

Homeland Security Investigations

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The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), is the principal investigative arm of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. HSI responsibilities include, but are not limited to, investigating transnational crime and threats, specifically those criminal organizations that exploit the global infrastructure through which international trade, travel and finance move.¹

The crimes and threats that are investigated include: the smuggling of narcotics, financial crimes, child exploitation, transnational gangs, identity theft, benefit fraud, cyber-crimes, trade fraud, human trafficking, human smuggling, and technology proliferation.

There are approximately 7,100 special agents in HSI, spread out through 220 cities throughout the United States and 80 overseas locations operating in 53 unique countries.

Mission Statement.

According to the government website for Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), HSI's mission is to investigate, disrupt and dismantle terrorist, transnational and other criminal organizations that threaten or seek to exploit the customs and immigration laws of the United States.²

Duties.

It is the duty of HSI criminal investigators to conduct criminal and civil investigations involving national security threats, terrorism, drug smuggling, child exploitation, human trafficking, illegal arms export, financial crimes, identity fraud, benefit fraud, commercial fraud and more.³

Approach.

To successfully conduct investigations, the agency utilizes unique and expansive criminal and administrative authorities; strategic law enforcement and non-governmental partnerships; robust international footprint and connectivity; and cutting-edge technology and innovation, and sophisticated criminal analysis.⁴

History.

The foundation for HSI dates back to 1789 when Congress formed the U.S. Customs Service department alongside the formation of the Office of the Superintendent of Immigration under the Department of Treasury. Customs houses became the headquarters for ports of entry all

¹ <https://www.ice.gov/about-ice/homeland-security-investigations>

² See Footnote No. 1.

³ See Footnote No. 1.

⁴ See Footnote No. 1.

around the U.S.A. Customs agents “inspected, taxed, stamped, and released imported goods.” Additionally, they prevented banned items from breaching the country’s borders. Customs agents used fast ships named “cutters”, to prevent ships containing illegal supplies and materials and smugglers from landing on the motherland. Over time, the banned goods would change, but for the most part it included: undeclared liquor, tobacco, firearms, drugs, stolen property, and specific foods.

The immigration act of 1891 gave customs agents the power to inspect passenger’s manifests, the power to conduct health inspections, and the power to accept or reject any prospective immigrants.

Shortly after in 1906, the Basic Naturalization Act was passed by Congress, framing the conditions for naturalization in the United States, taking power from the state and local level and giving it to the federal government.

Then in 1933, Congress created the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS).

In 1986, the Immigration and Naturalization Service expanded the scope of the customs agents. The agents were given the right to investigate certain gang, fraud and human smuggling activities, and enforce sanctions against employers who hired illegal aliens.

In 1996, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act allowed for the hiring of INS agents to enforce the interior and bolster certain criminal penalties.

In 1976, the Arms Export Control Act gave customs agents more power and authority to prevent the trafficking of weapons.

As a result of 9/11, The United States government strengthened its national security by passing the Homeland Security Act and creating the Department of Homeland Security. The department was the result of unifying 22 different federal organizations into one.

In 2003, INS and Customs merged with the DHS’s Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

In 2010, HSI was formed within ICE and its own previous Offices of Investigations, Intelligence, and International Affairs.

Recently, HSI separated from ICE and is now considered its own independent agency law enforcement agency within DHS.⁵

Organizational Structure.

HSI consists of eight unique divisions that are interconnected to tackle different tasks while upholding the mission of HSI, as follows.

⁵ See Footnote No. 1.

1. Domestic Operations. Domestic Operations Division manages, directs, coordinates, and supports all investigative activities of HSI domestic offices. Domestic Operations reviews implementation and adherence to policies, procedures, guidelines and directives governing investigative activities. The Domestic Operations Division is the lead division overseeing all major HSI enforcement initiatives and de-conflicts operations among HSI field offices. Domestic Operations agents consist of senior leaders who support field investigations and serve as the HQ for HSI.⁶
2. Countering Transnational Organized Crime (TOC). This Division supports investigations and operations related to transnational crime, financial and narcotics violations, human trafficking and smuggling, public safety, and labor exploitation.

Additionally, it assists law enforcement in training, technical assistance, and forensic analysis. They also provide support through investigative services by guiding all HSI undercover operations, polygraph operations, tactical and emergency responses, victim assistance, and special agent basic training.⁷

3. International Operations. International Operations Division develops and supports investigations, initiatives, and operations conducted or supported by HSI offices. International Operations builds relationships with domestic law enforcement officers to assist in domestic cases by detecting and deterring transnational crime organizations and preventing terrorist related activities. International Operations also builds relationships with offices and liaisons around the world that conduct investigations against terrorist and other criminal organizations that threaten national security. It is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. It interacts with international law enforcement on behalf of ICE to investigate immigration and customs violations. International Operations manages multiple programs like the Visa Security Program, Transnational Criminal Investigative Unit Program, Biometric Identification Transnational Migration Alert Program, and the International Visitors Program.⁸
4. The Office of Administrative Operations calculates budget formulation, budget execution, financial oversight, acquisitions, and procurement, workforce management, and other administrative services for domestic and international offices. It also handles various tasks: the logistics and internal control activities; oversees HSI's properties, facilities, travel, and fleet; reports on performance regarding HSI; coordinates the development of policies and forms that HSI needs to address; ensures HSI's goals align with ICE and DHS; oversees the disclosure of information; and supports all HSI headquarters, field offices and mission areas with strategies, analytics, modeling and efficiency studies to facilitate fact-based decision-making.⁹

