

GAO

Report to the Honorable  
Edward R. Roybal, House of  
Representatives

July 1987

# EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

## Hispanics' Advancement Opportunities in SSA Region IX



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**Human Resources Division**

B-227565

July 30, 1987

The Honorable Edward R. Roybal  
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Roybal:

Your letter of June 26, 1986, raised concerns that Hispanics may not be receiving fair consideration for promotions in certain Social Security Administration (SSA) offices in Region IX, which covers California, Arizona, Nevada, and Hawaii. You also asked about the number of Hispanics who participate in SSA's Region IX career development program and the region's delay in designating a person as Hispanic Employment Program manager.

In subsequent meetings, your office asked if (1) problems existed in specific SSA offices in Region IX's Service Areas 6 and 7 in providing services to claimants who only speak Spanish and (2) the reassignment without open competition of a non-Hispanic to a branch manager position in Service Area 6 unfairly denied Hispanics a promotion opportunity.

In discussions with your office, we agreed to obtain information specifically on

- the number of staff as of December 1986 who were bilingual in Spanish and English and in positions to provide direct services to claimants at six SSA offices in Service Areas 6 and 7;
- Hispanics' employment and selection rates for competitive promotions in the social insurance administrative job series at grades 11 through 14 in Service Areas 6 and 7 for fiscal years 1984-86;
- Hispanics' ability in Service Areas 6 and 7 during fiscal years 1984-86 to compete for promotions to social insurance administrative positions in which they were underrepresented;
- the noncompetitive reassignment in August 1986 of an employee to the El Sereno branch manager position in Service Area 6;
- participation by Hispanics during fiscal years 1984-86 in the SSA Region IX career development program; and
- the delay in designating a person to be the SSA Region IX Hispanic Employment Program manager.

Our findings relating to these issues are summarized below and discussed in more detail in appendix I.

## Use of Bilingual Staff to Serve Spanish-Speaking Claimants

SSA contact representatives and claims representatives provide direct assistance to the public through face-to-face, telephone, and/or mail contacts. Contact representatives—primarily grade 7 employees—assist claimants with initial applications for benefits. Claims representatives—mainly grade 10 employees—receive from claimants notification of actions that require adjustments to benefits and assist in making necessary adjustments.

The six offices we reviewed in Service Areas 6 and 7 were the Montebello, Pasadena, Glendale, and Los Angeles (downtown) District Offices and the Boyle Heights and El Sereno Branch Offices. In total, these offices employed 150 contact and claims representatives as of January 1987. According to SSA officials, in each of the six offices at least 30 percent of the staff in these positions were bilingual in Spanish and English and able to assist Spanish-speaking claimants. The offices also employed persons in other positions who were available as needed to interpret for Spanish-speaking claimants.

## Hispanics' Employment and Selection for Competitive Promotions in Service Areas 6 and 7

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission requires federal agencies to develop affirmative action plans to hire, promote, and reassign (1) white females and (2) both male and female Hispanics, Asian Americans, American Indians, and blacks (minority groups) to positions in which they are underrepresented. By the Commission's definition, underrepresentation exists when the minority group's rate of employment within the agency, divided by the minority group's rate of availability in the civilian labor force from which the agency recruits, is less than 100 percent. Region IX's affirmative action program includes a region-wide plan and nine service area affirmative action plans.

As of June 30 of each year, employment data are compiled, and used to determine representation for the following fiscal year's affirmative action plans (starting October 1 of that year). As of April 1987, SSA had not prepared its fiscal year 1987 plan. In this report, we present data for the fiscal year 1984-86 plans and for June 30, 1986.

### Service Area 6

For the affirmative action plans covering fiscal years 1984-86, Hispanics in Area 6 were fully represented in social insurance administrative positions at grades 11 and 12 and grade band 13-14.<sup>1</sup> Also, as of June 30,

<sup>1</sup>SSA determines representation within grades 11 and 12 and grade band 13-14 (grade 13 and grade 14 combined) in its affirmative action plan.

1986, of the 96 Area 6 employees in grades 11 through 14, 11 were Hispanic males and 9 were Hispanic females, making Hispanics fully represented at these grades as of that date. From fiscal year 1984 through 1986, there were 29 competitive promotions in Area 6 at grades 11 through 14, of which 6 (21 percent) of the selectees were Hispanic males, and 3 (10 percent) were Hispanic females.

## Service Area 7

According to affirmative action plans covering fiscal years 1984 through 1986, Area 7 Hispanic females were fully represented in social insurance administrative positions at grades 11 and 12 and grade band 13-14. But Hispanic males—while fully represented at grade band 13-14—were underrepresented in grades 11 and 12 for these fiscal years. Hispanic male underrepresentation for fiscal years 1984-86 affirmative action planning decreased from 85.2 to 71.4 percent in grade 11 but remained at 100 percent in grade 12.

