

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-105053](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Border Patrol, within U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), responds to reports of migrants attempting to enter the U.S. between ports of entry who may be missing or in distress. A committee report accompanying the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) fiscal year 2020 appropriation directed CBP to report data on migrant deaths, describe plans to help reduce the number of migrant deaths, and share its coordination efforts with external entities. The Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the fiscal year 2021 Consolidated Appropriations Act included a provision for GAO to review CBP's report and its efforts to mitigate migrant deaths.

This report addresses (1) how Border Patrol has implemented the Missing Migrant Program to help reduce the frequency of migrant deaths; (2) the extent to which Border Patrol collects and reports complete and accurate data on migrant deaths; and (3) how Border Patrol evaluates the Missing Migrant Program. GAO analyzed Border Patrol policies and documentation, interviewed officials at Border Patrol headquarters and four field locations, and from five external entities, such as medical examiners.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations to Border Patrol to take steps to ensure it collects and records available information on migrant deaths, including those identified by external entities; include known migrant deaths and any data limitations in public and Congressional reports; and develop a plan to evaluate the Missing Migrant Program. DHS concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-22-105053](#). For more information, contact Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512-8777 or GamblerR@gao.gov.

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SOUTHWEST BORDER

CBP Should Improve Data Collection, Reporting, and Evaluation for the Missing Migrant Program

What GAO Found

The U.S. Border Patrol set up the Missing Migrant Program in 2017 to help rescue migrants in distress and reduce migrant deaths along the southwest border. Border Patrol issued nationwide procedures in September 2021, and has coordinated with external entities (e.g., state and local officials) and undertook various efforts to help reduce the frequency of migrant deaths. In particular, the nationwide procedures are intended to help standardize how Border Patrol coordinates with external entities to respond to and track reports of missing and deceased migrants. Border Patrol has also undertaken various efforts to help respond to migrants who may be in distress. These efforts include placing rescue beacons and 9-1-1 placards in remote areas.

Memorial for a Deceased Migrant in the Southwest Border



Source: Christina Felschen/stock.adobe.com. | GAO-22-105053

Border Patrol has not collected and recorded, or reported to Congress, complete data on migrant deaths, or disclosed associated data limitations. Specifically, Border Patrol's fiscal year 2020 report to Congress did not contain complete data because the agency did not record all available information on migrant deaths from external entities in its system of record, or describe these data limitations in the report. By taking additional steps to ensure that it collects and records available information on migrant deaths, including all known migrant deaths discovered by external entities, and including known migrant deaths and any data limitations in public and Congressional reports, Border Patrol would improve the information it provides to Congress.

Border Patrol collects and reviews information at the field level about its implementation of the Missing Migrant Program. However, it does not have a plan to evaluate the program overall. Border Patrol headquarters uses weekly field reports to monitor the status of the Missing Migrant Program. These reports are positive steps to help the agency monitor field activities. However, Border Patrol could benefit from a more robust evaluation of the impacts of the Missing Migrant Program to reduce the frequency of migrant deaths and strengthen Border Patrol's efforts to respond to migrants in distress. Developing a plan to evaluate the Missing Migrant Program would better position Border Patrol to assess its progress in meeting the program's goals.