



April 2024

UNITED NATIONS

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

Accessible Version

GAO Highlights

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

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

April 2024

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

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.

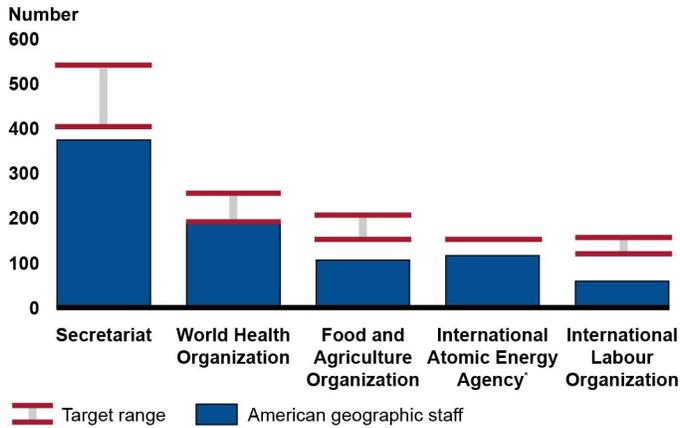
What GAO Recommends

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.

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

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

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

	American geographic staff	Minimum target range	Maximum target range
Secretariat	374	394	533
World Health Organization	188	188	255
Food and Agriculture Organization	106	145	196
International Atomic Energy Agency*	116	146	146
International Labour Organization	59	112	149

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

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.

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Abbreviations

FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IO	Department of State Bureau of International Organization Affairs
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISN	Department of State Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation
JPO	Junior Professional Officer
MSP	Office of Multilateral Strategy and Personnel
PRC	People's Republic of China
UN	United Nations
WHO	World Health Organization

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April 16, 2024

Congressional Requesters

To expand their global influence, competing and partner nations of the United States are increasingly prioritizing the hiring of their citizens in United Nations (UN) organizations. U.S. citizens employed at international organizations “advance U.S. norms and values such as accountability, ethical conduct, innovation, productivity, standards setting, and transparency,” according to the Department of State (State). State is the U.S. agency primarily responsible for leading U.S. efforts toward achieving equitable representation in the UN. Correspondingly, Members of Congress have raised questions about U.S. representation in UN organizations. These questions stem in part from an interest in strengthening Americans’ ability to impact the organization, and because the U.S. is the largest financial contributor to the UN system.

GAO has reviewed the hiring of U.S. citizens, or U.S. representation, at selected UN organizations in 2001, 2006, and 2010, and has found that Americans were generally underrepresented, according to “geographic representation” employment targets established by some UN organizations.¹

You asked us to assess current U.S. representation at UN organizations. This report addresses: (1) U.S. representation at selected UN organizations from 2015 to 2022, (2) issues that affect the recruitment, hiring, and retention of Americans at selected UN organizations, and (3) the extent to which State has recently undertaken and assessed efforts to improve U.S. representation at UN organizations.²

¹See *United Nations: Targeted Strategies Could Help Boost U.S. Representation*, [GAO-01-839](#), Jul. 27, 2001; *United Nations: Additional Efforts Needed to Increase U.S. Employment at U.N. Agencies*, [GAO-06-988](#), Sept. 6, 2006; and *U.S. Employment in the United Nations: State Department Needs to Enhance Reporting Requirements and Evaluate Its Efforts to Increase U.S. Representation*, [GAO-10-1028](#), Sept. 30, 2010.

²For purposes of this report, we are defining Americans as U.S. nationals or U.S. citizens, as appropriate. The UN organizations in our review use the term “nationality” when referring to representation of member states among employees. State uses the term “U.S. citizens” in its strategy to promote U.S. employment at the UN.

To address these issues, we focused our review on five UN organizations:

- the Secretariat³ in New York City;
- the Food and Agriculture Organization⁴ (FAO) in Rome, Italy;
- the International Atomic Energy Agency⁵ (IAEA) in Vienna, Austria; and
- the International Labour Organization⁶ (ILO) and World Health Organization⁷ (WHO), both located in Geneva, Switzerland.

We selected these five organizations based on factors such as the number of professional staff they employ.⁸ For all objectives, we interviewed State officials within the Bureau of International Organization Affairs (IO) virtually and at all U.S. missions overseas responsible for engaging with our five selected UN organizations in person during site

³The United Nations (UN) was founded in 1945, and the UN Secretariat, headed by the Secretary-General, carries out the day-to-day work of the organization. According to the UN Charter, the four purposes of the organization are, in part, to maintain international peace and security; develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples; cooperate in solving international problems and in promoting respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion; and be a center for harmonizing the acts of nations in attaining these common ends.

⁴FAO was established in 1945 in part to raise levels of nutrition and standards of living, to improve agricultural productivity, and to better the condition of rural populations. FAO is the lead agency in the UN system for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and rural development.

⁵IAEA was established in 1957 and works with its member states and other partners to promote safe, secure, and peaceful nuclear technologies. IAEA's mission focuses on safety and security, science and technology, and safeguards and verification. IAEA also plays a role in preventing the spread of nuclear weapons.

⁶ILO was created in 1919 and brings together governments, employers, and workers of the member states, to set labor standards, develop policies, and devise programs promoting decent work for all women and men. In 1946, the ILO became a specialized agency of the United Nations. The main aims of the ILO are to promote rights at work, encourage decent employment opportunities, enhance social protection, and strengthen dialogue on work-related issues.

⁷WHO was created in 1948 and is the directing and coordinating authority for health issues within the UN system. WHO is responsible for providing leadership on global health matters, shaping the health research agenda, setting norms and standards, articulating evidence-based policy options providing technical support to countries, and monitoring and assessing health trends.

⁸During our selection process we ranked UN agencies with a greater number of staff more highly than those with a lower number of staff.

visits.⁹ We also interviewed UN officials responsible for human resource issues at these organizations in person during site visits.

To address U.S. representation at selected UN organizations, we analyzed 2015-2022 staffing data from the Secretariat, FAO, IAEA, ILO, and WHO, with a focus on positions subject to geographic targets.¹⁰ We assessed the reliability of these data by reviewing related documentation, interviewing UN organization officials, and conducting electronic testing, and determined that these data are sufficiently reliable for our purposes of reporting on staffing at each organization.

To identify issues that affect the recruitment, hiring, and retention of Americans, we conducted discussion groups with 52 Americans employed at the five UN organizations. These groups included American staff ranging from non-supervisory to supervisory positions at each organization. We conducted a content analysis of responses provided by the participants in the discussion groups and compared the issues we identified against factors cited in past GAO reports addressing UN employment of U.S. citizens.

To assess and evaluate State's efforts to improve U.S. representation at UN organizations, we discussed such efforts with State officials and reviewed key documents. These included standard operating procedures for advocating for American candidates for UN positions and data related to those advocacy efforts. See appendix I for more information on our objectives, scope, and methodology.

We conducted this performance audit from July 2022 to April 2024 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

⁹All embassies, consulates, and other diplomatic posts in foreign countries are collectively known as missions. Missions are led by an ambassador and do some of the same work as embassies. These missions share the common goal of carrying out the foreign policy objectives of the U.S. government.

¹⁰The most recent year-end data available at the time of our review were from December 31, 2022.

Background

The UN System and Its Staff

The United Nations is a cornerstone of a rules-based international order, grounded in democratic values, with a mission shared by countries around the world to advance human rights, promote the peaceful settlement of disputes, and ensure adherence to international law. The UN is comprised of six principal bodies: the General Assembly, Security Council, Economic and Social Council, Trusteeship Council, International Court of Justice, and the Secretariat. The UN system also encompasses funds and programs, such as the UN Development Programme, and specialized agencies, such as FAO. These funds, programs, and specialized agencies have their own governing bodies and budgets but follow the guidelines of the UN charter.¹¹

Article 101 of the UN Charter states that in recruiting staff, the primary consideration is to obtain “the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity” and recognizes the importance of recruiting staff on “as wide a geographical basis as possible.” Each UN organization has its own personnel policies, procedures, and staff rules that it uses to fulfill these recruitment goals.

According to data from the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, a total of about 125,000 personnel were employed in the UN system in 2022, the latest year for which data are available. Generally, UN organizations use a standard pay scale based on a common job classification system to compensate their professional staff. Table 1 shows the UN grade scale for professional staff and the approximate U.S. government equivalent.

¹¹According to a 2007 UN Joint Inspection Unit report on voluntary funding of UN organizations, UN organizations’ funding resources are generally classified in two categories: (1) assessed contributions from member states, i.e., regular budget resources, and (2) voluntary contributions, generally referred to as extrabudgetary resources. Extrabudgetary resources can be used for the core purposes fundamental for the existence of an organization in which case they are provided without condition, or used for non-core purposes in which case they are generally earmarked by the donor for specific purposes.

Table 1: United Nations (UN) Grade Scale and U.S. Government Equivalent for Professional and Senior Positions

	UN entry-level	UN entry-level	UN entry-level	UN mid-level	UN mid-level	UN senior-level and policymaking	UN senior-level and policymaking
UN grade	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	D1/D2	Under Secretary-General/Assistant Secretary-General
U.S. grade	GS-11	GS-12	GS-13	GS-14	GS-15	Senior Executive Service	Executive Schedule

Source: GAO analysis based on State Department information and technical review by UN agencies. | GAO-24-106127

Note: UN "P" grades are professional positions, and "D" grades are director positions.

Geographic and Nongeographic Professional Positions

All five agencies we reviewed have designated professional positions subject to geographic representation targets. Targets are for professional and higher positions only, and do not reflect representation among non-geographic professional staff, who are often funded by extrabudgetary support.¹²

The Secretariat, WHO, FAO, and ILO have established formal procedures to determine member states' target range for equitable representation among geographic positions.¹³ These target ranges are calculated using three factors: membership status, population size (for Secretariat, WHO, and FAO), and assessed financial contributions.¹⁴ IAEA uses informal targets for member states that provide at least 1 percent of IAEA's regular

¹²In addition, Secretariat, WHO, FAO, and ILO targets are based on an assumed or budgeted number of geographic positions that does not always match the actual number of filled geographic positions at each organization. As a result, progress toward meeting targets does not fully represent the proportion of Americans among all filled professional positions at each organization.

¹³In April 2023, the Secretariat updated its method for calculating geographic targets. According to Secretariat officials, Americans will be more "underrepresented" after these changes take place. In addition, according to WHO officials, as of January 2024 WHO is considering updating its method for calculating geographic targets. For purposes of our report, we refer to the methods in place for our 5 UN organizations prior to these changes, which aligns with the timeframes for our data.

¹⁴At ILO, targets are based on assessed contributions, with heavier weighting for member states that contribute more. At the Secretariat, WHO, and FAO, member states receive an equal score for "membership," while formula components for financial contributions and populations are more heavily weighted for countries that contribute more funding or have larger populations. Formulas result in a target percentage range for "equitable representation" for each member state. These targets are expressed in terms of a range of positions to provide organizations with some flexibility in meeting these targets.

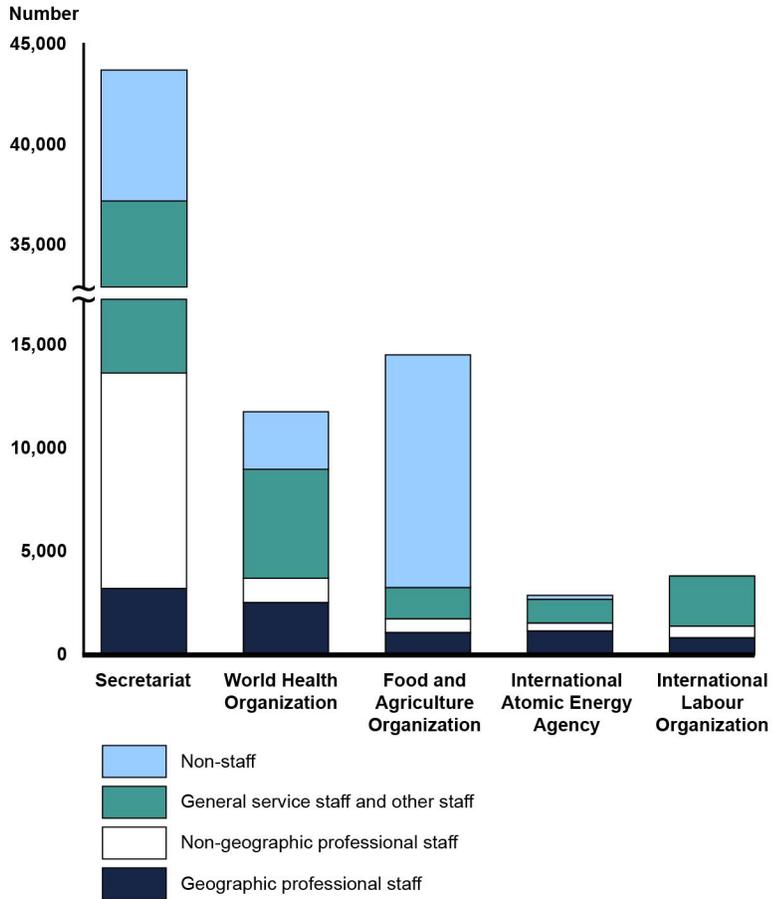
budget.¹⁵ IAEA calculates these member states to be underrepresented if their geographic representation is less than half of their contribution percentage for the regular IAEA budget. For example, if a member state accounts for 5 percent of the contribution to the regular budget but its nationals occupy less than 2.5 percent of the geographic positions at the agency, IAEA would consider it underrepresented.

The five UN organizations in our review designate workers into various categories. These categories include: professional and senior staff subject to geographic representation targets; professional and senior staff not subject to geographic targets (typically those whose positions are funded through extrabudgetary funding, or translators and interpreters); other staff such as general service staff and national professional officers; and “non-staff” positions such as consultants and contractors.

As shown in figure 1, the workforce composition varies across the five organizations we reviewed. At FAO, non-staff make up 78 percent of the workforce. At other organizations, such as IAEA and ILO, the use of non-staff is much less common, and most workers are staff members.

¹⁵According to IAEA officials, IAEA does not apply numerical quotas or desirable ranges for recruitment purposes. However, for internal purposes, IAEA maintains a record of post allocations based on member state assessments for contributions toward IAEA’s regular budget and compares it with the actual staff nationality distribution.

Figure 1: Composition of Workforce at Five United Nations (UN) Organizations in 2022



Source: GAO analysis of UN organization staffing data, UN organization documents, and information from UN officials. | GAO-24-106127

Accessible Data for Figure 1: Composition of Workforce at Five United Nations (UN) Organizations in 2022

	Geographic professional staff	Non-geographic professional staff	General service staff	Non-Staff
Secretariat	3,216	10,424	23,151	6,526
World Health Organization	2,533	1,176	5,274	2,786
Food and Agriculture Organization	1,078	668	1,512	11,261
International Atomic Energy Agency	1,159	374	1,152	198

	Geographic professional staff	Non-geographic professional staff	General service staff	Non-Staff
International Labour Organization	823	567	2,424	0

Source: GAO analysis of UN organization staffing data, UN organization documents, and information from UN officials. | GAO-24-106127

Note: Geographic professional staff are in P, D, or higher grades and their positions are subject to geographic representation targets. Nongeographic professional staff are in P, D, or higher grades, but their positions are not subject to geographic representation targets—often because they are funded through extrabudgetary support. Other staff include general service staff, field service staff, and national officers, none of which are subject to geographic representation targets. Non-staff include workers such as consultants and contractors. Secretariat non-staff data reported above for 2022 are preliminary and may vary from the final data reported by the Secretariat in the future. In addition, the Secretariat non-staff totals for 2022 reported above include consultants and contractors, but do not include interns and secondments, as 2022 data on interns and secondments are not available at the time of this report. In 2021, there were 726 interns and 92 secondments (staff on loan from member states) at the Secretariat. WHO non-staff data are for the full calendar year, rather than a snapshot from December 31 of that year. WHO non-staff data are an estimate of the number of full-time equivalent consultants and workers under Agreements for Performance of Work for that year. We do not include WHO staff with Special Services Agreements in the data above. All other data are as of December 31, 2022.