As of June 30, 1986, Area 7 employed 105 persons in the social insurance administrative job series at grades 11-14. Six were Hispanic males and eight, Hispanic females. These data indicate that both Hispanic males and females were underrepresented in grade 11 by 42.9 and 12.5 percent, respectively, and Hispanic males in grade 12 by 49 percent.

From fiscal year 1984 through 1986, there were 28 competitive promotions to grades 11 and 12 in Area 7. Among the 28, 1 Hispanic male was selected (to a grade 11 position) and 2 Hispanic females (one each to grades 11 and 12). Of the six promotions to grades 13-14 in these fiscal years, none were Hispanics.

## Hispanics' Ability to Compete for Promotions to Positions Where They Are Underrepresented

To determine Hispanics' ability to compete for promotions to social insurance administrative job series positions in which they were underrepresented, we focused on grade 11 and 12 vacancies in Area 7, in which Hispanic males were underrepresented in fiscal years 1984-86.

Area 7 had 28 competitive promotions to social insurance administrative grade 11 and 12 vacancies in these 3 fiscal years. But only nine promotion packages were available for us to analyze applicants' race and sex profiles. This was because, as of September 22, 1986, SSA no longer retained data on applicants for vacancies announced before September 1984 and did not have available for review data on vacancies announced after August 1986.

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In these nine promotion packages, of 98 individuals who ranked among the top-scoring applicants, only 2 were Hispanic males. Neither was selected. Also, the rate at which Hispanic males were included among the top-scoring applicants was less than the rate at which they applied for the positions. Persons competitively promoted are chosen from among those who apply for the position and are deemed best qualified (i.e., the highest scoring applicants). In the nine promotions we analyzed, therefore, selecting officials had little opportunity to select Hispanic males for promotions to grades where they were underrepresented.

Hispanic females' rates of application and being chosen among the best qualified for the grade 11 vacancies were lower than their representation in the region-wide potential applicant pool. None were selected for these vacancies. For the grade 12 vacancies, Hispanic females' rates of application and being chosen among the best qualified exceeded their representation in the region-wide internal applicant pool; two Hispanic females were selected for promotion.

The Commission's criteria require a "barrier analysis" to identify artificial barriers—nonjob-related policies, practices, and procedures—at any stage of an agency's competitive selection process that may hinder its affirmative action objectives. But according to the Region IX equal employment opportunity specialist and the Area 7 director, their offices had not analyzed the competitive promotion process to identify possible barriers to Hispanic males' ability to compete for Area 7 positions.

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## Recommendation

We recommend that the SSA Region IX Commissioner conduct an analysis of potential artificial barriers that may hinder the advancement of Hispanics to Area 7 positions where they are underrepresented.

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## Agency Comments

The Department of Health and Human Services in its comments on a draft of this report (see app. II) agreed with our recommendation and stated that by December 31, 1987, a barrier analysis would be completed in SSA's Region IX for all grade 11-14 positions in which Hispanics may be underrepresented.

## Noncompetitive Reassignment to Fill El Sereno Branch Manager Position

The noncompetitive reassignment to fill the vacant El Sereno Branch manager position did not offer a promotion opportunity for the person selected. SSA officials have discretionary authority to competitively promote or noncompetitively reassign an employee to a vacant social insurance administrative position at grades 11-15, provided the employee is reassigned at his/her current grade and no further promotion potential exists in the new position. All the grades 11-15 in that job series included in our review required competition for promotion to the next grade. The noncompetitive reassignment of a grade 12 employee to the grade 12 El Sereno Branch manager position in Service Area 6 was, therefore, within the proper authority of the responsible SSA selecting official.

## Hispanics' Participation in SSA Region IX Career Development Program

Region IX's Employee Development Program, initiated in January 1984, offers employees at grades 11 through 14 the opportunity to obtain work experience and training through an interchange of regional, area office, and field staff, which may enhance their advancement opportunities. Of the 107 employees who participated in the program from the first class in May 1984 through August 1986, 12 (11.2 percent) were Hispanic. Hispanic male and female participation rates were 5.6 percent each—6 males and 6 females.

## Delayed Designation of Hispanic Employment Program Manager

The Hispanic Employment Program was established in 1970 to enhance employment opportunities of Hispanics in the federal government. SSA established the position of Hispanic Employment Program manager as a part-time responsibility to (1) advocate the concerns of both Hispanics employed by SSA, and Hispanics residing in the communities SSA serves and (2) make recommendations to regional management on related topics.

The position of Region IX Hispanic Employment Program manager was vacant from November 1984 to July 1986. In Region IX, the incumbent carries out responsibilities for the Hispanic Employment Program up to 20 percent of the time and the duties of his/her primary job assignment at least 80 percent of the time. According to Region IX SSA officials, the designation of someone to carry out these responsibilities was delayed to allow regional management time to consider a transfer of the position's functions to the region's Civil Rights and Equal Opportunity Office and to initiate a new process to fill this position. While this position was vacant, according to Department of Health and Human Services and SSA region IX officials, the Hispanic Employment Program manager's duties

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were shared by SSA region IX's civil rights and equal opportunity manager and the assistant regional commissioner, field operations—both Hispanics.

