

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL  
OFFICE OF AUDIT**

## **BRIEFLY...**

**SEPTEMBER 27, 2017**

### **BLS COULD ENHANCE DATA COLLECTION CONTROLS IN THE CURRENT EMPLOYMENT STATISTICS SURVEY**

#### **WHY OIG CONDUCTED THE AUDIT**

BLS's monthly Current Population Survey (CPS) and the Current Employment Statistics Survey (CES) are both widely watched Principal Federal Economic Indicators that are heavily relied upon by the government and private sectors. Therefore, these surveys must meet the highest standards for accuracy and reliability.

Both CES and CPS must fully incorporate the Office of Management and Budget's Standards and Guidelines for Statistical Surveys that ensure federal statistical surveys use reliable information sources and appropriate techniques, as well as present statistical products in an accurate, clear, and unbiased manner. For the CPS, the Department of Commerce's Census Bureau collects the data that BLS reports. For the CES, BLS both collects and reports the data.

#### **WHAT OIG DID**

We performed this audit to determine the following:

Has BLS established controls to ensure CPS and CES reported data are accurate, clear, and unbiased?

#### **READ THE FULL REPORT**

To view the report, including the scope, methodologies, and full agency response, go to: <https://www.oig.dol.gov/public/reports/oa/2017/17-17-002-11-001.pdf>.

#### **WHAT OIG FOUND**

BLS has established controls to ensure CPS results are presented in an accurate, clear, and unbiased manner. While BLS does not collect the CPS data, it has developed a CPS analysis and reporting plan, and only develops the estimates and published the results after validating the data provided by the Census Bureau.

While BLS has established controls for CES that comply with the OMB Standards and Guidelines for Statistical Surveys, it could enhance and consistently comply with controls over data collection. We identified two areas where BLS could enhance CES data collection controls. First, BLS allows contracted CES data survey collectors to view prior period data when collecting current period data. While this is a standard survey methodology to reduce respondent burden, it still increases the risk of data falsification. BLS has established a quality assurance program consisting of re-interviews and case reviews. However, the program is not consistently followed by each data collection center. As such, BLS could take additional steps to reduce the risk of data falsification and maximize data quality without increasing respondent burden.

Second, BLS's CES data breach policy does not require BLS officials to inform survey respondents if their respondent identifiable information has been compromised. Since responding to the CES is voluntary, BLS must protect the confidentiality of the information it obtains. If confidential data is compromised, the agency must be transparent with survey respondents in order to retain their trust and continued participation in the CES surveys.

#### **WHAT OIG RECOMMENDED**

We made recommendations to the Acting Commissioner of BLS that included redesigning its data collection system to reduce the risk of data falsification.

BLS agreed to take corrective actions on two of the three recommendations in the report.