As of December 31, 2022, the number of total professional staff at these five organizations ranged from nearly 1,400 at ILO to over 13,600 at the Secretariat. The number of professional staff subject to geographic representation targets ranged from over 800 at ILO to over 3,200 at the Secretariat.¹⁶ At some of these organizations, general service staff and non-staff outnumber professional staff. The percent of total positions subject to geographic representation ranges widely across agencies, from 7 percent of the workforce at the Secretariat to 40 percent of the workforce at IAEA.

Member State Contributions to the UN and Selected UN Organizations

From 2013–2022 the United States was the top contributor to the UN system for total (regular and extrabudgetary) contributions combined.¹⁷ While the precise amount varies from year to year, the United States typically contributed approximately 25 percent of the overall UN budget.

¹⁶At the Secretariat, 76 percent of professional and higher staff were not subject to geographic targets. In [GAO-10-1028](#), we noted that the number of non-geographic professional positions was growing much more rapidly than the number of geographic positions at the UN organizations we reviewed, including the Secretariat. This trend has not fully reversed but has slowed substantially. In this report, we focus on representation of Americans among positions subject to geographic targets.

¹⁷Data on member state contributions are from the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, a central repository for UN funding data.

The United Kingdom, Japan, and Germany were among the top 5 contributors from 2013 to 2022. In 2015, The People’s Republic of China (the PRC) became one of the top 10 contributors and has since been a top 5 contributor several times.

For FAO, IAEA, ILO, and WHO, the United States was the top government contributor during 2013–2022. Across these four organizations, the U.S. contribution ranged from 9–34 percent of the total government contributions on a yearly basis during 2013–2022.¹⁸

State’s Role in U.S. Representation

State’s Bureau of International Organization Affairs (IO) manages efforts to strengthen U.S. representation in the UN system. IO coordinates with U.S. missions around the world that regularly engage with these UN organizations. In addition, State cooperates with other federal agencies that have interests in UN organizations.

U.S. Representation at Five Selected UN Organizations Generally Did Not Meet UN Targets and Has Declined

From 2015 to 2022, representation of Americans among geographic staff was generally below UN organization targets at all five organizations we reviewed. In addition, representation of Americans among geographic staff declined over this time period at all five organizations. Representation trends varied slightly by seniority level and UN organization, but generally declines were at the entry-level and mid-level, with mixed progress at the senior-level. With a few exceptions, the United States had relatively low participation in entry programs such as the Junior Professional Officer (JPO) program and UN Volunteers, which may have contributed to these trends. See appendix II for more information on U.S. participation in entry programs such as the JPO program.

¹⁸According to State officials, the Department and other contributing agencies withheld funding from WHO while withdrawal from the organization was pending in 2020. However, the United States provided \$357.6 million in WHO extrabudgetary contributions in January 2021.

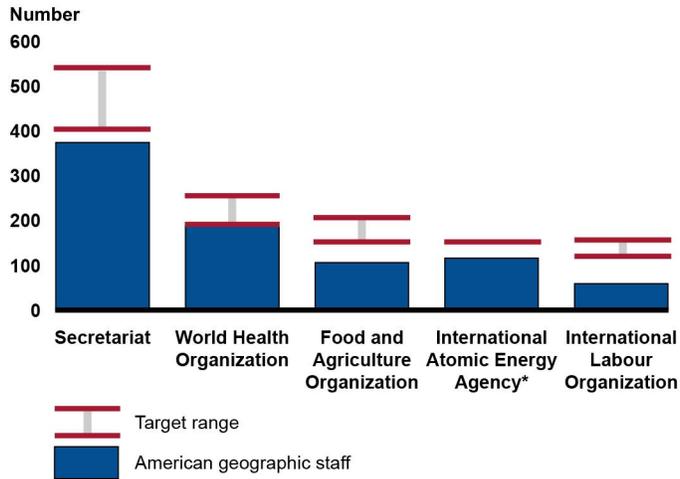
American Professional Staff Were Generally below UN Geographic Representation Targets, but Are Prevalent at Five UN Organizations

As of 2022, American representation was below UN organizations' targets at four of five organizations.¹⁹ The five UN organizations we reviewed have targets for the number of Americans and nationals from other member states among geographic staff. With one exception, representation of Americans was below target at all five organizations each year from 2015 to 2022. In 2022, WHO met its minimum target of 188 Americans.²⁰ Among those organizations where Americans were underrepresented in 2022, the level of underrepresentation varied from 20 positions under the minimum target at the Secretariat to 53 positions below the minimum target at ILO, as shown in figure 2. See appendix III for more information on representation of Americans in comparison to targets at these five organizations.

¹⁹Targets are for geographic professional and higher positions only, and do not reflect representation among non-geographic professional staff, who are often funded by extrabudgetary support. In addition, Secretariat, WHO, FAO, and ILO targets are based on an assumed or budgeted number of geographic positions that does not always match the actual number of filled geographic positions at each organization. As a result, progress toward meeting targets does not fully represent the proportion of Americans among all filled professional positions at each organization.

²⁰According to WHO officials, WHO did not update the number of budgeted posts it uses for its targets from 1996 to 2023. As of January 2024, according to WHO officials, WHO is considering updating the number of budgeted positions it uses for its targets.

Figure 2: Number of Americans in Geographic Positions in Comparison to United Nations (UN) Targets at Five UN Organizations, 2022



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

Accessible Data for Figure 2: Number of Americans in Geographic Positions in Comparison to United Nations (UN) Targets at Five UN Organizations, 2022

	American geographic staff	Minimum target range	Maximum target range
Secretariat	374	394	533
World Health Organization	188	188	255
Food and Agriculture Organization	106	145	196
International Atomic Energy Agency*	116	146	146
International Labour Organization	59	112	149

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

Note: Data are as of December 31, 2022. IAEA's representation target is based on the number of filled geographic positions at IAEA. In contrast, Secretariat, World Health Organization, Food and Agriculture Organization, and International Labour Organization calculate geographic representation targets based on an assumed or budgeted number of geographic posts that does not always match the actual number of filled geographic positions at each organization. As a result, progress toward meeting targets does not fully represent the proportion of Americans among all filled professional positions at each organization.

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

Even though U.S. representation was generally below targets, Americans often held more geographic positions than staff from other countries at the end of 2022. Americans can be both the most prevalent nationality and be below representation targets because the United States is the

member state with the highest target at all five organizations.²¹ As shown in table 2, at the Secretariat, WHO, FAO, and IAEA, Americans were the most prevalent nationality among geographic staff. At ILO, Americans were the second-most prevalent nationality, behind French nationals. According to UN officials, it can be particularly hard to reach targets for underrepresented member states like the United States and the PRC that have high targets. At one UN organization we reviewed, human resources staff said they are directed to give equal weight during the hiring process to applicants from any below-target country, despite the fact that some countries such as the United States and the PRC have a much larger gap between targets and actual representation.

Table 2: Countries with the Top Number of Staff in Geographic Representation Positions at Five United Nations (UN) Organizations, 2022

Category	Nationality	Number of Geographic Employees	Target for representation	Level of representation based on targets
UN Secretariat Total number of positions subject to targets: 3,734	United States	374	394 to 533	Below target
UN Secretariat Total number of positions subject to targets: 3,734	Germany	140	114 to 154	Met target
UN Secretariat Total number of positions subject to targets: 3,734	France	137	83 to 112	Above target
World Health Organization Total number of positions subject to targets: Not provided	United States	188	188 to 255	Met target
World Health Organization Total number of positions subject to targets: Not provided	United Kingdom	147	39 to 54	Above target
World Health Organization Total number of positions subject to targets: Not provided	India	143	7 to 14	Above target

²¹The United States is the largest financial contributor to the United Nations, and also has a large population. Financial contributions are included in target calculations at all five organizations, and population levels are included in target calculations at Secretariat, WHO, and FAO.

Letter

Category	Nationality	Number of Geographic Employees	Target for representation	Level of representation based on targets
Food and Agriculture Organization Total number of positions subject to targets: 1,368	United States	106	145 to 196	Below target
Food and Agriculture Organization Total number of positions subject to targets: 1,368	People's Republic of China	60	89 to 121	Below target
Food and Agriculture Organization Total number of positions subject to targets: 1,368	Italy	47	24 to 32	Above target
International Atomic Energy Agency Total number of positions subject to targets: 1,159	United States	116	146	Below target
International Atomic Energy Agency Total number of positions subject to targets: 1,159	United Kingdom	69	26	Above target
International Atomic Energy Agency Total number of positions subject to targets: 1,159	France	69	25	Above target
International Labour Organization Total number of positions subject to targets: 785	France	85	22 to 37	Above target
International Labour Organization Total number of positions subject to targets: 785	United States	59	112 to 149	Below target
International Labour Organization Total number of positions subject to targets: 785	Germany	49	31 to 52	Met target

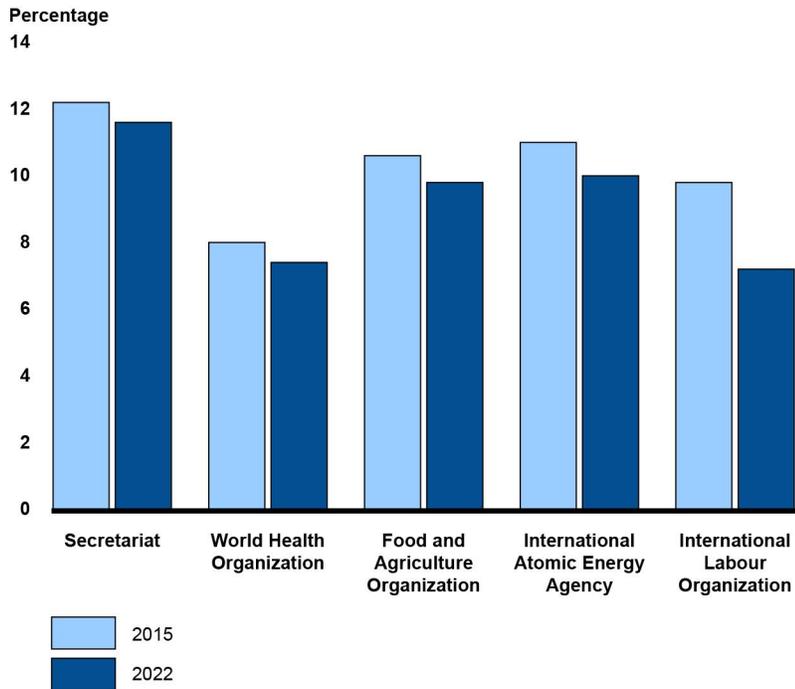
Source: GAO analysis of UN organization staffing and target data. | GAO 24-106127

Note: Data are as of December 31, 2022. Secretariat, World Health Organization, Food and Agriculture Organization, and International Labour Organization calculate geographic representation targets based on an assumed or budgeted number of geographic posts that does not always match the actual number of filled geographic positions at each organization. The World Health Organization chose not to provide the number of posts it used to calculate its targets.

Geographic Representation of Americans Has Declined in Recent Years at Five UN Organizations, in Part Due to High Attrition Rates

In addition to American representation generally being below UN’s own targets, representation of Americans has been declining over time. From 2015 to 2022, representation of Americans among geographic staff declined at all five organizations we reviewed. The steepest decline was at ILO, where representation of Americans declined by 3 percentage points, from 10 to 7 percent of geographic staff. See figure 3.

Figure 3: Percentage of Geographic Positions Filled by Americans at Five United Nations (UN) Organizations, 2015 and 2022



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

Accessible Data for Figure 3: Percentage of Geographic Positions Filled by Americans at Five United Nations (UN) Organizations, 2015 and 2022

	2015	2022
Secretariat	12.2	11.6
World Health Organization	8	7.4

	2015	2022
Food and Agriculture Organization	10.6	9.8
International Atomic Energy Agency	11.0	10.0
International Labour Organization	9.8	7.2

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

Notes: Secretariat 2015 data are from June 30, 2015. All other data are from December 31 of each year. Representation of Americans generally declined throughout the 2015 to 2022 period at the Secretariat, World Health Organization, International Atomic Energy Agency, and International Labour Organization. At the Food and Agriculture Organization, representation of Americans increased from 2016 to 2018 and then declined from 2018 to 2022.

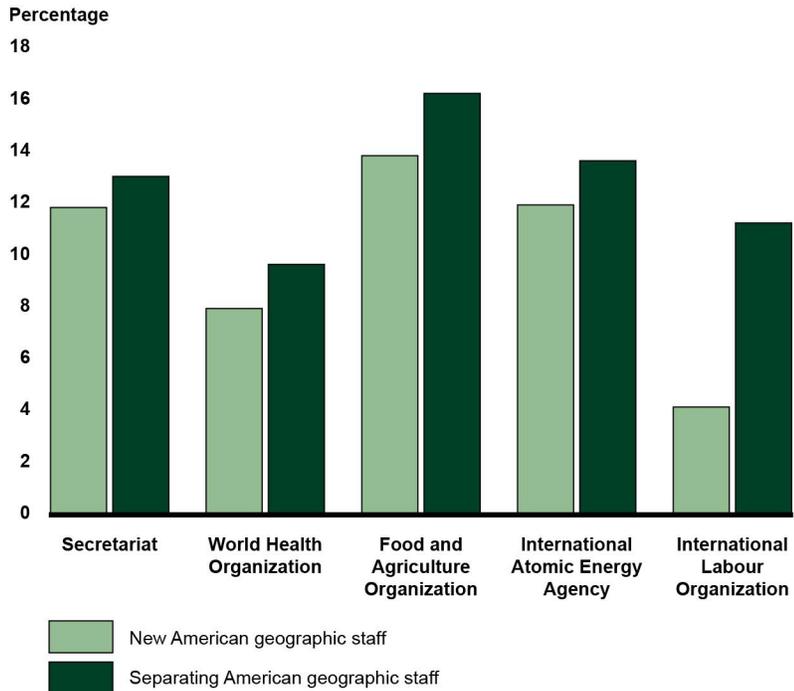
At all five organizations, the decline in U.S. representation from 2015 to 2022 was the largest or one of the largest declines among all underrepresented countries. At IAEA and ILO, the United States had the largest decline in representation among all member states.²² In contrast, the countries with the largest increases in representation were: the PRC at the Secretariat and FAO; the Democratic Republic of Congo at WHO; Austria at IAEA; and France at ILO.