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As arranged with your office, unless its contents are announced earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report until 30 days from its issue date. At that time, we will send copies to the Secretary of Health and Human Services, the Commissioner of Social Security, the Regional Commissioner of SSA Region IX, and other interested parties and make copies available to others on request.

Sincerely yours,



Richard L. Fogel  
Assistant Comptroller General





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**Abbreviations**

CLF	civilian labor force
EEOC	Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
SSA	Social Security Administration

# Equal Employment Opportunity: Hispanics' Advancement Opportunities in SSA Region IX

## Introduction

In a June 26, 1986, letter and subsequent discussions with us, Congressman Edward R. Roybal and his office raised concerns about whether in Region IX of the Social Security Administration (SSA) (1) selecting officials were giving fair consideration to Hispanics for promotion opportunities to managerial positions in SSA offices in Service Areas 6 and 7, which cover part of the Los Angeles area; (2) employees in six of these offices were able to communicate with the Spanish-speaking community; and (3) selecting officials' reassignment of a non-Hispanic as a branch manager in Service Area 6 without open competition unfairly denied Hispanics a promotion opportunity. The Congressman also sought information about SSA officials' delay in designating a Hispanic Employment Program manager and the selection of Hispanics to participate in career development programs.

SSA, a unit of the Department of Health and Human Services, administers a national social insurance program under which employees, employers, and self-employed persons contribute to a trust fund. SSA programs provide monthly benefits to retired and disabled workers, their spouses and children, and survivors of insured workers to partially replace lost earnings when insured workers' earnings stop or are reduced because of retirement, death, or disability.

SSA includes a headquarters operation and a field organization of 10 regions. Region IX is divided into nine service areas for the states of Arizona, California, Hawaii, and Nevada. Service Areas 6 and 7 cover parts of the downtown and suburban vicinity of Los Angeles. Each service area includes (1) district offices, branch offices, and either resident stations and/or a teleservice center to serve the public and (2) an area office to provide administrative support.

Staff in social insurance administrative positions at grades 11 through 15 are responsible for management of the social insurance programs and development of policies, procedures, and methods for conducting programs. They are employed in regional, branch, and district offices. Field positions in the social insurance administrative job series at grades 11-14<sup>1</sup> are summarized in table I.1.

<sup>1</sup>The social insurance administrative job series is the only job series with a significant number of grade 11 and above positions. There are no field positions in this job series above grade 14.

**Appendix I  
 Equal Employment Opportunity: Hispanics'  
 Advancement Opportunities in SSA Region IX**

**Table I.1: Field Positions in the Social Insurance Administrative Job Series (Grades 11-14)**

SSA component	Grade	Position
Area office	14	Area director
	12	Area administrative assistant
	11	Social insurance specialist
District office	13-14	District manager
	12-13	Assistant district manager
	12	Staff assistant
	12	Operations officer
	11-12	Operations supervisor
Branch office	12	Branch manager
	11	Operations supervisor

**Objectives, Scope, and Methodology**

In response to the Congressman's concerns, we agreed to obtain information on

- the number of staff who were bilingual in Spanish and English and in positions to directly provide services to claimants at six SSA offices in Service Areas 6 and 7,
- Hispanics' employment and selection rates for competitive promotions in the social insurance administrative job series at grades 11-14 in Service Areas 6 and 7 for fiscal years 1984-86,
- Hispanics' ability in Service Areas 6 and 7 during fiscal years 1984-86 to compete for promotions to social insurance administrative positions in which they were underrepresented,
- the noncompetitive reassignment in August 1986 of an employee to the El Sereno Branch manager position in Service Area 6,
- participation by Hispanics during fiscal years 1984-86 in the SSA Region IX career development program, and
- the delay in designating a person to be the SSA Region IX Hispanic Employment Program manager.

We obtained relevant data from SSA Baltimore headquarters and visited Southern California in September 1986 to obtain and compile information concerning the issues included in our review.

In addressing the specific concerns raised by the requester, we

- reviewed SSA Region IX and Areas 6 and 7 affirmative action plans and work-force race and sex profiles for fiscal years 1984-86,
- compiled the race and sex profiles of applicants for announced vacancies from SSA data on individual employees.

- analyzed SSA records on the race and sex profiles of persons competitively promoted,
- analyzed SSA records of personnel reassignments, and
- interviewed responsible SSA officials from Region IX and Areas 6 and 7 to supplement the documents and records we obtained during our review.

