canadian Eyes Only classification. This classification requires that the indicators are stored securely in locked cabinets in secluded areas of the mission, meaning their retrieval may be onerous and thus discourage officers from consulting them when required.

Nonetheless, most (79%) IRCC officers working at missions overseas who responded to the evaluation survey did not report experiencing issues with accessing the indicators⁷⁶. Those that did indicated the following issues:

- retrieving the indicators from secure storage is time-consuming (36%);
- physically retrieving the indicators from secure storage is not easy (27%); and
- ensuring the indicators are kept secured throughout the day is time-consuming (25%).

The survey further indicated that most officers consult the indicators on a regular basis and generally find them quite useful. Specifically, 72% of officers said that they always applied the security screening indicators when assessing an application, and 14% applied them most of the time (see Figure 32). However, close to one-third (31%) of all respondents reported that the additional time it takes to consult indicators during an application review sometimes deterred them from doing so.

Figure 32. Most IRCC officers always applied the screening indicators



Source: Compiled by the evaluation team based on survey data.

In terms of the usefulness of the indicators, close to one third (30%) of IRCC officers considered them very useful, and another half (48%) considered them somewhat useful (see Figure 33). According to officers, the indicators were useful because they:

- support a clear determination of which applications require a referral (36%);

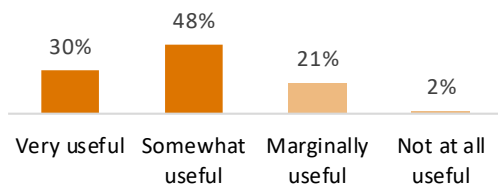
⁷⁶ Note that IRCC officers could refer to either set of indicators in their responses [redacted]. The classification of both the original and the new thematic sets of indicators is the same, which indicates that any potential barriers to access should be identical.

- allow for a faster assessment of applications (27%); and
- serve as a guidance tool in the referral process (21%).

The IRCC officers who did not find the security screening indicators to be particularly useful cited the following challenges:

- indicators are broad, making it difficult to apply them (38%);
- indicators require information on the applicant that is not easily accessible (21%); and
- there are a large number of indicators to be consulted (17%).

Figure 33. Most IRCC officers considered screening indicators at least somewhat useful



Source: Compiled by the evaluation team based on survey data.