⁶ <https://www.ice.gov/about-ice/homeland-security-investigations/domestic-operations>

⁷ <https://www.ice.gov/about-ice/homeland-security-investigations/ctoc>

⁸ <https://www.ice.gov/about-ice/homeland-security-investigations/international-operations>

⁹ <https://www.ice.gov/about-ice/homeland-security-investigations/administrative-operations>

5. The Office of Intelligence uses the HSI Framework for Criminal Analysis to conduct in-depth analysis of criminals and their networks. It produces accurate criminal analysis that assists criminal investigators in identifying, prioritizing, disrupting and dismantling transnational terrorist and criminal networks that threaten national security or seek to exploit the customs and immigration laws.¹⁰
6. Cyber and Operational Technology Division oversees investigations of internet-related crimes: cybercrime, child exploitation, and manages information spreading and technology across DHS. They also support ICE and DHS by directing information and operational technology between other agencies. Cyber and Operational Technology also keeps HSI's technology standards and security requirements up to date.
7. Global Trade Division provides support through oversight of investigations regarding U.S. import and export laws to uphold national security. Global Trade also protects the public's health and safety, and prevents predatory and illegal trade practices. Global Trade combats global intellectual property theft and regulates illegal transactions on the internet. Additionally, they manage the counter-proliferation investigations program, which prevents outside nations and groups from obtaining U.S. military equipment including: dual-use technology, weapons of mass destruction, and nuclear materials.¹¹
8. The National Security Division is critical to accomplishing ICE's mission to identify, disrupt and dismantle transnational criminal and terrorist organizations and hostile foreign intelligence entities that threaten the United States and her allies.

The National Security Division leads investigations and prosecutions regarding violators of human rights, war criminals, and preventing them from seeking refuge in the United States. The NSD uses ICE's authorities and partnerships to investigate fraud and abuse of immigration, trade, and finances. NSD's programs include human rights violations, war crimes, counter terrorism, criminal exploitation, and national security threats investigations.¹²

By the Numbers.

According to the official website for Homeland Security and Investigations, in 2022 alone:

- \$3.9 Billion Seized in Currency and Assets from Financial and Cyber Enabled Crimes.
- 1,170 Victims of Child Exploitation were Rescued or Identified.
- 765 Victims of Human Trafficking Identified or Assisted.
- 744 Identity and Benefit Fraud Criminals Arrested.
- 20,981 Lbs. of Fentanyl Seized.
- 4,777 Transnational Gangs Criminal Arrests: 663 of which were MS-13 arrests.
- \$1.1 Billion Seized in Counterfeit Goods and Illicit Goods.

¹⁰ <https://www.ice.gov/about-ice/homeland-security-investigations/intelligence>

¹¹ <https://www.ice.gov/about-ice/homeland-security-investigations/global-trade>

¹² <https://www.ice.gov/about-ice/homeland-security-investigations/national-security>

- 1,076 Counter-Proliferation Related Seizures.
- 88% of JTTF Disruptions were Achieved with Significant HSI involvement.
- 11,863 Visa Applications Refused Based on Terrorist Connections or Derogatory Information.

Employment Qualifications and Requirements.

The requirements and qualifications for employment as a Special Agent with DHS HSI are as follows.

- US citizen
- Able to Pass Criminal Background Check
- Qualify for a Secret or Top Secret Security Clearance
- Valid Driver's License.
- Selective Service registration required for males
- Pass a Version of the Civil Service Exam with a Competitive Score
- High Degree of Physical Fitness
 - 32 sit ups in 1 minute
 - 220 yard sprint in 44.73 seconds
 - 22 pushups in 1 minute
 - 1.5 mile run in 14 minutes 25 seconds
- Be at least 18, but No Older than 37 years old
- Three years of progressively responsible experience, one year equivalent to GS-4, demonstrating ability to analyze problems, gather pertinent data, and recognize solutions; plan and organize work; communicate effectively orally and in writing.
 - OR
 - Education: 4 years course of study in any field leading to a bachelor's degree, at an accredited college or university.
 - OR
 - Combination: post-high school education and experience in the field.¹³

Application Process.

The application process includes.

- Answer Job Posting on USA JOBS
- Invitation for 1st Assessment
- Invitation for 2nd Assessment
- Invitation for 3rd Assessment
- Qualification Review
- Certificate Issued
- Selection Process
- Issue Tentative Job Offer
- Drug Test, Background Check (may include poly), Medical Test, Fitness Test

¹³ <https://www.ice.gov/doclib/careers/pdf/dhsOnlyEntryLevel.pdf>

- Attend and successful completion of the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC), which is the federal equivalent of the police academy.¹⁴

Recent Events.

As of the writing of this paper, a high profile HSI human sex trafficking investigation, originating out of New York, served search warrants two of Hip Hop Legend P-Diddy's mansion estates, located in Los Angeles and Miami. Heavily armed DHS HSI tactical teams were broadcast on nationwide news outlets. Law Enforcement sources reported safety concerns regarding the unusual number of heavily armed security guards present at both locations.¹⁵ The details and outcome of this investigation are still pending.

Moving Forward.

DHS HSI is among the newest agencies in federal law enforcement. With a commitment to Integrity, Courage, and Excellence, we look forward to seeing more from this agency as they continue to brand their identity amongst federal law enforcement's heavy hitters.

¹⁴ <https://www.ice.gov/doclib/careers/pdf/dhsOnlyEntryLevel.pdf>

¹⁵ Confidential Law Enforcement Source.