We did not assess the reliability of data from SSA's work-force race and sex profiles or other documentation provided by SSA. Except as noted, our work was performed in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

## Use of Bilingual Staff to Serve Spanish-Speaking Claimants

At SSA's district offices and branch offices, contact representatives, usually grade 7, and claims representatives, usually grade 10, provide service and assistance directly to the public through face-to-face, telephone, and/or mail contacts. These SSA employees review applications for benefits, develop claims for benefits, offer referral assistance for Social Security-related programs, and receive notifications of actions that require adjustments to benefits.

As a routine practice, Area 6 maintains records of employees' bilingual skills, and Area 7 officials are cognizant of their employees' bilingual abilities.

According to information provided by the Area 6 staff assistant and Area 7 area analyst, as of January 1987 at least 30 percent of the contact and claims representatives in each of the six offices spoke Spanish and therefore were able to assist Spanish-speaking claimants. These data are shown by district and branch office in table I.2.

**Appendix I**  
**Equal Employment Opportunity: Hispanics'**  
**Advancement Opportunities in SSA Region IX**

**Table I.2: Spanish-Speaking Contact and Claims Representatives in Six SSA Offices in Service Areas 6 and 7**  
 (As of January, 1987)

SSA District/Branch Office	Contact and claims representatives		
	Total	Spanish-speaking	
		No.	Percent
<b>Service Area 6:</b>			
Montebello District Office	20	15	75
Pasadena District Office	16	5	31
Boyle Heights Branch Office	16	13	81
El Sereno Branch Office	6	5	83
<b>Service Area 7:</b>			
Glendale District Office	32	10	31
Los Angeles (Downtown) District Office	60	18	30

The Area 7 area analyst told us that the Glendale and Los Angeles (downtown) District Offices had available six and nine employees, respectively, in other positions who could interpret for Spanish-speaking claimants, as needed. The Area 6 staff assistant said that the Montebello and Pasadena District Offices and Boyle Heights and El Sereno Branch Offices also employed similar staff, but she did not know how many.

## Hispanics' Employment and Competitive Promotions

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the principal federal agency for enforcing equal employment opportunity, requires federal agencies to determine whether underrepresentation exists in specific employment categories, i.e., job series and grade levels. Each agency must compare each minority group's rate of employment in its work force to the group's rate of availability in the appropriate civilian labor force (CLF)—the national, regional, or local labor force from which the agency recruits to fill specific positions. Underrepresentation exists when the minority group's rate of employment within the agency divided by the appropriate CLF rate is less than 100 percent. The Commission requires agencies to set numerical goals—by race and sex—to hire, promote, and reassign minority group members to positions in which they are underrepresented.

Region IX annually prepares a region-wide and nine area-wide affirmative action plans, which identify by job series and grades the positions with underrepresentation of minority groups. As of June 30 each year, the employment rates are compiled for use with the following fiscal year's affirmative action plan.

## Hispanic Employment

As of June 30, 1986, SSA Region IX employed 934 persons in its field operations in the social insurance administrative job series in grade 11-15 positions. Of the employees who held such positions on that date, 13.9 percent (130) were Hispanic—8.2 percent (77) males and 5.7 percent (53) females. These data indicated that Hispanic males were underrepresented in grades 11 and 12 by 20.4 and 29.6 percent respectively and females in the same grades by 7.8 and 15.6 percent (see table I.3).

In Area 6, Hispanic males and females were fully represented in social insurance administrative positions at grades 11 and 12 and grade band 13-14, according to the affirmative action plans covering fiscal years 1984-86. As of June 30, 1986, Area 6 employed 96 staff in the social insurance administrative job series at grades 11-14 in its 7 district offices, 17 branch offices, and 2 resident stations. Of these 96 employees, 20.9 percent (20) were Hispanic—11.5 percent (11) males and 9.4 percent (9) females (see table I.3). Thus, Hispanic males and females were fully represented in those grades at that time.

In Area 7, Hispanic females were fully represented in social insurance administrative positions at grades 11 and 12 and grade band 13-14, according to affirmative action plans covering fiscal years 1984-86. Hispanic males were fully represented at grade band 13-14, but were underrepresented in grades 11 and 12 for these years. According to EEOC criteria, Hispanic male underrepresentation for fiscal years 1984-86 affirmative action planning decreased from 85.2 percent (as of June 30, 1983) to 71.4 percent (as of June 30, 1985) in grade 11, but remained at 100 percent in grade 12 on those dates.

Area 7 employed 105 persons in the social insurance administrative job series, grades 11-14, in its 7 district offices, 8 branch offices, and teleservice center, as of June 30, 1986. Of the 105 employees, 13.3 percent (14) were Hispanic—5.7 percent (6) males and 7.6 percent (8) females. These data indicate that both Hispanic males and females were underrepresented in grade 11 and Hispanic males in grade 12 at that date.

Details on the number of Hispanic employees and their employment rates for Region IX and Areas 6 and 7 are presented in table I.3.