At all five organizations, the attrition rate of Americans was higher than that of non-Americans, with 6 to 11 percent average annual attrition of American geographic staff compared to 4 to 8 percent average annual attrition of non-American geographic staff. In addition, none of these organizations hired Americans at sufficient rates to increase representation over time. As shown in figure 4, Americans at these organizations left geographic positions at higher rates than they entered, leading to overall declines in representation over time. This difference was particularly stark at ILO, where Americans were 4 percent of new

²²We measured representation as the proportion of nationals from a member state employed among all filled geographic positions. We measured changes in representation in percentage points, so a member state with a decline from 10 percent to 7 percent over this period would have the same change in representation as a member state with a decline from 4 percent to 1 percent. The United States had the fourth-largest decline in representation among all nationalities at WHO and the Secretariat, and the fifth-largest decline in representation among all nationalities at FAO. The only underrepresented member states with larger declines in representation from 2015 to 2022 were: Japan at the Secretariat; and Germany and the United Kingdom at FAO.

geographic staff and 11 percent of separating geographic staff from 2016 to 2022.²³

Figure 4: Percent of Americans among New and Separating Staff at Five United Nations (UN) Organizations, 2016–2022



Source: GAO analysis of United Nations organization staffing data. | GAO-24-106127

Accessible Data for Figure 4: Percent of Americans among New and Separating Staff at Five United Nations (UN) Organizations, 2016–2022

	New American geographic staff	Separating American geographic staff
Secretariat	11.8	13
World Health Organization	7.9	9.6

²³We estimated the number of new geographic staff as the number of unique employees who were in a geographic position at some point from 2016 to 2022 but were not in a geographic position the previous year. We estimated the number of separating geographic staff as the number of unique employees who were not in a geographic position at some point from 2016 to 2022 but were in a geographic position the previous year. Note that, because our data are snapshots from a single point in time each year, we are not able to count employees who entered and left the organization within the same year. When we include non-geographic employees in this analysis, Americans left the Secretariat, WHO, ILO, and FAO at higher rates than they entered.

	New American geographic staff	Separating American geographic staff
Food and Agriculture Organization	13.8	16.2
International Atomic Energy Agency	11.9	13.6
International Labour Organization	4.1	11.2

Source: GAO analysis of United Nations organization staffing data. | GAO-24-106127

Note: We estimated the number of new geographic staff as the number of unique employees who were in a geographic position at some point from 2016 to 2022 but were not in a geographic position the previous year. We estimated the number of separating geographic staff as the number of unique employees who were not in a geographic position at some point from 2016 to 2022 but were in a geographic position the previous year. Note that, because our data are snapshots from a single point in time each year, we are not able to count employees who entered and left the organization within the same year. When we include non-geographic employees in this analysis, Americans left the Secretariat, WHO, ILO, and FAO at higher rates than they entered.

Mixed U.S. Progress Was Present at Senior Levels, and U.S. Representation Generally Decreased at Entry- and Mid-Levels, for Five UN Organizations

Representation of Americans among senior-level geographic staff increased from 2015 to 2022 at three of the UN organizations we reviewed and decreased at two of the organizations (see fig. 5).²⁴

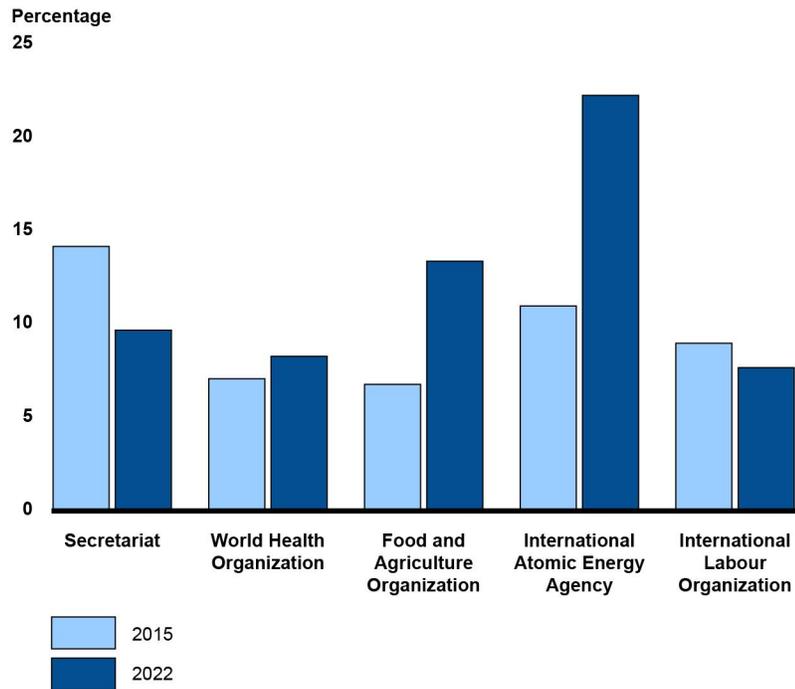
Representation of Americans among senior-level geographic staff increased at WHO, FAO, and IAEA from 2015 to 2022. At FAO and IAEA, Americans had the highest percentage point increase in representation of senior-level geographic staff among all nationalities; this change was particularly marked at IAEA, where representation of Americans among senior-level geographic staff doubled from 11 percent in 2015 to 22 percent in 2022. See appendix III for more information on representation of Americans by seniority level at these five UN organizations.

At the Secretariat and ILO, American representation declined among senior-level geographic staff over this timeframe. This was particularly true at the Secretariat, where representation fell from 14 percent in 2015 to 10 percent in 2022—the largest decline among all nationalities. At ILO,

²⁴Senior-level staff include officials in D1, D2, and executive positions (such as Assistant Director-General) at each organization, and also P6 staff at WHO. Senior-level geographic staff are a relatively small portion of staff at each organization. Because of this, the percentage changes we present are at times driven by a small change in the number of Americans. In 2022, the total number of senior-level geographic staff at each organization was approximately: 370 at the Secretariat; 200 at WHO; 110 at FAO and ILO; and 50 at IAEA.

representation of Americans fell from 9 percent to 8 percent of senior-level geographic staff.

Figure 5: Representation of Americans among Senior-Level Geographic Staff at Five United Nations (UN) Organizations, 2015 and 2022



Source: GAO analysis of United Nations organization staffing data. | GAO-24-106127

Accessible Data for Figure 5: Representation of Americans among Senior-Level Geographic Staff at Five United Nations (UN) Organizations, 2015 and 2022

	2015	2022
Secretariat	14.1	9.5
World Health Organization	7.0	8.2
Food and Agriculture Organization	6.7	13.3
International Atomic Energy Agency	10.9	22.2
International Labour Organization	8.9	7.6

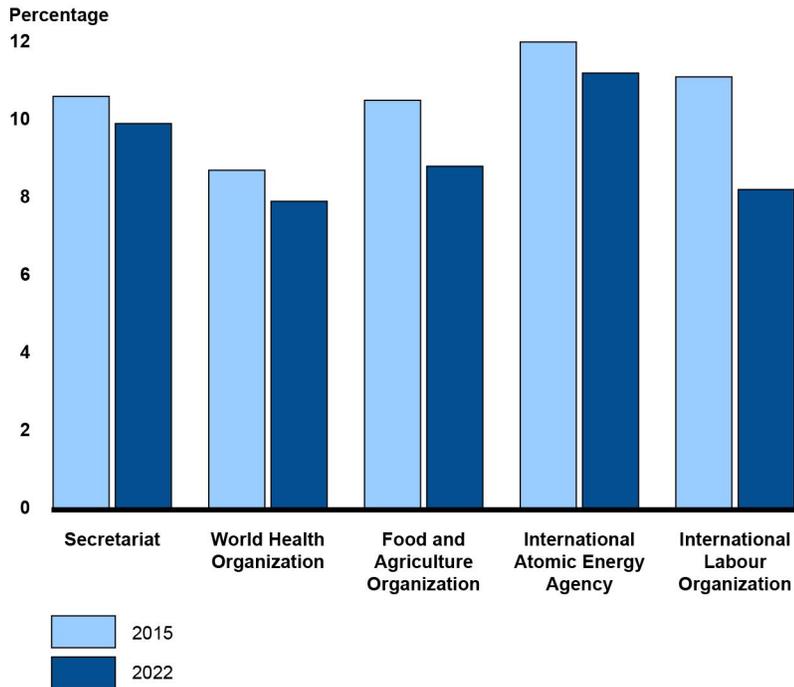
Source: GAO analysis of United Nations organization staffing data. | GAO-24-106127

Note: Senior-level staff include officials in D1, D2, and executive positions (such as Assistant Director-General) at each organization, and also P6 staff at WHO. This figure does not include senior-level staff in non-geographic professional positions. Secretariat 2015 data are from June 30, 2015. All other data are from December 31 of each year. Senior-level geographic staff are a relatively small portion of staff at each organization. Because of this, the percentage changes we present are at times driven by a small change in the number of Americans. In 2022, the total number of senior-level

geographic staff at each organization was approximately: 370 at the Secretariat; 200 at WHO; 110 at FAO and ILO; and 50 at IAEA.

As shown in figure 6, representation of Americans among mid-level (P4- and P5-level) geographic staff declined between 2015 and 2022 at all five organizations we reviewed. This decline ranged from a 1 percentage point decline at the Secretariat, WHO, and IAEA to a 3 percentage point decline at ILO. At ILO, the decline in American representation was the largest among all nationalities.

Figure 6: Representation of Americans among Mid-Level Geographic Staff at Five United Nations (UN) Organizations, 2015 and 2022



Source: GAO analysis of United Nations organization staffing data. | GAO-24-106127

Accessible Data for Figure 6: Representation of Americans among Mid-Level Geographic Staff at Five United Nations (UN) Organizations, 2015 and 2022

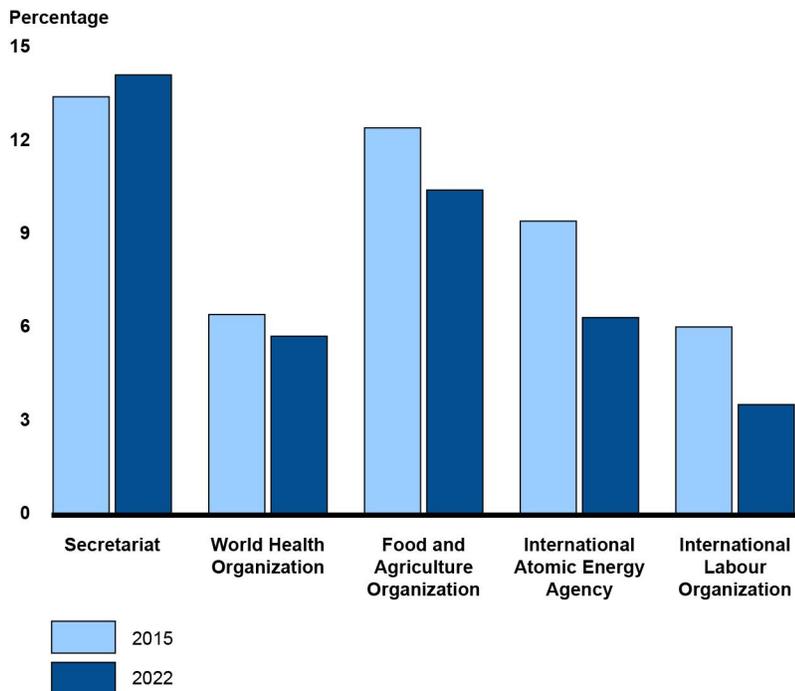
	2015	2022
Secretariat	10.6	9.9
World Health Organization	8.7	7.9
Food and Agriculture Organization	10.5	8.8
International Atomic Energy Agency	12	11.2
International Labour Organization	11.1	8.2

Source: GAO analysis of United Nations organization staffing data. | GAO-24-106127

Note: Mid-level geographic staff include officials in P4 and P5 positions. This figure does not include mid-level staff in non-geographic professional positions. Secretariat 2015 data are from June 30, 2015. All other data are from December 31 of each year.

Representation of Americans among entry-level (P1- through P3-level) geographic staff declined at four of the five organizations we reviewed from 2015 to 2022. This ranged from a 1 percentage point decline at WHO to a 3-percentage point decline at IAEA. At IAEA, the decline in U.S. representation was the largest among all nationalities. Representation of Americans increased among entry-level geographic staff at the Secretariat, from 13 percent in 2015 to 14 percent in 2022. See figure 7.

Figure 7: Representation of Americans among Entry-Level Geographic Staff at Five United Nations (UN) Organizations, 2015 and 2022



Source: GAO analysis of United Nations organization staffing data. | GAO-24-106127

Accessible Data for Figure 7: Representation of Americans among Entry-Level Geographic Staff at Five United Nations (UN) Organizations, 2015 and 2022

	2015	2022
Secretariat	13.4	14.1
World Health Organization	6.4	5.7
Food and Agriculture Organization	12.4	10.4

	2015	2022
International Atomic Energy Agency	9.4	6.3
International Labour Organization	6	3.6

Source: GAO analysis of United Nations organization staffing data. | GAO-24-106127

Note: Entry-level geographic staff include officials in P1, P2, and P3 positions. This figure does not include entry-level staff in non-geographic professional positions. Secretariat 2015 data are from June 30, 2015. All other data are from December 31 of each year.

U.S. Participation in the Junior Professional Officer Program and Other Entry or Visiting Staff Programs

UN organizations have a number of programs to bring in entry-level staff, such as the Junior Professional Officer (JPO) program. JPOs are young professionals that are financed, or sponsored, by their member country governments for 2-3 years and are supervised by UN staff. Other entry programs include UN Volunteers, internships, and the Young Professionals Program. Staff from member state governments can also gain exposure to the UN organization by serving as a “secondment,” a type of visiting staff.

As of the end of 2022, U.S. participation was generally low among these programs. There were a few exceptions where Americans were a substantial portion of staff, such as the JPO program at IAEA, and secondments at WHO and IAEA. In most of these programs, however, Americans were a low percentage of participants relative to the overall American presence at these organizations. See appendix II for more information on the JPO program and other entry programs.

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

Americans Who Participated in Discussion Groups We Held at Five UN Organizations Reported Career Challenges, Some of which the Organizations Are Addressing

American employees who participated in seven discussion groups that we conducted at all five UN organizations reported facing challenges in securing and continuing employment at their organizations.²⁵ Officials from these organizations told us that they are working to improve recruiting, hiring, and retaining professional staff, including Americans. Participants in these groups shared 10 key challenges in their UN organizations—seven of which have been long-standing issues.

²⁵We conducted seven discussion groups with a total of 52 participants—two at the UN Secretariat in New York City, one at FAO in Rome, Italy; one at IAEA in Vienna, Austria; and two at ILO and one at WHO in Geneva, Switzerland. The information obtained from our discussion groups is not generalizable to all Americans employed at the five UN organizations we reviewed or within the UN as a whole.

Seven Long-standing Challenges to Employment at the 5 UN Organizations Persisted

Discussion group participants identified seven long-standing challenges to recruiting, hiring, and retaining professional staff, including Americans, in the five UN organizations we reviewed. Some of these challenges have been identified in other GAO reports for more than 20 years.²⁶ With one exception, (noted below) these challenges may not be particular to Americans and may also affect employees of other member states at the UN agencies. Some of these challenges could affect Americans more than citizens from some of the other countries. For example, an IAEA official told us that sometimes the length of time it takes to hire staff is an issue for Americans who could possibly receive a better offer in the United States in the interim.

Difficulty obtaining spousal employment. In five of the seven discussion groups we conducted, participants reported that difficulty in obtaining employment for their spouses could adversely impact the recruiting, hiring, and retention of American employees at UN organizations. For example, one participant at IAEA said he would have to leave his position because his spouse could not find employment.

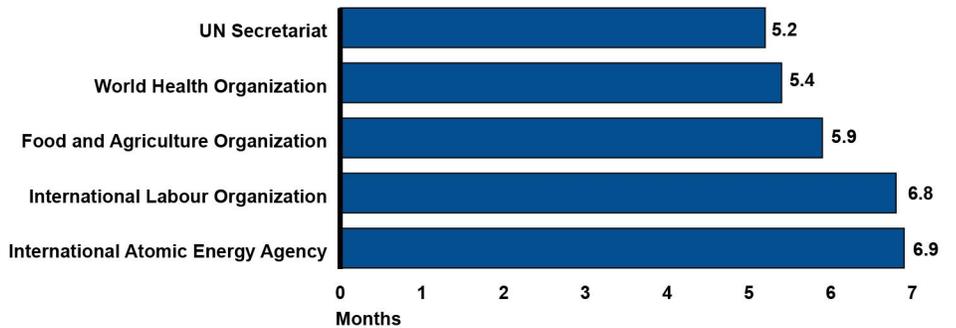
Lengthy hiring process. During five of the seven discussion groups we conducted, participants reported that the lengthy hiring process poses a challenge to recruitment and hiring. At a Secretariat discussion group, participants told us that while the agency has been streamlining the hiring process, it takes a long time to hire staff and, in the meantime, candidates find other opportunities. At WHO, one participant told us that they had to wait 18 months to hear about the status of their application, and another participant said it took between 9 and 12 months to get hired. One participant who worked for the FAO told us that it can be 8 months between submitting an application and getting called for an interview, and the best candidates are likely the first to drop out.

