

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-24-106127](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Global competitors are increasingly prioritizing the hiring of their citizens as employees at UN agencies to expand their influence in the UN. In 2010, GAO found that Americans were underrepresented in UN employment at the agencies GAO reviewed. Members of Congress have raised questions about the representation of Americans in UN organizations.

GAO was asked to review U.S. representation. This report examines (1) U.S. representation at five UN organizations; (2) issues affecting the employment of American staff at these organizations; and (3) the extent to which State has recently undertaken and assessed efforts to increase U.S. representation.

GAO analyzed employment data for 2015-2022 from five UN organizations that comprise over 50 percent of total UN professional staff. GAO also interviewed U.S. and UN officials and held discussion groups with Americans employed at the five organizations. These organizations were: the Secretariat; the World Health Organization; the Food and Agriculture Organization; the International Atomic Energy Agency; and the International Labour Organization. Finally, GAO assessed State's efforts to increase American employment at the UN.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making four recommendations to State, including to establish additional performance indicators and set targets for all indicators to track the progress of its actions to implement its strategy to encourage U.S. citizens to pursue UN careers. State concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-24-106127](#). For more information, contact Nagla'a El-Hodiri at (202) 512-7279 or ElHodiriN@gao.gov.

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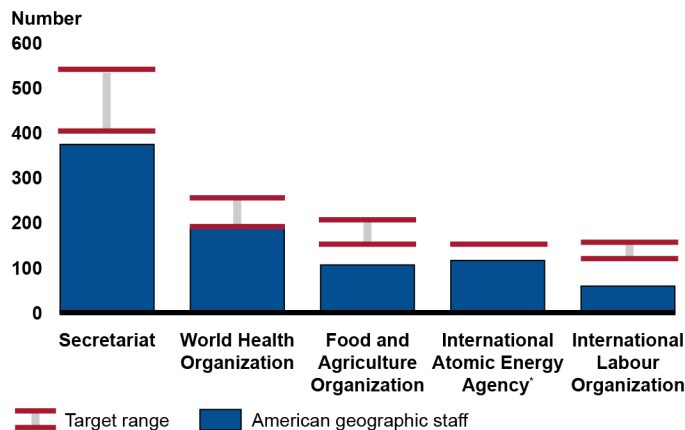
UNITED NATIONS

State Department Should Better Assess Its Efforts to Increase Employment of Americans at UN Agencies

What GAO Found

U.S. citizen employment at UN organizations, or U.S. representation, was generally below targets at all five United Nations (UN) organizations GAO reviewed. Some UN organizations establish targets for member state representation among certain professional positions. Representation of Americans was below the established target at all five UN organizations each year from 2015 to 2021. In 2022, the World Health Organization met its minimum target of employing 188 Americans, but representation of Americans was below the targets at the four other organizations (see figure).

Number of Americans Compared to Targets at Five United Nations Organizations, as of December 31, 2022



Source: GAO analysis of UN organization staffing and target data. | GAO-24-106127

¹IAEA's representation target is a single number rather than a range.

Americans who participated in seven discussion groups at the five UN organizations GAO reviewed reported challenges affecting the recruitment, hiring, and retention of professional staff. Consistent with GAO reports since 2001, discussion groups identified challenges such as lengthy hiring processes and unclear compensation packages. In addition, some Americans reported new challenges at certain UN organizations, such as the perception that an agency preferred to hire outside candidates for senior positions. UN officials highlighted actions that address some of these issues, such as efforts to streamline hiring.

The Department of State (State) is responsible for supporting the U.S. presence in the UN system and has taken actions to promote U.S. employment at UN agencies. State's Bureau of International Organization Affairs developed a strategy in 2023 to encourage U.S. citizens to pursue careers in international organizations. The strategy includes actions to assist in achieving this goal; however, the bureau has not established performance indicators for all its actions or set targets for the indicators. GAO's work on managing federal efforts calls for offices to establish indicators and targets to measure performance. By creating additional indicators and setting targets, State can better understand the extent to which its efforts are encouraging U.S. citizens to pursue UN careers.