**Appendix I  
Equal Employment Opportunity: Hispanics'  
Advancement Opportunities in SSA Region IX**

**Table I.3: Hispanic Employment in the Social Insurance Administrative Job Series, Grades 11-15, SSA Region IX Field Operations and Areas 6 and 7 (As of June 30, 1986)**

		Hispanic employment rates in percent			
		Males		Females	
<b>Civilian labor force<sup>a</sup></b>					
Regional		9.8		6.4	
National		3.9		2.5	
<b>Employees in the social insurance administrative job series</b>					
<b>Hispanics (Rate of employment in percent)</b>					
		Males		Females	
		No.	Percent	No.	Percent
<b>Location/grade</b>	<b>Total no.</b>				
<b>Region IX</b>					
11	539	42	[7.8]	32	[5.9]
12	259	18	[6.9]	14	[5.4]
Subtotals	798	60	•	46	•
13	77	10	•	5	•
14	57	7	•	2	•
15	2	0	•	0	•
Subtotals	136	17	12.5	7	5.1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>934</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>•</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>•</b>
<b>Area 6</b>					
11	58	7	12.1	5	8.6
12	26	3	11.5	2	7.7
Subtotals	84	10	•	7	•
13	6	0	•	1	•
14	6	1	•	1	•
Subtotals	12	1	8.3	2	16.7
<b>Totals</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>•</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>•</b>
<b>Area 7</b>					
11	72	4	[5.6]	4	[5.6]
12	20	1	[5.0]	3	15.0
Subtotals	92	5	•	7	•
13	7	0	•	1	•
14	6	1	•	0	•
Subtotals	13	1	7.7	1	7.7
<b>Totals</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>•</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>•</b>

<sup>a</sup>SSA uses the regional CLF for grades 11 and 12 to determine underrepresentation of minority groups and the national CLF for grade band 13-15.

[ ] Identifies underrepresentation based on a comparison of Hispanic male/female employment rates in Region IX with rates of availability in the appropriate CLF.

**Hispanic Competitive Promotions**

In fiscal years 1984-86, there were 214 competitive promotions in Region IX for social insurance administrative positions at grades 11-15. Hispanic males received 17 (7.9 percent) of these promotions and Hispanic females, 9 (4.2 percent).

Appendix I  
 Equal Employment Opportunity: Hispanics'  
 Advancement Opportunities in SSA Region IX

For the same period, there were 29 competitive promotions in Service Area 6 to grades 11-14. Hispanic males received 6 (20.7 percent) of these promotions and Hispanic females, 3 (10.3 percent)

For fiscal years 1984 through 1986, there were 34 competitive promotions in Area 7 to grades 11-14. Hispanics were not competitively promoted to any of the six social insurance administrative grade band 13-14 positions that were filled in Area 7. Of 28 promotions to grades 11 and 12 during that period, 1 Hispanic male and 1 Hispanic female received grade 11 promotions, and 1 Hispanic female received a grade 12 promotion. Details on the number of Hispanics competitively promoted during this period to the positions and grades discussed above are shown in table 1.4.

**Table 1.4: Hispanic Competitive Promotions in the Social Insurance Administrative Job Series, Grades 11-15, SSA Region IX Field Operations and Areas 6 and 7 (Fiscal Years 1984-86)**

Location/grade	Competitive promotions in the social insurance administrative job series								
	Totals			Hispanic males			Hispanic females		
	1984	1985	1986	1984	1985	1986	1984	1985	1986
<b>Region IX:</b>									
11	62	44	49	5	3	4	2	1	3
12	14	9	12	1	1	1	0	0	2
Subtotals	76	53	61	6	4	5	2	1	5
13-15	0	6	18	0	1	1	0	0	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Area 6</b>									
11	8	6	8	2	2	1	0	0	2
12	2	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	1
Subtotals	10	6	11	3	2	1	0	0	3
13-14	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Area 7:</b>									
11	9	5	7	0	0	1	0	0	1
12	2	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	1
Subtotals	11	7	10	0	0	1	0	0	2
13-14	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>

## Hispanics' Ability to Compete for Promotions to Positions Where They Are Underrepresented

SSA selecting officials have discretionary authority to competitively promote or noncompetitively reassign employees to vacant social insurance administrative positions at grades 11-15. Persons competitively promoted are chosen from among those applicants deemed best-qualified candidates: that is, the highest-scoring applicants. Persons noncompetitively reassigned are chosen from among applicants who are at the same grade (or a higher grade) as that established for the vacant position.

According to EEOC Management Directive 707, assuming there are no artificial barriers in an agency's merit staffing processes, minority groups' rates of application, certification as being the best qualified, and selection in hiring actions should reflect their availability rates in the appropriate civilian labor force. According to the SSA Region IX affirmative action plan, competition for vacant positions at grades 11 and above in the social insurance administrative job series is generally limited to SSA employees. Therefore, the appropriate standard for examining applicant flow rates for competitive promotions is a minority group's rate of employment in the region-wide internal applicant pool—persons employed in the job series at the grade below the announced vacancy—rather than the civilian labor force.