Based on information obtained from the five UN organizations we reviewed, the average length of time from the date a vacancy announcement is issued (published) to the date the offer of employment is sent to the selected candidate can take from about five to seven

²⁶See [GAO-01-839](#), [GAO-06-988](#), and [GAO-10-1028](#). [GAO-10-1028](#) identified another challenge—a preference for hiring internal candidates—that was not raised by any of our discussion group participants during this review.

months. See figure 8 for the average length of hiring time at these organizations.

Figure 8: Average Length of Hiring Time for Five UN Organizations, 2022



Source: GAO analysis of UN organization information. | GAO-24-106127

Accessible Data for Figure 8: Average Length of Hiring Time for Five UN Organizations, 2022

UN organization	Average hiring time (months)
International Atomic Energy Agency	6.9
International Labour Organization	6.8
UN Secretariat	5.2
World Health Organization	5.4
Food and Agriculture Organization	5.9

Source: GAO analysis of UN organization information. | GAO-24-106127

Note: Average length of hiring time for the Secretariat, International Atomic Energy Agency, International Labour Organization, World Health Organization, and Food and Agriculture Organization for the calendar year 2022. The average length of hiring time is the average length of time from the date a vacancy announcement is issued (published) to the date the offer of employment is sent to the selected candidate.

Low or unclear compensation or benefits. Participants in five of the seven discussion groups reported that UN salaries are not competitive with those in the private sector and some U.S. government positions. For example, a discussion group participant with hiring authority at the Secretariat provided an example of a well-qualified candidate who earned over \$200,000 in the private sector yet would likely only be eligible to apply for a Secretariat position with a maximum salary around \$100,000.

In addition, one participant said that the benefits—which can be substantial—could be difficult to identify or understand and were not clearly explained. Participants at FAO told us that they know people who have backed away from applying at the organization because they could not understand the package FAO was offering.

Limited opportunity for promotion and professional growth.

Participants in five of our seven discussion groups reported that limited opportunities for promotion and professional growth present a challenge to retaining Americans. According to IAEA officials, promotion is generally achieved by applying to a new position at a higher grade-level that is filled through a competitive selection process rather than through the reclassification of one's current position.

Participants at IAEA said that several vacant positions are not being filled. In one instance, for example, team members are rotated through such positions for 2–3 months, just short of the tenure necessary to trigger reclassification to a higher position or salary. IAEA participants also told us that staff with highly specialized skills, such as nuclear safeguards professionals, can become less marketable for other jobs the longer they stay at a UN organization.

American candidates lack proficiency in more than one UN language.

UN organizations have previously reported facing challenges finding qualified Americans proficient in more than one UN language. Participants in four discussion groups cited language proficiency in multiple UN languages as a barrier to recruitment, hiring, and retention. At FAO, one participant told us that there is a “dearth of Americans that speak a second language. Not every agency is strict about it, but FAO is.” While at WHO, participants told us that “Americans are not as multilingual, so they can't deploy to some countries with sudden outbreaks of contagious disease, and therefore don't get senior roles.”

Required mobility or rotation. Participants in three of the seven discussion groups reported that mobility or rotation policies—policies that require the acceptance of postings to different locations or rotations through different offices—posed challenges to recruitment and retention. Participants at FAO said that in the past, taking part in the mobility policy was perceived more as a punishment than a career-advancing move. One participant at the WHO told us that the agency has been struggling with these policies for years. Their colleagues who participated in the mobility program in the past encountered problems with finding housing and reliable guidance on resources.

Noncompetitive practices. Participants in three of our seven discussion groups reported that noncompetitive human resource practices at their organizations present challenges to recruitment, hiring, and retention. Some participants shared the perception that friends and fellow nationals help each other within their organization. Participants told us that

sometimes hiring does not seem to be competency or merit-based, and that they do not perceive hiring systems to be transparent.

Three Newly-Identified Challenges Are Specific to Certain UN Organizations

In addition to the long-standing challenges, the American UN employees we spoke with shared three additional challenges specific to certain UN organizations.

Perception of U.S. overrepresentation. During our discussion group at the Secretariat, participants reported that the perception that the United States is overrepresented at the agency is a challenge to the recruitment, hiring, and retention of Americans. These participants told us that the perception that the U.S. is overrepresented adversely impacts American candidates for job openings. One participant told us that an acquaintance of theirs who had advanced to the interview stage was told “We would love to hire you, too bad you’re American.” Another participant told us that several candidates were screened out of the selection process because they were American.²⁷

Preference for outside candidates at the director level. At the discussion group we conducted at FAO, participants reported that there was a preference for external candidates at the director level that posed a challenge for the retention of staff. These participants said that many of their director colleagues were fired, and many directors are on one-year contracts.²⁸ One participant said that there was high turnover during the first 2 years of the current Director General’s tenure. As a result, participants told us that many staff at the P5 level may not want to apply for director positions because the salary is not much higher, and it comes with much lower job security.

²⁷Of the ten challenges GAO identified for this report, the perception of U.S. overrepresentation was the only challenge that applied exclusively to U.S. citizens employed by UN agencies (rather than to citizens of all or most member states). In addition, some participants in some of the discussion groups at the other UN agencies we visited reported the perception of U.S. overrepresentation. In the interest of brevity, we report only selected examples.

²⁸In January 2024, FAO officials said that firings at the Director level are extremely rare, so the participants were likely observing Directors who were not obtaining renewals to their contracts.

Uncertainty surrounding contract extensions. At the discussion group we conducted at IAEA, participants reported that the uncertainty surrounding the extension of contracts was a challenge to the recruitment, hiring, and retention of Americans at the agency.²⁹ At IAEA, participants said that in recent years there has been increased uncertainty about whether employees will get contract extensions as well as an unclear understanding of the basis for granting or denying the extension.³⁰ Although IAEA follows an employment model where the expectation is that staff will leave IAEA after 7 years, participants told us that nevertheless some people spend many years at IAEA.

However, according to these participants, the lack of transparency about how or in what instances contract extensions are granted is extremely disruptive. Participants said that this uncertainty has increased over the last few years and said that the increased uncertainty over who gets extensions may be due to a perception on the part of upper management that too many extensions were approved in the past. This may have led to a sense of complacency and declining performance by some in the views of some participants. Some participants said that the uncertainty has led to a lot of anxiety for both managers and staff.

UN Organizations Are Making Efforts to Address Certain Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention Challenges

UN organizations we reviewed have taken, or plan to take, steps to address some of the challenges discussed above. According to UN organization human resource officials, these efforts can better support recruitment, hiring, and retention as well as address a number of the challenges employees shared with us.

Difficulty obtaining spousal employment: UN organizations we reviewed provide some support concerning spousal employment. For example, according to officials at the UN Secretariat, the Secretariat has a policy specific to transferring one of two employed spouses to a new location. Specifically, according to Secretariat officials, when both

²⁹For professional positions, the IAEA follows a policy of rotation out of the organization. Regular fixed-term appointments are typically made for an initial three-year period and are subject to a maximum tour of service which shall normally be seven years.

³⁰In addition, some participants in some of the discussion groups at the other UN agencies we visited reported concerns over contract extensions. In the interest of brevity, we report only selected examples.

spouses are serving with the organization and one of them is transferred indefinitely to another duty station, every effort will be made to assist the other spouse in securing employment with the UN at the new location, subject to the availability of a post and to relevant qualifications.

ILO officials said that the agency provides information and guidance to assist the employee and their spouse to find employment locally. IAEA officials said that the employee's spouse can, upon request, receive a certificate from the Austrian Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs indicating that they belong to the category enjoying preferential treatment. The issuance of the certificate does not presuppose any specific offer of employment.

Lengthy hiring process: According to IAEA officials, IAEA has taken steps to reduce the time it takes to fill vacancies. However, the officials also noted that its efforts to address member states' request to increase staff from low-income countries and to achieve gender parity may extend the time to fill vacancies. Secretariat officials said that they have introduced new tools in recent years to support hiring managers in decreasing the time taken for making selection decisions. FAO officials said that they are issuing new guidelines for the recruitment of staff, with the aim to simplify the selection process to gain more efficiency.

Low or unclear benefits or compensation: UN organization officials said that vacancy announcements contain information on salary and benefits. They also said that there are a number of publicly available resources to which candidates may refer such as International Civil Service Committee salary tables as well the agency's own career website.

American candidates lack proficiency in more than one UN language: FAO, ILO, and IAEA reported allowing newly-selected candidates to acquire sufficient proficiency in a second UN language while on the job. All five of the UN agencies reported offering language training once the candidate is hired. Further, according to IAEA officials English is the only required language at IAEA.

Required mobility or rotation: FAO has been considering changes to its mobility and rotation policies. In January 2024, FAO officials told us that they will review the organization's mobility and rotation policy by the end of 2025. WHO officials reported that their new mobility policy was approved and implemented in the summer of 2023, with an agreement to start with a voluntary phase in July 2023.

According to WHO officials, eligible candidates only—staff who were fixed term or on a continuing appointment with a minimum of 2 years’ time in position—could apply to positions which comprised both HQ and regional positions. WHO planned to inform candidates of the recommendations in the first quarter of 2024. The mandatory mobility process at WHO is scheduled to start in 2025 with communication to staff who would be eligible during the third quarter of 2024, according to WHO officials. It is unclear how Americans will respond to the mandatory mobility process.

State Has Taken Actions to Improve U.S. Representation at UN Organizations, But Has Not Taken Certain Steps to Assess Its Progress

IO has taken various actions to improve U.S. representation at UN organizations, such as creating a new office to promote U.S. citizen employment at international organizations, including the UN. The new office advocates for U.S. candidates for UN positions, participates in career fairs, and undertakes other actions toward this goal. In 2023, IO’s new office created a strategy, mandated by Congress, for encouraging U.S. citizens to pursue careers at international organizations. However, we found that the new office has not assessed its strategy actions and currently does not have certain performance metrics to measure progress of its strategy actions over time.

State Has Taken Actions Intended to Improve U.S. Representation at International Organizations

State Created an Office to Promote U.S. Citizen Employment at the UN

IO created the Office of Multilateral Strategy and Personnel (MSP) in July 2021 to focus on promoting U.S. citizen employment at the UN and other international organizations, tracking third-country efforts to reshape or undermine the rules-based international order and executing strategies for key electoral campaigns for American candidates in multilateral agencies. MSP officials said that MSP took over the U.S. citizen employment portfolio from IO’s Office of Management Policy and Resources, which managed this work prior to the creation of MSP. State told us that MSP’s Multilateral Appointments team, one of three MSP teams, has four officers dedicated to promoting U.S. citizen employment

at the UN as of December 2023. MSP has efforts for, and a strategy regarding, the UN and other international organizations; however, our focus in this report is on the UN system.³¹

State Promotes U.S. Employment in the UN

IO, primarily through MSP and in coordination with U.S. missions, has taken several actions to increase interest in UN careers and increase the number of Americans at UN organizations.³²

Maintaining a careers website. IO maintains a publicly accessible “International Organization Careers” website that provides information on available UN system positions that Americans interested in UN careers can use (see fig. 9).³³

³¹While the strategy includes input from the interagency process, we refer to it as the MSP strategy in this report because MSP managed the development of the strategy and is responsible for leading U.S. government efforts to encourage citizens to pursue employment at UN agencies.

³²The James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023 authorized the Secretary of State to promote employment of U.S. citizens at international organizations by providing stipends and consultation, and making grants, to support U.S. citizen applicants. 22 U.S.C. § 276c-6(b). MSP is considering a plan to provide such assistance to U.S. citizen applicants. While the statute authorizes funding to be appropriated from the Diplomatic Programs account for this purpose, Congress has not specifically required funding for this purpose in annual appropriations acts.

³³An MSP official said that, according to MSP tracking data, the website had approximately 100,000 views in 2022. MSP data also showed that, as of December 31, 2023, job links on the website were accessed 24,749 times. The website is located here: <https://iocareers.state.gov/Main/Content/Public/>.

Figure 9: Job Listings from the Department of State’s Bureau of International Organization Affairs “International Organization Careers” Website

Organization	Job Title	Job Level	Job Family	Job DS
ILO	Senior Regional Skills Specialist	P-5	International Development, Administration/Management	Switzerland (Geneva)
ILO	Senior Regional Specialist on Labour Economics	P-5	International Development, Political Affairs	Switzerland (Geneva)
ILO	Senior Technical Specialist in Social Dialogue	P-5	International Development, Political Affairs	Switzerland (Geneva)
ILO	Information Security Operations Lead	P-4	Computer Science/Information Technology, Administration/Management	Switzerland (Geneva)

Source: Screenshot of Department of State (State) Bureau of International Organization Affairs (IO) careers webpage as of Dec. 28, 2023. | GAO-24-106127

Performing outreach. MSP also performs outreach to potential U.S. applicants for UN positions by participating in recruitment and networking events, such as career fairs, to educate the public about career opportunities in international organizations. MSP officials told us that, from December 2022 to December 2023, the office participated in three events, including a career development roundtable geared to Americans already abroad, a virtual career fair for returned Peace Corps Volunteers, and an event focused on sharing UN opportunities with retiring Foreign Service Officers. In addition, IO’s Office of Public Affairs and Outreach facilitated 12 outreach activities between January and August 2023 with American audiences to encourage U.S. citizen employment at the UN.

Conducting advocacy. A primary effort for MSP is to coordinate State’s efforts to conduct advocacy for U.S. candidates for UN employment. An MSP official stated that the main goal of advocacy is to get qualified Americans into the UN at all levels.³⁴ MSP provides advocacy guidance and collects information on potential U.S. candidates, and U.S. missions

³⁴Another advocacy goal is to protect the integrity of the UN system, according to MSP officials. For example, State may choose to support qualified candidates from other countries in instances when advocacy does not result in the hiring of U.S. citizens.

conduct most of the advocacy at UN agencies.³⁵ Depending on the nature and location of the advocacy requested by American candidates as well as staff resources, MSP and the missions share responsibility for reviewing the requests and determining whether and how to advocate for the candidates.

State generally conducts advocacy only when requested by U.S. applicants. However, for high-level positions filled by appointment or nomination, the U.S. government may initiate an effort to find and advocate for a qualified U.S. candidate. MSP officials said that State considers a wide range of factors when deciding where to focus advocacy efforts and follows standard operating procedures to conduct advocacy, depending on the position type.³⁶

Tracking advocacy. To better manage State's advocacy efforts and centrally track the progress of U.S. candidates for UN positions, MSP created the Advocacy Plus (A+) Salesforce-based software system in June 2022.³⁷ A+ is primarily an internal system that enables MSP and U.S. missions to create new advocacy contacts, manage advocacy applications, collaborate, and communicate with each other and job applicants within a centralized system.³⁸

The A+ software system has one external component, a link on IO's website that U.S. citizens can click to request advocacy or let State know about their interest in a UN position by filling out an intake form with information on their background and qualifications (see fig. 10). In January 2023, MSP connected the intake form with A+, allowing the

³⁵According to State, advocacy may involve having State leadership, such as bureau or mission officials, call, email, or meet with UN human resource officials to promote a U.S. candidate for a UN position, usually when the candidate reaches the interview stage.

