



Highlights of [GAO-10-643](#), a report to the Committee on Finance, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

A U.S. passport allows the owner to travel freely both in and out of the country. Although passport recipients typically travel internationally for business or leisure, some passport recipients are using their passports to commit nefarious illegal activities outside this country. Specifically, the Department of Justice (DOJ) has documented cases of U.S. passport holders engaging in sex acts with children in foreign countries. Federal statutes authorize the Secretary of State to deny issuance of a passport in certain circumstances, such as for a conviction for international drug trafficking or arrearages in child support.

GAO was asked to (1) determine, to the extent possible, the number of passport recipients who are registered sex offenders and (2) develop case study examples of passport recipients who are registered sex offenders. To do so, GAO compared fiscal year 2008 passport data from the Department of State (State) to data in DOJ's National Sex Offender Registry (NSOR). GAO also interviewed State officials. GAO selected 30 sex offenders, primarily based on geography, and performed investigations.

In response to a draft of this report, DOJ had no comments. State expressed concerns about the presentation of some findings. State's comments are addressed within the report.

[View GAO-10-643 or key components.](#)
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PASSPORT ISSUANCE

Current Situation Results in Thousands of Passports Issued to Registered Sex Offenders

What GAO Found

State issued U.S. passports to thousands of registered sex offenders during fiscal year 2008. Currently, State has no statutory authority to deny passports to registered sex offenders, except those convicted of sex tourism. GAO's analysis of data provided by State and DOJ indicates that of over 16 million U.S. passports issued in 2008, about 4,500 were issued to registered sex offenders. This estimate is likely to be understated because of data limitations in the passport and NSOR databases. From analysis of the NSOR, GAO also found that about 50 of these registered sex offenders either lived outside of the United States or the offender's whereabouts were not known. GAO also found that at least 30 of these registered sex offenders were federal employees during fiscal year 2008.

GAO judgmentally selected 30 sex offenders for investigation. At the time of the criminal offense, many of these offenders held positions of public trust, such as health care provider, school teacher, religious layman, law enforcement official, National Aeronautics and Space Administration engineer, and owner of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Section 8 program single-family houses. GAO's investigation also found that State issued passports to individuals who were residing in prison or delinquent in child support or whose whereabouts were unknown according to the NSOR. Finally, GAO's investigation found that one individual has illegally failed to register with the police department as a sex offender for several years. The following are examples of registered sex offenders who were issued U.S. passports.

Examples of Registered Sex Offenders Who Were Issued U.S. Passports

State	Date of passport issuance	Description
Ohio	July 2008	The offender was previously convicted of gross sexual imposition, pandering obscenity, and various other sex offenses. In the late 2000s, the offender fled after law enforcement seized his computers for child pornography. The offender was issued a passport subsequent to fleeing from law enforcement. The offender was later arrested in the Philippines.
New York	April 2008	A police officer was convicted of sodomy in the early 2000s. According to law enforcement records, the offender was caught having sex with his foster son. At the time the passport was issued, the offender was a landlord for two properties—receiving Section 8 money from HUD.
Texas	April 2008	A U.S. Postal Service carrier was convicted of indecency with a girl, including sexual contact. The Postal Service was aware of the conviction and the offender is still employed as a postal carrier. The assigned route for the postal carrier goes through a residential area that includes an elementary school.
Texas	October 2007	The State Department issued a passport in name of the sex offender while he was incarcerated for child pornography possession. The offender was previously convicted for soliciting trips to Mexico to find “young friends” with other “boy lovers.”

Source: GAO analysis of State and other records.