For example, as of June 30, 1986, in SSA Region IX Hispanic males occupied 6.4 percent of grade 10 positions and 7.8 percent of grade 11 positions. These were their rates of availability in the internal applicant pools for the grade 11 and 12 positions in the social insurance administrative job series. On the same date, Hispanic females held 11.6 percent of the grade 10 positions and 5.9 percent of the grade 11 positions. This means that SSA could expect Hispanics to apply for competitive promotions to grade 11 and 12 vacancies at the same rates as they were employed in the region-wide internal applicant pool. Similarly, Hispanics' representation at each stage of the process—being deemed best-qualified candidates and selected to fill vacancies—should reflect these rates, assuming an even distribution exists among all groups of the qualifications required for merit promotion.

For fiscal years 1984-86, a total of 34 employees were competitively promoted to grade 11-14 positions in the social insurance administrative job series in Service Area 7. Of these, 1 was a Hispanic male and 2 were Hispanic females. (See table I.4.) For these years, Hispanic males' average rates of promotion to grades 11 and 12 positions, 4.8 and 0 percent, were less than their June 30, 1986, rates of availability in the region-wide internal applicant pool (6.4 and 7.8 percent for grades 10 and 11,

respectively). Hispanic females' 4.8 percent rate of promotion to grade 11 was less than the 11.6 percent rate of employment at grade 10, but their 14.3 percent rate of promotion to grade 12 exceeded their 5.9 percent rate of employment at grade 11.

ssa had not compiled data on the number of Hispanics who applied for and were deemed best-qualified candidates for these positions. To determine the ability of Hispanics to compete for promotions to positions in which they were underrepresented, we focused on grade 11 and 12 vacancies in Area 7.

Of the 28 competitive promotions for social insurance administrative grades 11 and 12 vacancies in fiscal years 1984-86 in Area 7, only 9 promotion packages were available for us to determine applicants' race and sex. As of the time of our field work (Sept. 1986), the ssa personnel office responsible for Area 7 no longer retained data on vacancies announced before September 1984 and did not have on-site data on vacancies announced after August 1986.

Our analysis of data for the six grade 11 positions showed that Hispanic males' rates of application and being deemed among the best-qualified candidates for these positions were less than their June 30, 1986, rate of availability (6.4 percent) in the region-wide internal applicant pool. A review of data for the three grade 12 positions showed that their 7.6-percent rate of application was slightly less than their 7.8-percent rate of availability in the region-wide internal applicant pool, and their 3.8-percent rate of being deemed best-qualified candidates was also lower. Of the nine grade 11 and 12 vacancies for which we reviewed race and sex profiles, no Hispanic males were selected.

Hispanic females applied for the six grade 11 positions at a rate of 6.0 percent, which was less than their 11.6-percent employment rate at grade 10 in the region. Two of the 45 best-qualified candidates (4.4 percent) were Hispanic females, but neither was selected for competitive promotion to these 6 grade 11 positions.

Hispanic females applied for the three grade 12 positions at a rate of 16.0 percent, which was greater than their 5.9 percent employment rate at grade 11 in the region-wide internal applicant pool. Six of the 53 (11.3 percent) best-qualified candidates were Hispanic females. Two of the 3 selectees were Hispanic females.

**Appendix I  
Equal Employment Opportunity: Hispanics'  
Advancement Opportunities in SSA Region IX**

Details of Hispanics' rates of application and being determined best-qualified candidates for competitive promotion to grade 11 and 12 vacancies in the social insurance administrative job series appear in table I.5.

**Table I.5: Profile of Hispanic Applicants and Best-Qualified Candidates for Competitive Promotions in the Social Insurance Administrative Job Series, Grades 11 and 12 Vacancies, SSA Area 7 (September 1984-August 1986)**

Grade and date of announcement	Applicants					Best-qualified candidates				
	Totals	Hispanic males		Hispanic females		Totals	Hispanic males		Hispanic females	
		No.	Percent	No.	Percent		No.	Percent	No.	Percent
<b>Grade 11</b>										
04/15/85 <sup>a</sup>	13	0	0	2	15.4	7	0	0	1	14.3
10/29/85	17	0	0	1	5.9	7	0	0	0	0
04/04/86 <sup>b</sup>	22	1	4.5	1	4.5	9	0	0	0	0
02/26/86	17	0	0	1	5.9	6	0	0	1	16.7
06/06/86	17	1	5.8	1	5.9	11	0	0	0	0
07/08/86	13	1	7.7	0	0	5	0	0	0	0
Subtotals	99	3	3.0	6	6.0	45	0	0	2	4.4
<b>Grade 12</b>										
12/23/85	47	3	6.4	7	14.9	13	0	0	2	15.4
12/23/85 <sup>c</sup>	46	3	6.5	7	15.2	14	0	0	2	14.3
05/30/86	38	4	10.5	7	18.4	26	2	7.7	2	7.7
Subtotals	131	10	7.6	21	16.0	53	2	3.8	6	11.3
<b>Grand totals</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>10.9</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8.2</b>