³⁶In deciding whether to conduct advocacy, for positions filled by appointment or nomination, State considers the issues for which the position is responsible, whether the organization is standard-setting or advisory, and the position's decision-making role in the organization. For other UN positions, specifically those subject to a standard hiring process, State considers the position's relevancy to U.S. policy and interests, the position's responsibilities, and the candidate's qualifications.

³⁷Salesforce is a customer relationship management software suite hosted on the internet and made available as a subscription service.

³⁸MSP officials said that one additional goal of A+ is to build a database of Americans interested in UN jobs so that MSP can email them if a relevant UN position opens. MSP officials also said that their office is working to train State officials on the use of the A+ system.

information to be stored in A+ and made centrally available to MSP and mission officials to help determine what advocacy to provide to each candidate and to record hiring outcomes.

Figure 10: Intake Form Available on the Department of State’s Bureau of International Organization Affairs “International Organization Careers” Website

Applicant Details	
Gender:	Citizenship:
Phone:	Email:
Current Employer:	Title:
Career Interests:	USG Employee:
Professionally Proficient Language(s):	Education Level:
Work Experience:	Resume:
Biography:	

Job Details	
Position Name:	Organization:
Department:	Office:
Country:	Job Family:
Grade:	Educational Background:
Job Description:	Job Opening URL:

Source: Screenshot of Department of State (State) Bureau of International Organization Affairs (IO) careers webpage as of Dec. 28, 2023. | GAO-24-106127

State officials said that between June 2022 and December 2023, for the five UN organizations that we reviewed, State conducted advocacy for 46 American applicants for positions at those organizations, with five of those applicants receiving job offers, and 26 still under consideration by UN human resources officials. Most advocacy was undertaken for Secretariat and FAO job candidates (20 and 21 cases, respectively), while advocacy for IAEA candidates contributed to the largest number of hires (3). All 46 advocacy cases resulted from submissions of MSP’s website intake form, and State conducted the advocacy via email, phone calls, in-person meetings, and letters. According to State officials, the 46 advocacy cases include both Americans who were newly applying for a UN position and those who were already in the UN and applying for a

different or higher position. See Table 3 for a breakdown of advocacy cases per selected UN agency in this period and their status.³⁹

Table 3: Status of Advocacy Cases at Five Selected United Nations (UN) Organizations, June 2022–December 2023

UN Organization	U.S. Candidate Application Still Under Consideration by UN Organization	U.S. Candidate Hired	U.S. Candidate Not Hired	Total Number of Advocacy Cases
UN Secretariat	15	0	5	20
Food and Agriculture Organization	10	2	9	21
International Atomic Energy Agency	0	3	0	3
International Labour Organization	0	0	1	1
World Health Organization	1	0	0	1
Total	26	5	15	46

Source: Department of State Bureau of International Organization Affairs Office of Multilateral Strategy and Personnel. | GAO-24-106127

Facilitating details and transfers. MSP officials said that if an employee from another U.S. agency is interested in a UN detail or transfer, their office sometimes gets involved through interagency conversations.⁴⁰ To decide whether to get involved and send a letter of support, MSP officials consider whether the employee of the U.S. agency is qualified for the position and placement in the UN organization aligns with bureau or national strategy. UN organizations make the final decision about accepting a U.S. government employee detail or transfer and MSP does not have insight into that decision.⁴¹

Promoting UN human resources policy changes. U.S. missions also promote changes to human resources policies in certain instances to increase hiring and retention of Americans at the UN. For example, U.S.

³⁹An additional 44 Americans requested advocacy, but State has not conducted advocacy for various reasons, such as citizens finding alternate employment or not responding to State’s outreach.

⁴⁰A transfer or detail, in this case, involves a federal employee temporarily separating from their agency and going to work for the UN for a period of time, usually two to five years. According to State, a federal employee “transferred” to an international organization becomes an employee of, and is paid by, that organization, and a federal employee on “detail” to an international organization continues to be an employee of, and is paid by, their federal agency.

⁴¹An MSP official told us that they do not have data identifying the number of U.S. government employee details working at UN agencies. The official noted that Congress has not asked State to track these categories of personnel.

mission officials in New York said that they have advocated in favor of human resource policy reforms in the UN General Assembly, such as reduced restrictions on promotions, for issues that may cause a retention issue for Americans. In addition, U.S. mission staff in Rome said that they have advocated in FAO Finance Committee meetings for faster hiring processes.

Collecting UN human resources data. An MSP official told us the office has conducted an annual request for detailed human resources data twice on Americans working in 45 UN and other international organizations, and works with consultants to prepare an analytical report on this employment data.⁴² MSP selected the UN organizations based on the U.S. National Security Strategy and IO bureau strategy. The reports inform strategic advocacy for recruitment and hiring and help MSP understand (1) which UN positions are saturated, and (2) where gaps in mid- and high-level positions at various UN organizations exist.

After seeing what the most recent data bears out, MSP officials can then revise their approach to encouraging U.S. employment at the UN if needed. As of November 2023, MSP was still compiling and analyzing the employment data.

State Has Developed a Strategy to Encourage U.S. Citizens to Pursue UN Careers, but Has Not Fully Developed Measures to Assess Progress

MSP Developed a Strategy in 2023 for Encouraging U.S. Employment in the UN

In response to a law enacted in 2022,⁴³ MSP, in coordination with other U.S. agencies,⁴⁴ developed and released a strategy in April 2023 on the importance of, and priorities for, strengthening U.S. citizen employment at international organizations. The stated high-level goal of the strategy is “encouraging U.S. citizens to pursue careers in international organizations, particularly organizations that (a) set international

⁴²IO previously conducted human resource data requests from 1991-2019 in response to congressional mandates.

⁴³22 U.S.C. § 276c-6(d).

⁴⁴These agencies included the Department of the Treasury and the U.S. Agency for International Development.

scientific, technical, or commercial standards or (b) are involved in international finance and development.”

The strategy states that “the promotion of U.S. citizen employment in the UN and other international organizations and multilateral bodies is a strategic priority for the United States” and the strategy emphasizes that “qualified U.S. citizens bring important technical skills to the UN, enhance U.S. outcomes, bolster UN good governance efforts, and advance U.S. norms and values.” The strategy further states that “strategic competitors and partners alike are increasingly prioritizing personnel placement to expand their influence in the UN system.”

The strategy emphasizes that State will employ an approach to increase U.S. citizen representation at all levels across international organizations. This approach includes pursuing UN senior leadership appointments, expanding advocacy for mid-level competitive UN positions, and increasing U.S. entry-level positions through the JPO program and paid UN internships.

To pursue the goal of encouraging U.S. citizens to pursue employment in international organizations, the strategy outlines seven actions representative of MSP’s efforts at the time the strategy was created:

1. Increasing outreach opportunities in the United States through virtual or in-person recruitment and networking events to educate the U.S. public about career opportunities in international organizations;
2. Advising prospective U.S. citizen candidates to help increase their knowledge of the UN hiring process as well as offering U.S. advocacy support to help increase their competitiveness;
3. Continuing to foster network building and mentorship opportunities for current U.S. staff in the UN system to support their long-term career progression;
4. Researching available options to increase the secondment of U.S. government mid-level personnel to international bodies to share technical expertise;
5. Conducting outreach to UN specialized agencies and related organizations where U.S. citizen employees remain underrepresented to identify opportunities, understand processes, and advocate for U.S. citizens, when appropriate;
6. Developing integrated technology platforms to modernize how State tracks U.S applicant positions, manages applicant data, and develops

data-driven analytic reports, trends, and visualizations to inform how State strategically prioritizes U.S. hiring in international organizations; and

7. Sharing best practices across U.S. government agencies on advocacy for U.S. citizens to improve competitiveness.

MSP Has Not Fully Established Performance Measures to Assess Its Efforts to Encourage U.S. Employment in the UN

MSP has not fully established measures to assess the progress of its efforts to meet the strategy's goal of encouraging U.S. employment in the UN. Specifically, MSP has not assessed the extent to which the strategy's current actions will contribute to meeting its goal, identified any actions to address long-standing challenges to U.S. employment at the UN, or developed performance indicators and targets for all seven strategy actions.

MSP Has Not Assessed How Much Current Strategy Actions Will Contribute to Encouraging U.S. Citizens to Pursue UN Employment

MSP has not assessed the extent to which the seven actions contained in its strategy will contribute to meeting the long-term MSP strategy goal of encouraging U.S. citizens to pursue employment in international organizations. MSP developed its strategy actions based on its existing efforts and aligned with the broader goals of IO's regional bureau strategy.⁴⁵ However, MSP did not assess its actions to determine which would be most useful in achieving the MSP strategy goal. MSP officials said that they believe the current strategy actions will be helpful, and that they can adapt their actions to meet future needs.

GAO's past work on results-oriented federal efforts has shown that leading organizations assess the extent to which their activities contribute to meeting their goals.⁴⁶ Without assessing the extent to which their current set of actions contributes to meeting the goal of encouraging U.S. citizens to pursue international organization employment, MSP may not

⁴⁵The actions relate to the broader IO regional bureau strategy goal to maximize U.S. credibility, influence, and leadership in the UN system and international institutions through U.S. diplomatic engagement on key issues and election or appointment of qualified, independent personnel to positions at all levels in the UN and international organizations.

⁴⁶GAO, *Executive Guide: Effectively Implementing the Government Performance and Results Act*, [GAO-96-118](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 1, 1996).

have a clear understanding of whether and how their efforts will result in increased American interest in UN employment.

MSP’s Strategy Does Not Address Long-standing Challenges to Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention of Americans in the UN System

MSP’s strategy does not identify actions to address long-standing challenges to American recruitment, hiring, and retention at UN agencies, such as those described earlier in this report. Such challenges have been identified in GAO reports dating back to 2001, and MSP officials acknowledged these longstanding challenges, including difficulties finding spousal employment, lengthy hiring times, and unclear compensation packages.

MSP officials said that the strategy’s actions are based on their experience working to encourage U.S. employment at the UN. This includes experience passed down by the Office of Management Policy and Resources, which worked on this issue before MSP was created. MSP officials said that, rather than addressing long-standing challenges in identifying strategy actions, they considered where the U.S. government can add value and provide support. The officials said that State does not have direct control over many of these long-standing challenges, many of which they view as systemic to the UN. For example, they said there is a limit to where they can be effective on issues such as spousal employment.

However, State also told us they do make individual efforts where they can, such as contacting UN officials if a U.S. candidate has not heard back on a job application, and, as mentioned above, advocating in favor of human resource policy reforms at UN organizations in certain instances. These efforts are undertaken on an ad hoc basis and have not been identified in MSP’s strategy to allow for consistency.

Factors within and outside an organization can affect its ability to achieve its goals. GAO work has shown that managing the results of federal efforts includes key actions such as identifying both internal and external factors that could affect the achievement of goals and defining approaches to mitigate those factors.⁴⁷ External factors in this instance can include, for example, UN practices and policies that contribute to the

⁴⁷GAO, *Evidence-Based Policymaking: Practices to Help Manage and Assess the Results of Federal Efforts*, [GAO-23-105460](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 12, 2023).

long-standing challenges noted above, such as unclear benefits packages.

If MSP does not identify any possible actions to mitigate long-standing challenges in a consistent manner, State may be missing an opportunity to assist with identified issues, such as spousal employment, that have complicated U.S. employment in UN organizations for years. State's efforts may therefore have less impact than might be possible.

MSP Has Not Identified Performance Indicators for All Strategy Actions or Developed Indicator Targets

MSP worked with the Office of Management Policy and Resources to create a set of eight performance indicators in summer 2023 to measure progress on efforts that included increasing U.S. employment at the UN. MSP officials stated that they worked with Office of Management Policy and Resources officials on the eight performance indicators to ensure that they would measure progress toward the higher-level IO bureau strategy goals as well as some of the activities MSP is taking under their strategy.

MSP is in the process of collecting data related to these indicators and plans to measure progress after data collection and analysis are completed. The indicators measure a variety of metrics, for example: the number of U.S. citizens who receive advocacy for a specific UN position, the number of active U.S.-sponsored JPOs in the UN, and the number of outreach activities facilitated with American audiences to encourage interest and support for sustained U.S. leadership in the UN (see table 4).

MSP's eight indicators measure some, but not all, of the seven activities described in MSP's strategy. We found that the indicators fully measure two of the activities in MSP's strategy, partially measure one of the activities, and do not measure four of the activities. For example, the indicators do not measure "sharing best practices across U.S. government agencies on advocacy for U.S. citizens to improve competitiveness." Further, MSP has not developed targets for any of its newly-established performance indicators to assess planned progress against actual results over time.

Table 4: GAO Assessment of State Department Office of Multilateral Strategy and Personnel (MSP) Strategy Actions' Alignment with MSP Performance Indicators

Actions Included in Office of Multilateral Strategy and Personnel (MSP) Strategy	Performance Indicators	GAO Assessment
Increasing outreach opportunities in the U.S. through virtual or in-person recruitment and networking events to educate the U.S. public about career opportunities in international organizations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of outreach activities facilitated with American audiences to encourage interest and support for sustained U.S. leadership across the international system 	Indicator Fully Measures Action
Advising prospective U.S. citizen candidates to help increase their knowledge of the UN hiring process as well as offering U.S. advocacy support to help increase their competitiveness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of unique inquiries by U.S. citizens interested in a specific position at the UN or international organizations Number of U.S. citizens who receive advocacy for a specific position at the UN or international organizations Number of U.S. citizens who received advocacy that are hired for a specific position at the UN or international organizations 	Indicators Fully Measure Action
Continuing to foster network building and mentorship opportunities for current U.S. staff in the UN system to support their long-term career progression.	n/a	No Indicators Measure Action
Researching available options to increase the secondment of U.S. government mid-level personnel to international bodies to share technical expertise.	n/a	No Indicators Measure Action
Conducting outreach to UN specialized agencies and related organizations where U.S. citizen employees remain underrepresented to identify opportunities, understand processes, and advocate for U.S. citizens, when appropriate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For advocacy: Number of U.S. citizens who receive advocacy for a specific position at the UN or international organizations No indicators identified specific to outreach to UN specialized agencies 	Indicator Partially Measures Action
Developing integrated technology platforms to modernize how we track U.S applicant positions, manage applicant data, and develop data-driven analytic reports, trends, and visualizations to inform how we strategically prioritize U.S. hiring in international organizations.	n/a	No Indicators Measure Action
Sharing best practices across U.S. government agencies on advocacy for U.S. citizens to improve competitiveness.	n/a	No Indicators Measure Action

Legend: n/a = not applicable

Source: Analysis of information from Department of State Bureau of International Organization Affairs Office of Multilateral Strategy and Personnel. | GAO-24-106127

The performance indicators measure some of the activities in MSP's strategy. However, since the indicators were developed in the context of the bureau strategy, they were not aligned with and do not measure all the activities in MSP's strategy. MSP officials have not yet decided whether to develop more indicators related to their strategy. They are open to developing more indicators for the strategy to cover activities not

addressed by the current indicators. MSP officials also stated that they intend to develop targets for the indicators.

Performance indicators and targets are important tools for assessing the results of federal efforts. GAO's past work on managing federal efforts has shown that an organization's activities should have performance goals, or indicators, with targets and timeframes against which performance can be measured.⁴⁸ Performance indicators, and their associated targets, demonstrate progress toward the results that an organization seeks to achieve. They guide the organization's activities, and allow decision makers, staff, and stakeholders to assess performance by comparing planned and actual results.