Legend

<sup>a</sup>Vacant position was in Los Angeles (Downtown) District Office

<sup>b</sup>Vacant position was in Glendale District Office

<sup>c</sup>Candidate selected for noncompetitive reassignment

According to EEOC's affirmative action guidance, policies, practices, and procedures in the competitive promotion process that are not job-related may impose artificial barriers to minority group members' advancement to positions where they are underrepresented. Analyzing race and sex data should reveal any disparate rates for underrepresented minority groups at any stage of the process, including individuals (1) applying for vacancies, (2) determined by SSA to be among the best-qualified candidates, and (3) selected for competitive promotion. If disparate rates are found, EEOC Management Directive 707 requires that the agency must identify the specific policies, procedures, and practices that acted as barriers and, if they are found to be artificial, take corrective action.

A region-wide analysis of grade 11 in this job series had been done, the regional equal employment opportunity specialist said, but the analysis was not area-specific to identify disparate rates for Area 7. The Area 7 director said that her office had not analyzed the competitive promotion process to determine whether there were disparities in the rates at which Hispanics applied and were determined best-qualified candidates for competitive promotion to grades 11 and 12 vacancies.

**Recommendation**

We recommend that the SSA Region IX Commissioner conduct an analysis of potential artificial barriers that may hinder Hispanics' advancement to Area 7 positions where they are underrepresented.

**Agency Comments**

The Department of Health and Human Services, in its comments on a draft of this report, agreed with our recommendation and stated that by December 31, 1987, a barrier analysis would be completed in SSA's Region IX for all grade 11-14 positions in which Hispanics may be underrepresented.

**Noncompetitive  
Reassignment to Fill  
El Sereno Branch  
Manager Position**

SSA selecting officials have discretionary authority to competitively promote or noncompetitively reassign employees to vacant social insurance administrative positions at grade 11 and above. Department of Health and Human Services Instruction 335-6 exempts from competitive procedures the lateral reassignment of an employee at his/her current grade to another position with no higher noncompetitive promotion potential than the employee's former position.

The SSA Region IX selecting official had the authority to fill the vacant El Sereno Branch manager position in Service Area 6 through either a competitive promotion or noncompetitive reassignment. Effective August 3, 1986, the assistant regional commissioner for field operations simultaneously reassigned three employees in Area 6. An employee from the regional office was reassigned to the El Sereno Branch manager position, the El Sereno Branch manager was reassigned to the Glendora Branch manager position, and the Glendora Branch manager was reassigned to the Montebello District Office operations supervisor position.

Region IX's three reassignments, including the El Sereno Branch manager position, were exempt from competitive procedures. Each employee involved was reassigned from one grade 12 position to another grade 12 position, all three with no career ladder promotion potential.

The assistant regional commissioner for field operations ordered the series of reassignments, he told us, confirming that no announcements of vacancies relating to these reassignments were issued. Originally, he had wanted to place a regional office employee who requested reassignment to a field position in the vacant operations supervisor position in the Montebello District Office, the official told us. But, because the employee had not worked in the field for several years, the Montebello District manager requested a person with more recent field experience. To place the employee in a field position, the assistant regional commissioner for field operations vacated the then-encumbered El Sereno and Glendora Branch manager positions, he said, and reassigned the regional office employee and the two displaced employees to other offices, as discussed above.

## Hispanics' Participation in SSA Region IX Career Development Program

The Employee Development Program, which became effective January 1984, is the only career development program conducted in Region IX. It allows Region IX employees at grades 11-14 to obtain experience and training through an interchange of staff in the regional office, area directors' offices, and field offices. Participants are detailed from 60 to 120 days at their current grade level to perform duties other than their own; some may perform duties of a higher-graded position. The stated objectives of the program are to

- provide field staff with area and regional office experience and regional staff with field experience and
- give managers an organized method to identify, develop, and assess employees for higher-graded positions through participation in the program.

As of June 30, 1986, 1,055 individuals were employed in Region IX in grades 11-14; of these, 82 (7.8 percent) were Hispanic males and 58 (5.5 percent) were Hispanic females (see table I.6).

**Table I.6: Hispanic Employment in  
 Grades 11-14 Positions in SSA Region IX**  
 (As of June 30, 1986)

Grade	Total employees	Hispanic employees			
		Males		Females	
		No.	Percent	No.	Percent
11	601	43	7.2	36	6.0
12	304	22	7.2	15	4.9
13	89	10	11.2	5	5.6
14	61	7	11.5	2	3.3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1,055</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>5.5</b>

As of August 1986, there were 107 participants in the Employee Development Program, of these 11.2 percent (12) were Hispanic—6 females and 6 males.