Without additional performance indicators and targets for all indicators, MSP may not clearly understand whether, or the extent to which, State's various actions are accomplishing the intended results to encourage U.S. citizens to pursue UN employment and bring qualified Americans into the UN system. Without this information, State may not be as effective in targeting its efforts to achieve improved results and strengthen U.S. employment in the UN system.

Conclusions

The United Nations is a cornerstone of a rules-based international order, grounded in democratic values, with a mission shared by countries around the world to advance human rights, promote the peaceful settlement of disputes, and ensure adherence to international law. Strategic competitors are increasingly prioritizing the hiring of their citizens to expand their influence in the UN system.

While the U.S. government recognizes the importance of having Americans at the UN to advance its norms and values, U.S. citizen employment at the UN remains below established UN targets in certain organizations, such as those we reviewed. In 2021, IO increased its focus on U.S. representation by taking the important step of establishing MSP to promote U.S. citizen employment, especially in international organizations whose missions are important to advancing U.S. technical and national security issues.

⁴⁸[GAO-23-105460](#).

State developed a strategy specifically for encouraging U.S. citizens to pursue careers at international organizations such as the UN and outlined actions they undertake in support of this goal. However, the strategy focused on actions that were already underway and MSP did not assess the degree to which those actions are sufficient for achieving the goal of encouraging U.S. employment at the UN.

Further, State could gain a better understanding of the sufficiency of its current strategy actions by assessing whether additional actions, including ones targeting long-standing challenges that have been identified by GAO in this and past reports, could advance the goal of State's strategy. Such assessments could help State ensure that its efforts have the maximum impact on increasing U.S. employment at UN organizations. Moreover, by developing additional performance indicators as well as targets for all actions in the strategy, State can better assess its performance by comparing planned and actual results over time and determine which of its actions are most successful at achieving stronger representation for the United States.

Recommendations for Executive Action

We are making four recommendations to the Department of State:

The Secretary of State should ensure that the Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of International Organization Affairs assesses the actions contained in the "Strategy for Encouraging U.S. Citizens to Pursue Careers with International Organizations" to determine the extent to which they will contribute to the goal of encouraging U.S. employment in the UN system. (Recommendation 1)

The Secretary of State should ensure that the Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of International Organization Affairs identifies any actions, in addition to those in its "Strategy for Encouraging U.S. Citizens to Pursue Careers with International Organizations," to mitigate long-standing challenges to U.S. employment at UN organizations and takes steps to implement them. (Recommendation 2)

The Secretary of State should ensure that the Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of International Organization Affairs creates performance indicators for measuring progress of all actions contained in the "Strategy for Encouraging U.S. Citizens to Pursue Careers with International Organizations." (Recommendation 3)

The Secretary of State should ensure that the Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of International Organization Affairs develops targets for all performance indicators related to actions contained in the “Strategy for Encouraging U.S. Citizens to Pursue Careers with International Organizations.” (Recommendation 4)

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to the Department of State for review and comment. In its comments, reproduced in appendix IV, State concurred with our recommendations, stating that it plans to review the actions listed in its “Strategy for Encouraging U.S. Citizens to Pursue Careers with International Organizations” on a regular basis to ensure that those actions continue to contribute to the goal of encouraging U.S. citizen employment in the UN system.

State also wrote that some of the challenges to U.S. employment in UN organizations are longstanding, systemic challenges that it believes are outside the U.S. government’s ability to change and stated that the Department will work to identify actions where the Department can effectively engage and implement actions where appropriate. The Department stated that it is developing a performance management plan for the strategy that includes indicators and targets that will be used to track State’s implementation of the strategy. State also provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.

In addition, we provided relevant portions of the draft report to each of the five UN organizations for technical review and we incorporated their comments as appropriate.

As agreed with your offices, unless you publicly announce the contents of this report earlier, we plan no further distribution until 30 days from the report date. At that time, we will send copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Secretary of State, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, and the Directors-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the International Labour Organization, and the World Health Organization. In addition, the report will be available at no charge on the GAO website at <https://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-7279 or ElHodiriN@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of

Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix V.



Nagla'a El-Hodiri
Acting Director, International Affairs and Trade

List of Requesters

The Honorable Michael McCaul
Chairman

The Honorable Gregory Meeks
Ranking Member
Committee on Foreign Affairs
House of Representatives

The Honorable Christopher Smith
Chairman

The Honorable Susan Wild
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Global Health, Global Human Rights
and International Organizations
Committee on Foreign Affairs
House of Representatives

The Honorable Joaquin Castro
House of Representatives

The Honorable Nicole Malliotakis
House of Representatives

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

GAO was asked to review U.S. representation in the United Nations (UN). This report examines (1) U.S. representation at selected UN organizations from 2015 to 2022, (2) issues that affect the recruitment, hiring, and retention of Americans at selected UN organizations, and (3) the extent to which State has recently undertaken efforts, and assessed those efforts, to improve U.S. representation at UN organizations.¹

To address these issues, we focused our review on five UN organizations: the Secretariat in New York City; the Food and Agriculture organization (FAO) in Rome, Italy; the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna, Austria; and the International Labour Organization (ILO) and World Health Organization (WHO), both located in Geneva, Switzerland. We selected a non-generalizable sample of U.N. agencies for our data collection and interviews using the following steps: 1) we identified the UN agencies with at least 1,000 staff and 2) then identified those UN organizations with formal or informal targets for U.S. employment, and 3) considered the amount of data likely available from each agency based on a review of prior GAO reports that discussed UN employment of U.S. citizens.

For all objectives, we interviewed Department of State officials within the Bureau of International Organization Affairs (IO), Office of Multilateral Strategy and Personnel (MSP) and at all U.S. missions overseas responsible for engaging with our five selected UN organizations. We also spoke with UN officials responsible for human resource and data issues at these five organizations. Further, we spoke with officials from the Department of State's Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation regarding the bureau's sponsorship of Junior Professional Officers (JPOs).

¹The objectives for this review were similar to those used for prior GAO reports on US representation at the United Nations. See *UN: Targeted Strategies Could Help Boost U.S. Representation*, [GAO-01-839](#), Jul. 27, 2001; *UN: Additional Efforts Needed to Increase U.S. Employment at U.N. Agencies*, [GAO-06-988](#), Sept. 6, 2006; and *U.S. Employment in the UN: State Department Needs to Enhance Reporting Requirements and Evaluate Its Efforts to Increase U.S. Representation*, [GAO-10-1028](#), Sept. 30, 2010.

To assess representation of Americans at the organizations we reviewed, we analyzed individual-level data on workers at each organization, from 2015 to 2022. Each organization sent us anonymized information on each staff member in their employee database as of December 31 of each calendar year. These data included information such as the grade, job title, nationality, and funding source (regular or extrabudgetary) of each employee. These data included professional staff that are subject to UN organization targets for equitable representation as well as professional staff not subject to these targets. Information on non-staff, such as contractors and consultants, came from either each organization's employee database, when available, or from UN officials or from the organization's annual reports.

We used these data to establish the proportion of Americans and other nationalities by year and grade level. To assess progress toward UN organization geographic representation targets, we compared the number of Americans to each organization's numerical targets. We assessed the reliability of these data by reviewing related documentation, interviewing UN organization officials, and conducting electronic testing and data checks. We determined that these data are sufficiently reliable for our purposes of reporting on representation of the number, nationality, grade, and separations of staff and non-staff at each organization from 2015 to 2022.

To review issues affecting the recruitment, hiring, and retention of professional staff, to include Americans, at the five UN organizations, we conducted seven discussion groups with a total of 52 participants—two at the UN Secretariat in New York City, one at FAO in Rome, Italy, one at IAEA in Vienna, Austria, and two at ILO and one at WHO in Geneva, Switzerland. We relied on the U.S. missions to arrange participation. Group sizes ranged from 5-10 participants. Participants were selected based on their citizenship (American) and their employment type (P- or D-level professional positions) at each UN agency.

Participants in each discussion group were of the same employee type, and where possible, we convened separate groups with participants in supervisory and nonsupervisory positions. The questions were of two types—(1) standardized and closed-ended or (2) open-ended—and covered participants' backgrounds and work experience.

Next, we conducted a content analysis of responses provided by the participants in the seven discussion groups and coded responses into categories to identify common themes within and across groups

pertaining to challenges that hinder U.S. citizens' efforts during the recruitment, hiring, or retention phases of employment at UN organizations. One analyst coded the responses into categories and a second analyst reviewed this coding to ensure comments were consistently and appropriately coded. In conjunction with information we gathered from UN and U.S. officials and our analysis of UN documents, we used discussion group responses to identify factors that might hinder UN organizations from recruiting, hiring, and retaining Americans. We then compared the factors we identified against factors cited in past GAO reports addressing UN employment of U.S. citizens to determine those that had been previously identified.

The information obtained from our discussion groups is not generalizable to all Americans employed at the five UN organizations we reviewed or within the UN as a whole. Our methodology does not incorporate the views of Americans who attempted but were not successful in obtaining UN employment due to the difficulty of identifying such a group.

To assess State's efforts to improve U.S. citizen employment at UN organizations, we reviewed key documents such as MSP's Strategy for Encouraging U.S. Citizens to Pursue Careers with International Organizations, IO's 2022 Regional Bureau Strategy, IO's standard operating procedures for advocating for American candidates for UN positions, and data related to those advocacy efforts. We also reviewed those key documents to evaluate State's efforts to improve U.S. citizen employment at UN organizations, and its assessment of those efforts. We also reviewed IO's "International Organization Careers" website, to include the website's option for Americans to submit an intake form to provide State with their employment information and request for advocacy.

To evaluate State's assessment of its efforts, we reviewed GAO's past work on results-oriented federal efforts.² We also reviewed GAO's past work on challenges to U.S. employment at the UN from reports issued in 2001, 2006, and 2010. Further, we analyzed the performance indicators that MSP released in the summer of 2023 against the seven activities in its strategy. We considered activities fully measured if all aspects of the activity would be addressed and measured by the indicators, partially measured if some portion of the activity would be addressed and

²See "Effectively Implementing the Government Performance and Results Act," [GAO-96-118](#), June 1996.

measured by the indicators but some portion would not, and not measured if no aspect of the activity would be addressed and measured by the indicators. To complete the analysis, one analyst reviewed the information and made a decision, and another analyst verified the decisions. In addition, we reviewed GAO's work on managing federal efforts, including best practices on developing indicators and targets to measure performance.³ We then discussed with MSP officials how their strategy actions and indicators were established and compared that information against the best practices included in GAO's past work.

We conducted this performance audit from July 2022 to April 2024 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

³GAO, *Evidence-Based Policymaking: Practices to Help Manage and Assess the Results of Federal Efforts*, GAO-23-105460 (Washington, D.C.: July 12, 2023).

Appendix II: U.S. Junior Professional Officers (JPOs) and Other Entry Programs at the United Nations (UN)

State Department Support for the JPO Program

Junior Professional Officers (JPOs) are young professionals that are financed, or sponsored, by their member country governments for 2-3 years, and are supervised by UN staff. According to MSP officials, the cost for a U.S. agency to sponsor a JPO for two years is approximately \$450,000.¹ While JPOs are not guaranteed career UN positions upon completion of the program, they have UN experience that may provide them with an advantage over other applicants for permanent UN positions.

As part of IO's efforts, the bureau supports, and provides information on, the JPO program. IO collects data on JPO placement across the UN system and coordinates with other U.S. agencies as well as other State bureaus that support JPOs, such as the Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation (ISN) and the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, to discuss JPO-related issues.

MSP leads State efforts to assist Americans interested in JPO positions at the UN, such as providing information through the international careers website to those interested in career opportunities through the JPO program (see fig. 11), sponsoring JPOs at UN organizations, and surveying JPOs about their UN experience. MSP officials said that they advertise JPO positions through various social media and digital platforms, their website, career fairs, and job boards, and also coordinate

¹A 2013 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the U.S. government and the UN Secretariat describes the process for funding a JPO: the UN first estimates the full cost of the JPO position, then the U.S. government deposits that amount or more in a UN bank account from which the UN withdraws funds as needed to pay the JPO's salary, insurance, and other costs. Any leftover funds roll over for future JPO costs.

Appendix II: U.S. Junior Professional Officers (JPOs) and Other Entry Programs at the United Nations (UN)

through different academic, public, and private institutions to reach potentially interested Americans.

Figure 11: U.S. Junior Professional Officers (JPOs) Section from the Department of State’s Bureau of International Organization Affairs “International Organization Careers” Website

Junior Professional Officer Programs

Are you interested in a meaningful career with global impact?

Get first-hand experience at the United Nations through the Junior Professional Officer (JPO) program.

The UN JPO Program is a two-year developmental program for young professionals that provides a pathway to a career at the United Nations. During the two years, JPOs gain experience in the field of multilateral cooperation through on-the-job learning under the supervision of experienced UN staff.

Eligibility: JPO candidates must have either a master's degree with at least three years of work experience or a bachelor's with at least five years of working experience. U.S. candidates must be no older than 32 years of age as of December 31 of the year of application.

Important Dates: New opportunities are posted throughout the year. Visit locareers.state.gov to learn more about upcoming JPO recruitment cycles.

How to Apply: Visit <https://www.un.org/development/desa/jpo/how-to-apply-faq/> for more information on how to apply.

Current JPO Vacancies sponsored by the Bureau of International Organization Affairs:

- [IO - Sponsored JPO Vacancies](#)

Source: Screenshot of Department of State (State) Bureau of International Organization Affairs (IO) careers webpage as of Dec. 28, 2023. | GAO-24-106127

According to an April 2023 report prepared by State on the JPO program, State’s ISN Bureau was funding the largest number of JPOs within the U.S. government. Officials from ISN stated that they support JPOs at IAEA because IAEA’s regular budget is declining while its workload is increasing, and JPOs are younger professionals who are building their careers and often have an interest in international organizations.² Their experience at IAEA encourages young people to pursue a career in peaceful uses of nuclear science when they come back from the JPO program. ISN officials reported that ISN receives around \$95 million each year to support IAEA activities, and some of that funding is used to sponsor JPOs (see text box).

²Further, ISN officials said the JPO program can introduce young people to nuclear science and technology uses in energy, medicine, agriculture, and other areas outside of nuclear weapons.

Appendix II: U.S. Junior Professional Officers (JPOs) and Other Entry Programs at the United Nations (UN)

U.S. Junior Professional Officers (JPO) in Vienna Shared Perspectives with GAO

We met with several U.S. JPOs in Vienna and collected their perspectives on the factors affecting their recruitment, hiring, and retention at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). While most participants spoke highly of their time in Vienna, several participants reported challenges. One prominent challenge reported by JPOs at IAEA was that they are not given meaningful work that makes use of their technical backgrounds—which is listed as a requirement for the JPO position in the job postings. The JPOs also reported experiencing challenges identified by prior GAO teams (or more senior staff) such as difficulty in obtaining employment for their spouses.

Source: GAO summary of views shared by American Junior Professional Officers employed at IAEA. | GAO-24-106127

To further assist American JPOs, MSP officials explained that State hosts an annual, department wide JPO virtual orientation. MSP officials told us that this orientation provides incoming JPOs with an opportunity to engage with U.S. leadership, understand U.S. strategic priorities at the UN, and hear from current and former JPO panelists from across the U.S. government. IO also administers a series of interactive online surveys after orientation, at the end of the JPOs' first and second years, and upon completion of the program, to assess JPO feedback and trends.

U.S. Participation in Entry Programs, including the JPO Program

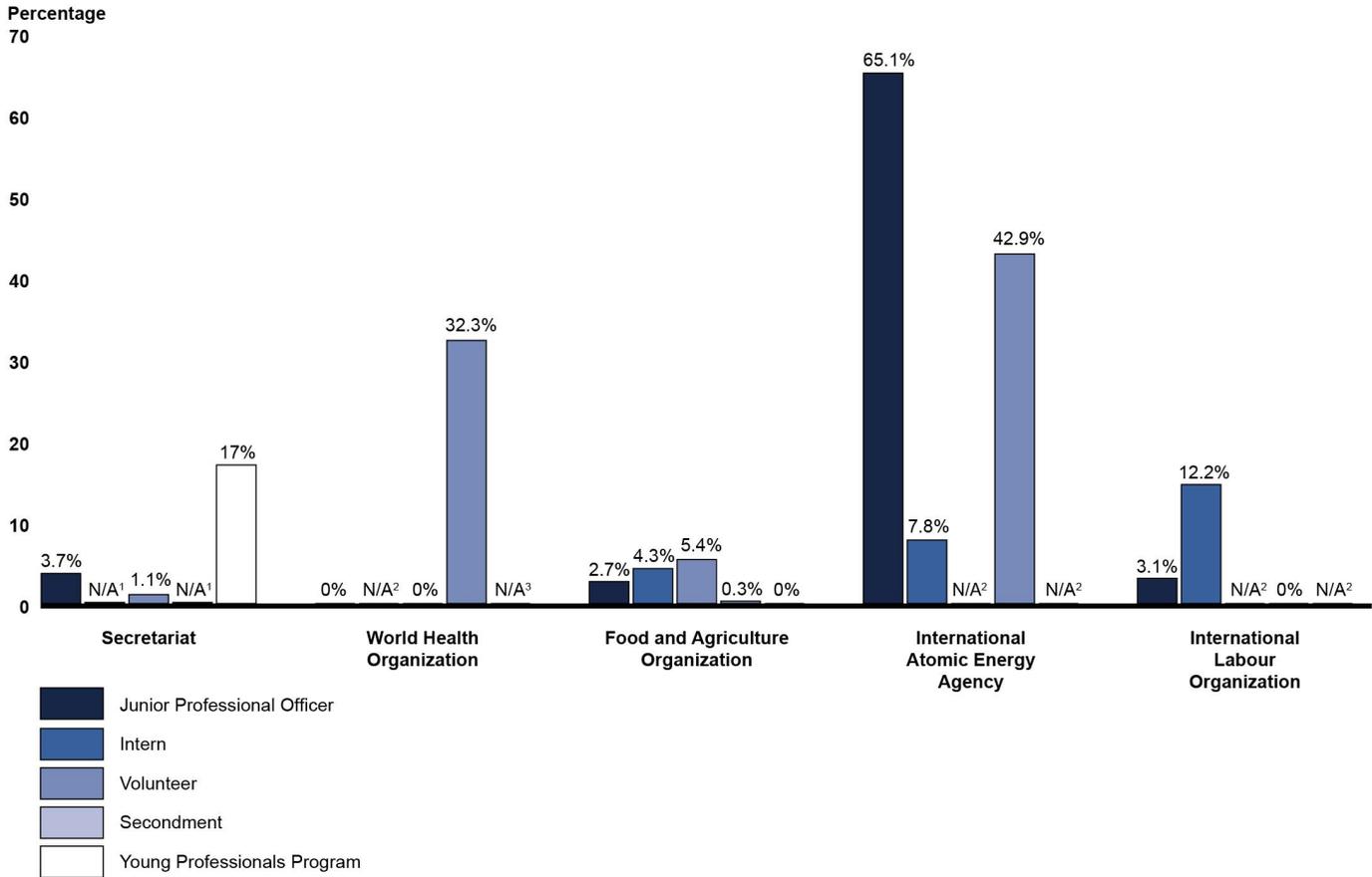
As of the end of 2022, U.S. participation was generally low among entry-level or visiting staff programs such as the JPO program, Young Professionals Program, internships, UN Volunteers, and secondment programs that provide staff on loan from member country governments.³ There were a few exceptions where Americans were a substantial portion of staff, such as the JPO program at IAEA, and secondments at WHO and IAEA. In most programs, however, Americans were a low percentage of participants relative to the overall American presence at these organizations, according to data available at the time of this report.⁴ See figure 12.

³The UN Young Professionals Program is an entry-level professional recruitment initiative for applicants who are under 32 years of age and from a participating country. A "secondment" is the movement of a staff member from one organization (in this case, a U.S. government agency) to another (a UN organization) for a fixed period, during which the staff member will normally be subject to the staff regulations and rules of the receiving organization but will be funded by the releasing organization.

⁴Data on secondments and interns at the Secretariat in 2022 are not yet available at the time of this report. Americans were 8.8 percent of interns and 1.1 percent of secondments at Secretariat in 2021.

Appendix II: U.S. Junior Professional Officers (JPOs) and Other Entry Programs at the United Nations (UN)

Figure 12: Percent of Americans among Entry and Visiting Staff Programs at Five United Nations (UN) Organizations, as of December 31, 2022



Source: GAO analysis of UN organization staffing data, UN organization documents, and information from UN officials. | GAO 24-106127

Accessible Data for Figure 12: Percent of Americans among Entry and Visiting Staff Programs at Five United Nations (UN) Organizations, as of December 31, 2022

	Junior professional officer	Intern	Volunteer	Secondment	Young Professionals Program
Secretariat	3.7	NA ¹	1.1	NA ¹	17
World Health Organization	0	NA ²	0	32.3	NA ³
Food and Agriculture Organization	2.7	4.3	5.4	0.3	0
International Atomic Energy Agency	65.1	7.8	NA ²	42.9	NA ²
International Labour Organization	3.1	14.6	NA ²	0	NA ²

Source: GAO analysis of UN organization staffing data, UN organization documents, and information from UN officials. | GAO 24-106127

Appendix II: U.S. Junior Professional Officers (JPOs) and Other Entry Programs at the United Nations (UN)

Note: N/A1: Data on interns and secondments at Secretariat in 2022 are not yet available at the time of this report. Americans were 8.8 percent of interns and 1.1 percent of secondments at Secretariat in 2021.

N/A2: This position type does not exist at this organization in 2022.

N/A3: The Young Professionals Program at WHO is only available for individuals from Least Developed Countries.

Trends in JPO Program Sponsorship, by Nationality

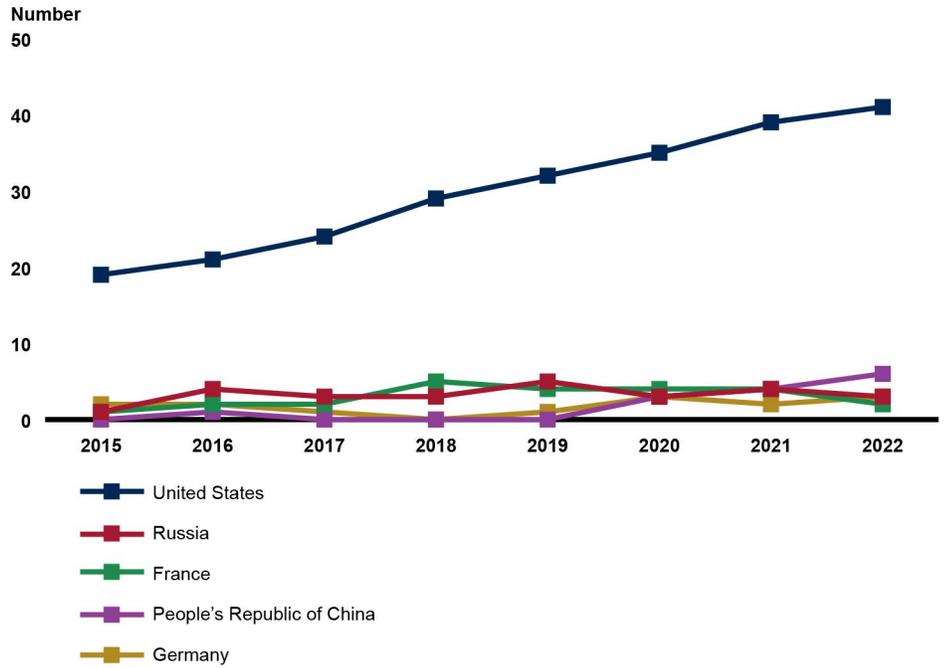
Among the five UN organizations we reviewed, the greatest number of U.S.-funded JPOs was at IAEA, where the United States sponsored 41 JPOs as of December 2022.⁵ As noted above, State's ISN bureau sponsors the largest number of JPOs within the U.S. government.⁶ As shown in figure 13, the United States consistently sponsored the largest number of JPOs at IAEA each year from 2015 to 2022.

⁵Some European countries also sponsor JPOs from developing countries. Due to data limitations, we report on the number of JPOs by nationality of the JPO, rather than the sponsoring country. This should not affect our count of the number of JPOs sponsored by the United States

⁶According to an April 2023 report by State, there were 147 U.S.-funded JPO positions throughout the entire UN system in 2022. Participating State bureaus include International Organization Affairs (10), International Security and Nonproliferation (58), Population, Refugees, and Migration (35), and Counterterrorism (1). Other U.S. agencies include U.S. Agency for International Development's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (34), the Department of Labor (1), and the Department of Energy and the National Nuclear Security Administration (8). However, State collects information on all JPOs in service at some point during the calendar year, whereas we report on JPOs in service as of December 31 of each year. Therefore, the number of JPOs we present in the body of this Appendix will be lower than those in State's April 2023 report.

Appendix II: U.S. Junior Professional Officers (JPOs) and Other Entry Programs at the United Nations (UN)

Figure 13: Number of United Nations Junior Professional Officers (JPOs) from Countries with the Most JPOs at International Atomic Energy Agency, 2015 to 2022



Source: GAO analysis of International Atomic Energy Agency staffing data. | GAO 24-106127

Accessible Data for Figure 13: Number of United Nations Junior Professional Officers (JPOs) from Countries with the Most JPOs at International Atomic Energy Agency, 2015 to 2022

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
United States	19	21	24	29	32	35	39	41
Russia	1	4	3	3	5	3	4	3
France	1	2	2	5	4	4	4	2
People's Republic of China	0	1	0	0	0	3	4	6
Germany	2	2	1	0	1	3	2	3

Source: GAO analysis of International Atomic Energy Agency staffing data. | GAO 24-106127

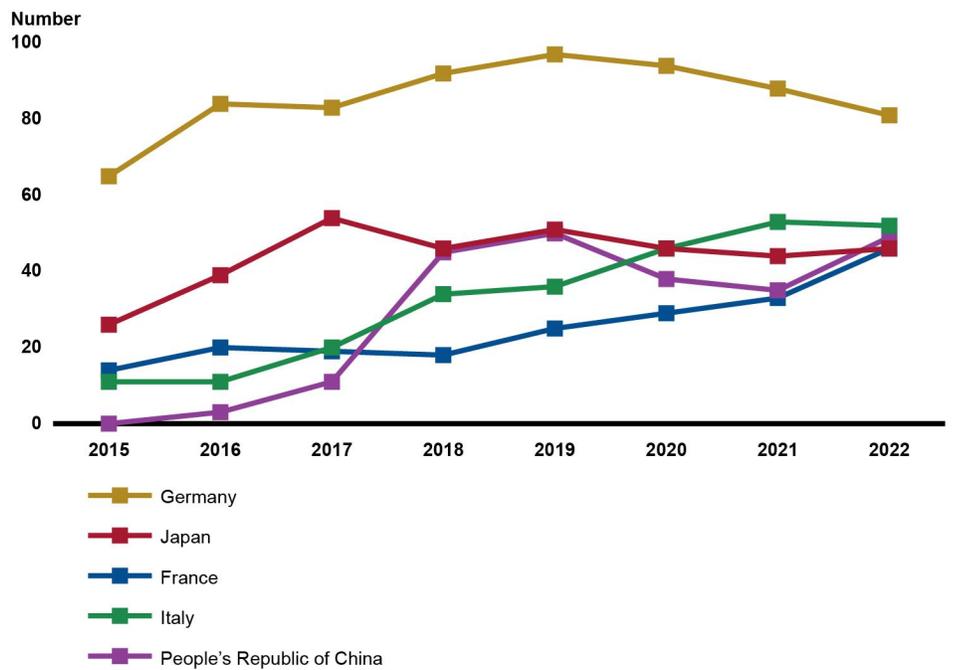
Note: This figure shows the five member states with the highest cumulative number of Junior Professional Officers of that nationality at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) during this period. Data are as of December 31 of each year.

U.S. participation in the JPO program is much lower at the other four UN organizations we reviewed. As of December 2022, the United States was funding one JPO at FAO, one JPO at ILO, and 14 JPOs at the Secretariat, which was 3 or 4 percent of total JPOs at each organization. The United States did not have JPOs at WHO from 2015 to 2022. As shown in figure 14, the United States was not among the top five

Appendix II: U.S. Junior Professional Officers (JPOs) and Other Entry Programs at the United Nations (UN)

countries with JPOs at these four organizations from 2015 to 2022. Germany consistently had the highest number of JPOs at these organizations. The People’s Republic of China had the largest increase in JPO participation at these organizations: from zero JPOs in 2015 to 49 JPOs in 2022, which was the third-highest total in 2022, behind Germany (81) and Italy (52).

Figure 14: Total Number of United Nations Junior Professional Officers (JPOs) from Countries with the Most JPOs at Secretariat, WHO, FAO, and ILO, from 2015 to 2022



Source: GAO analysis of Secretariat, Food and Agriculture Organization, and International Labour Organization staffing data, and World Health Organization documents. | GAO 24-106127

Accessible Data for Figure 14: Total Number of United Nations Junior Professional Officers (JPOs) from Countries with the Most JPOs at Secretariat, WHO, FAO, and ILO, from 2015 to 2022

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Germany	65	84	83	92	97	94	88	81
Japan	26	39	54	46	51	46	44	46
France	14	20	19	18	25	29	33	46
Italy	11	11	20	34	36	46	53	52
People's Republic of China	0	3	11	45	50	38	35	49

Source: GAO analysis of Secretariat, Food and Agriculture Organization, and International Labour Organization staffing data, and World Health Organization documents. | GAO 24-106127

Notes: This figure shows the five member states with the highest cumulative number of Junior Professional Officers of that nationality at these four organizations during this period. Data from FAO

**Appendix II: U.S. Junior Professional Officers
(JPOs) and Other Entry Programs at the United
Nations (UN)**

and ILO are as of December 31 of each year. Secretariat data for 2015 are as of June 30, and Secretariat data for 2016 to 2022 are as of December 31. Due to data limitations, data for WHO are for the full calendar year of each year, rather than a snapshot from December 31.

Appendix III: U.S. Representation in Geographic Positions at Five UN Organizations, 2015-2022

Tables 5 through 9 show, from 2015 through 2022, (1) the numeric target for U.S. representation in geographic positions set by each of the five UN organizations we reviewed, (2) the number of geographic positions that Americans held, (3) the percentage of budgeted geographic positions that were targeted for Americans, (4) the percentage of budgeted geographic positions filled by Americans, and (5) whether the number of American geographic staff is below, at, or above the organization's targets.

Table 5: U.S. Representation in Secretariat Geographic Positions, 2015 to 2022

Year	Target number of geographic positions for Americans	Number of Americans in geographic positions	Percentage of budgeted geographic positions targeted for Americans	Percentage of budgeted geographic positions filled by Americans	Equitability of U.S. representation based on targets
2015	373 to 504	366	10.5% to 14.2%	10.3%	Below target
2016	373 to 504	357	10.4% to 14.1%	10.0%	Below target
2017	383 to 519	360	10.6% to 14.4%	10.0%	Below target
2018	383 to 519	360	10.6% to 14.4%	10.0%	Below target
2019	383 to 519	365	10.6% to 14.4%	10.1%	Below target
2020	383 to 518	362	10.4% to 14.1%	9.8%	Below target
2021	383 to 518	359	10.4% to 14.0%	9.7%	Below target
2022	394 to 533	374	10.6% to 14.3%	10.0%	Below target

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

Note: Data for 2015 are as of June 30, 2015. Data for 2016 to 2022 are as of December 31 of each year.