The regional commissioner annually selects participants for the Employee Development Program from among Region IX applicants. Generally, one applicant from each of the nine service areas and one or two from each component located in the regional office are selected for classes that are scheduled throughout the year, according to the regional equal employment opportunity specialist. The Area 7 director told us that six employees from her service area had participated in the program—one Hispanic male, one Hispanic female, two white males, and two white females. Five employees from Area 6 had participated in the program. The staff assistant for Area 6 said all were white females.

## Delayed Designation of Hispanic Employment Program Manager

The Hispanic Employment Program was established in 1970 to enhance the employment and advancement opportunities of Hispanics in federal agencies, including SSA. To accomplish the goals of the program, SSA established as a collateral (part-time) responsibility the position of Hispanic Employment Program manager, to be selected by the regional commissioner. The manager's responsibilities were to advise management of the concerns of the Hispanic community, recommend to regional management improvements on topics relating to Hispanic employment, and review the annual affirmative action plans. In Region IX, the commissioner decided that the program manager could spend up to 20 percent of his or her time on these duties. According to the manager of the SSA headquarters Hispanic Employment Program, the regional program manager's functions are always collateral duties, and the percent of time spent on Hispanic Employment Program activities varies from one region to another.

During the period November 1984-July 1986, SSA Region IX had no designated Hispanic Employment Program manager. The functions of the position, however, were carried out by the regional civil rights and equal opportunity manager and staff. That official told us that activities relating to Hispanic issues undertaken during this period included sponsoring National Hispanic Heritage Week and establishing a bank of bilingual candidates—primarily Spanish-speaking—for recruitment as interviewers of non-English-speaking claimants. In commenting on a draft of this report, the Department of Health and Human Services stated that the assistant regional commissioner for field operations in SSA Region IX also performed the Hispanic employment manager's duties during this time.



The Department also noted that both the civil rights and equal opportunity manager and the assistant regional commissioner were Hispanic and that the Department felt confident that Hispanic interests were served by the two individuals.

The delay in designating a Hispanic Employment Program manager began with the resignation in November 1984 of the incumbent, according to the regional civil rights and equal opportunity manager. During the delay, she said the regional commissioner considered transferring special program functions, such as the Hispanic Employment Program, to the Office of Civil Rights and Equal Opportunity and possibly increasing the office's staff, but he retired before making a decision. In October 1985, a new regional commissioner was appointed; he later decided against the proposed transfer of functions because of a pending staff reduction.

In January 1986, the regional commissioner initiated a new process to select a Hispanic Employment Program manager by requesting self-nominations for the manager's position, the regional civil rights and equal opportunity manager told us. Applicants were asked to submit their qualifications, including their public affairs experience and past involvement in dealing with Hispanic concerns. In July 1986, the regional commissioner designated a Region IX district manager as the Hispanic Employment Program manager for fiscal years 1986 and 1987.

# Comments From the Department of Health and Human Services



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Office of Inspector General

Washington, D.C. 20201

JUN 22 1987

Mr. Richard L. Fogel  
Assistant Comptroller General  
U.S. General Accounting Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Fogel:

The Secretary asked that I respond to your request for the Department's comments on your draft report, "Equal Employment Opportunity: Hispanics' Advancement Opportunities in SSA Region IX." The enclosed comments represent the tentative position of the Department and are subject to reevaluation when the final version of this report is received.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on this draft report before its publication.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "R. Kusserow".

Richard P. Kusserow  
Inspector General

Enclosure

Appendix II  
Comments From the Department of Health  
and Human Services

COMMENTS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES ON THE  
GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE'S DRAFT REPORT: "EQUAL EMPLOYMENT  
OPPORTUNITY: HISPANICS' ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES IN SSA  
REGION IX"

General Accounting Office Recommendation

That the SSA Region IX Commissioner conduct an analysis of potential artificial barriers that may hinder Hispanics' advancement to Area 7 positions where they are underrepresented.

Department of Health and Human Services Comment

We agree with the recommendation. By December 31, 1987, we will complete a barrier analysis for all GS/GM 11-14 positions in the Social Security Administration's (SSA) Region IX where Hispanics, male or female, may be underrepresented.

Other Matters

We would like to resolve an apparent misunderstanding of the auditors concerning the extent of the internal applicant pool. On pages 6 and 23, the auditors' analysis was based on the internal applicant pool of Area 7. However, the internal applicant pool for grades 11 and 12 in the job series 105 is regionwide rather than limited to the area in which the vacancies occur. Therefore, comparing the availability of potential competitors within the area is not sufficient.

Finally, in addressing the concern regarding the time lag in appointing a new Regional Hispanic Employment Program (HEP) Coordinator, we would like to point out that during the interval the duties of the HEP were assumed by the Civil Rights and Equal Opportunity Manager, (an Hispanic female) and by the Assistant Regional Commissioner, Field Operations (an Hispanic male.) We feel confident that during this period Hispanic interests were being served by those two individuals.

Now on pp 4 and 20



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