**Appendix III: U.S. Representation in
Geographic Positions at Five UN
Organizations, 2015-2022**

Table 6: U.S. Representation in World Health Organization Geographic Positions, 2015 to 2022

Year	Target number of geographic positions for Americans	Number of Americans in geographic positions	Percentage of budgeted geographic positions targeted for Americans	Percentage of budgeted geographic positions filled by Americans	Equitability of U.S. representation based on targets
2015	188 to 255	152	Not available	Not available	Below target
2016	188 to 255	154	Not available	Not available	Below target
2017	188 to 255	162	Not available	Not available	Below target
2018	188 to 255	170	Not available	Not available	Below target
2019	188 to 255	180	Not available	Not available	Below target
2020	188 to 255	179	Not available	Not available	Below target
2021	188 to 255	180	Not available	Not available	Below target
2022	188 to 255	188	Not available	Not available	Met target

Source: GAO analysis of World Health Organization staffing and target data. | GAO-24-106127

Note: Data are as of December 31 of each year. The World Health Organization chose not to provide the number of posts it used to calculate its targets. For this reason, we were not able to calculate the percentage of geographic positions targeted for or filled by Americans.

Table 7: U.S. Representation in Food and Agriculture Organization Geographic Positions, 2015 to 2022

Year	Target number of geographic positions for Americans	Number of Americans in geographic positions	Percentage of budgeted geographic positions targeted for Americans	Percentage of budgeted geographic positions filled by Americans	Equitability of U.S. representation based on targets
2015	129 to 175	100	10.6% to 14.4%	8.2%	Below target
2016	133 to 180	98	10.7% to 14.4%	7.9%	Below target
2017	133 to 180	121	10.7% to 14.4%	9.7%	Below target
2018	138 to 186	133	10.6% to 14.3%	10.2%	Below target
2019	138 to 186	129	10.6% to 14.3%	9.9%	Below target
2020	143 to 194	116	10.6% to 14.4%	8.6%	Below target
2021	143 to 194	117	10.6% to 14.4%	8.7%	Below target
2022	145 to 196	106	10.6% to 14.3%	7.7%	Below target

Source: GAO analysis of Food and Agriculture Organization staffing and target data. | GAO-24-106127

Note: Data are as of December 31 of each year.

**Appendix III: U.S. Representation in
Geographic Positions at Five UN
Organizations, 2015-2022**

Table 8: U.S. Representation in International Atomic Energy Agency Geographic Positions, 2015 to 2022

Year	Target number of geographic positions for Americans	Number of Americans in geographic positions	Percentage of budgeted geographic positions targeted for Americans	Percentage of budgeted geographic positions filled by Americans	Equitability of U.S. representation based on targets
2015	136	117	12.8%	11.0%	Below target
2016	137	120	12.7%	11.2%	Below target
2017	137	125	12.8%	11.6%	Below target
2018	143	128	12.7%	11.3%	Below target
2019	145	124	12.7%	10.8%	Below target
2020	150	118	12.7%	10.0%	Below target
2021	149	119	12.6%	10.1%	Below target
2022	146	116	12.6%	10.0%	Below target

Source: GAO analysis of International Atomic Energy Agency staffing and target data. | GAO-24-106127

Note: Data are as of December 31 of each year.

**Appendix III: U.S. Representation in
Geographic Positions at Five UN
Organizations, 2015-2022**

Table 9: U.S. Representation in International Labour Organization Geographic Positions, 2015 to 2022

Year	Target number of geographic positions for Americans	Number of Americans in geographic positions	Percentage of budgeted geographic positions targeted for Americans	Percentage of budgeted geographic positions filled by Americans	Equitability of U.S. representation based on targets
2015	97 to 130	73	13.7% to 18.3%	10.3%	Below target
2016	102 to 136	73	13.8% to 18.5%	9.9%	Below target
2017	101 to 135	69	13.8% to 18.5%	9.5%	Below target
2018	108 to 145	69	14.0% to 18.8%	9.0%	Below target
2019	110 to 147	68	14.1% to 18.8%	8.7%	Below target
2020	111 to 148	69	14.1% to 18.9%	8.8%	Below target
2021	111 to 149	67	14.1% to 18.9%	8.5%	Below target
2022	112 to 149	59	14.3% to 19.0%	7.5%	Below target

Source: GAO analysis of International Labour Organization staffing and target data. | GAO-24-106127

Note: Data are as of December 31 of each year.

Tables 10 to 14 show, from 2015 through 2022, the percentage of Americans among total geographic professional positions by grade level at each of the five organizations we reviewed.

Table 10: U.S. Representation in Secretariat Geographic Positions by Grade Level, 2015 to 2022

Year	Entry-Level Geographic Positions Filled by Americans (percent)	Mid-Level Geographic Positions Filled by Americans (percent)	Senior-Level Geographic Positions Filled by Americans (percent)
2015	13.4	10.6	14.1
2016	13.4	10.3	12.6
2017	13.6	10.3	10.6
2018	12.9	10.4	11.7
2019	13.3	10.1	11.4
2020	13.4	10.0	11.3
2021	14.0	9.4	11.0
2022	14.1	9.9	9.5

Source: GAO analysis of Secretariat staffing data. | GAO-24-106127

Note: Entry-level staff include officials in P1, P2, and P3 positions. Mid-level staff include officials in P4 and P5 positions. Senior-level staff include officials in D1, D2, and executive positions (such as Assistant Director-General). Data for 2015 are as of June 30, 2015. Data from 2016 to 2022 are as of December 31 of each year.

**Appendix III: U.S. Representation in
Geographic Positions at Five UN
Organizations, 2015-2022**

Table 11: U.S. Representation in World Health Organization Geographic Positions by Grade Level, 2015 to 2022

Year	Entry-Level Geographic Positions Filled by Americans (percent)	Mid-Level Geographic Positions Filled by Americans (percent)	Senior-Level Geographic Positions Filled by Americans (percent)
2015	6.4	8.7	7.0
2016	7.0	8.5	7.0
2017	7.4	8.5	6.6
2018	6.9	9.0	7.7
2019	6.7	8.9	9.1
2020	6.7	8.1	9.0
2021	6.6	7.7	8.5
2022	5.7	7.9	8.2

Source: GAO analysis of World Health Organization staffing data. | GAO-24-106127

Note: Entry-level staff include officials in P1, P2, and P3 positions. Mid-level staff include officials in P4 and P5 positions. Senior-level staff include officials in P6, D1, D2, and executive positions (such as Assistant Director-General). Data are as of December 31 of each year.

Table 12: U.S. Representation in Food and Agriculture Organization Geographic Positions by Grade Level, 2015 to 2022

Year	Entry-Level Geographic Positions Filled by Americans (percent)	Mid-Level Geographic Positions Filled by Americans (percent)	Senior-Level Geographic Positions Filled by Americans (percent)
2015	12.4	10.5	6.7
2016	11.6	9.9	7.2
2017	15.4	10.1	8.2
2018	16.5	10.8	7.4
2019	14.4	10.2	11.2
2020	12.4	9.7	11.8
2021	12.2	9.6	12.3
2022	10.4	8.8	13.3

Source: GAO analysis of Food and Agriculture Organization staffing data. | GAO-24-106127

Note: Entry-level staff include officials in P1, P2, and P3 positions. Mid-level staff include officials in P4 and P5 positions. Senior-level staff include officials in D1, D2, and executive positions (such as Assistant Director-General). Data are as of December 31 of each year.

**Appendix III: U.S. Representation in
Geographic Positions at Five UN
Organizations, 2015-2022**

Table 13: U.S. Representation in International Atomic Energy Agency Geographic Positions by Grade Level, 2015 to 2022

Year	Entry-Level Geographic Positions Filled by Americans (percent)	Mid-Level Geographic Positions Filled by Americans (percent)	Senior-Level Geographic Positions Filled by Americans (percent)
2015	9.4	12.0	10.9
2016	8.1	12.7	11.8
2017	8.8	13.1	11.5
2018	8.5	12.9	12.0
2019	7.3	12.6	16.0
2020	7.0	11.1	18.9
2021	6.8	11.2	22.2
2022	6.3	11.2	22.2

Source: GAO analysis of International Atomic Energy Agency staffing data. | GAO-24-106127

Note: Entry-level staff include officials in P1, P2, and P3 positions. Mid-level staff include officials in P4 and P5 positions. Senior-level staff include officials in D1, D2, and executive positions (such as Assistant Director-General). Data are as of December 31 of each year.

Table 14: U.S. Representation in International Labour Organization Geographic Positions by Grade Level, 2015 to 2022

Year	Entry-Level Geographic Positions Filled by Americans (percent)	Mid-Level Geographic Positions Filled by Americans (percent)	Senior-Level Geographic Positions Filled by Americans (percent)
2015	6.0	11.1	8.9
2016	7.6	10.1	8.8
2017	6.4	10.2	7.5
2018	5.3	9.6	8.3
2019	5.0	9.4	7.7
2020	4.8	9.1	10.3
2021	4.8	8.9	9.3
2022	3.6	8.2	7.6

Source: GAO analysis of International Labour Organization staffing data. | GAO-24-106127

Note: Entry-level staff include officials in P1, P2, and P3 positions. Mid-level staff include officials in P4 and P5 positions. Senior-level staff include officials in D1, D2, and executive positions (such as Assistant Director-General). Data are as of December 31 of each year.

Appendix IV: Comments from the Department of State

Appendix IV: Comments from the Department
of State



United States Department of State
Comptroller
Washington, DC 20520

MAR 25 2024

Jason Bair
Managing Director
International Affairs and Trade
Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548-0001

Dear Mr. Bair:

We appreciate the opportunity to review your draft report, "UNITED NATIONS: State Department Should Better Assess Its Efforts to Increase Employment of Americans at UN Agencies." GAO Job Code 106127.

The enclosed Department of State comments are provided for incorporation with this letter as an appendix to the final report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. A. Walsh".

James A. Walsh

Enclosure:
As stated

cc: GAO – Nagla’a El-Hodiri
OIG - Norman Brown

Department of State Response to GAO Draft Report

**UNITED NATIONS: State Department Should Better Assess Its Efforts to
Increase Employment of Americans at UN Agencies**
(GAO-24-106127, GAO Code 106127)

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on GAO's draft report, "*State Department Should Better Assess Its Efforts to Increase Employment of Americans at UN Agencies.*" The Department expresses its gratitude to Congress for its ongoing interest in and support for promoting U.S. citizen employment at the UN. As evidenced in the report, the issue is a top priority for the Bureau of International Organization Affairs (IO), which has taken multiple actions to advance progress, to include the creation of IO's Office of Multilateral Strategy Personnel (IO/MSP) and investment in technology platforms to facilitate U.S. citizen advocacy and encourage U.S. citizens to consider pursuing careers at the UN. The IO Bureau will continue to identify ways to enhance support of U.S. citizens seeking employment at international organizations and will work to implement these recommendations to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of its efforts.

Recommendation 1: The Secretary of State should ensure that the Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of International Organization Affairs assesses the actions contained in the "Strategy for Encouraging U.S. Citizens to Pursue Careers with International Organizations" to determine the extent to which they will contribute to the goal of encouraging U.S. employment in the UN system.

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation and plans to review the actions listed in the "Strategy for Encouraging U.S. Citizens to Pursue Careers with International Organizations" on a regular basis to ensure that they continue to contribute to the goal of encouraging U.S. citizen employment in the UN system. The Department has taken steps to advance some actions that are not reflected in the report. For example, IO has increased outreach to U.S. citizens regarding opportunities at the UN

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and international organizations by redesigning the IO Careers website (<https://iocareers.state.gov>) and conducting outreach at Model UN conferences, university career fairs, and other on-campus opportunities to increase awareness of the IO-sponsored Junior Professional Officer program, UN internships, and other employment opportunities.

Recommendation 2: The Secretary of State should ensure that the Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of International Organization Affairs identifies any actions, in addition to those in its “Strategy for Encouraging U.S. Citizens to Pursue Careers with International Organizations,” to mitigate long-standing challenges to U.S. employment at UN organizations and takes steps to implement them.

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation and is committed to identifying and addressing barriers to U.S. citizen employment at the UN, as appropriate and consistent with its authorities. However, some of the challenges are longstanding, systemic challenges that are ultimately outside of the U.S. government’s ability to change. For example, the language proficiency of U.S. citizen candidates and difficulty obtaining spousal employment at overseas UN posts are not challenges that can be fully overcome solely through Departmental action. The IO Bureau will work to identify actions where the Department can effectively engage and will take steps to implement these actions where appropriate.

Recommendation 3: The Secretary of State should ensure that the Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of International Organization Affairs creates performance indicators for measuring progress of all actions contained in the “Strategy for Encouraging U.S. Citizens to Pursue Careers with International Organizations.”

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. The Department is developing a performance management plan for the strategy that includes indicators that will be used to track the Department’s implementation of the strategy.

- 3 -

Recommendation 4: The Secretary of State should ensure that the Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of International Organization Affairs develops targets for all performance indicators related to actions contained in the “Strategy for Encouraging U.S. Citizens to Pursue Careers with International Organizations.”

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. The Department is developing a performance management plan for the strategy that includes indicators and targets and will be used to track the Department’s implementation of the strategy.

Additional Clarifications: The Department would like to clarify the data presented on U.S. contributions to the five audited UN organizations:

- The report states that the United States withheld much of its WHO extrabudgetary contributions in 2020 and 2021. The Department and other contributing agencies withheld funding from WHO while withdrawal from the organization was pending in 2020. However, the United States provided \$357.6 million in WHO extrabudgetary contributions in January 2021.
- It is more accurate to state that the U.S. contribution percentage ranged from 15-30 percent of total contributions (assessed and voluntary) from 2012-2021, not 20-30 percent of total budgets (inclusive of all revenue sources), as stated in the report. During this timeframe the U.S. share of total contributions to the WHO never reached 20 percent, the U.S. share of total contributions to the ILO averaged about 18 percent, and the U.S. share of total contributions to the FAO averaged around 15 percent.

Accessible Text for Appendix IV: Comments from the Department of State

MAR 25 2024

Jason Bair
Managing Director
International Affairs and Trade
Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548-0001

Dear Mr. Bair:

We appreciate the opportunity to review your draft report, "UNITED NATIONS: State Department Should Better Assess Its Efforts to Increase Employment of Americans at UN Agencies." GAO Job Code 106127.

The enclosed Department of State comments are provided for incorporation with this letter as an appendix to the final report.

Sincerely,

James A. Walsh

Enclosure:
As stated

cc: GAO – Nagla'a El-Hodiri
OIG - Norman Brown

Department of State Response to GAO Draft Report

**UNITED NATIONS: State Department Should Better Assess Its Efforts to
Increase Employment of Americans at UN Agencies**

(GAO-24-106127, GAO Code 106127)

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on GAO's draft report, "State Department Should Better Assess Its Efforts to Increase Employment of Americans at UN Agencies." The Department expresses its gratitude to Congress for its ongoing interest in and support for promoting U.S. citizen employment at the UN. As evidenced in the report, the issue is a top priority for the Bureau of International Organization Affairs (IO), which has taken multiple actions to advance progress, to include the creation of IO's Office of Multilateral Strategy Personnel (IO/MSP) and investment in technology platforms to facilitate U.S. citizen advocacy and encourage U.S. citizens to consider pursuing careers at the UN. The IO Bureau will continue to identify ways to enhance support of U.S. citizens seeking employment at international organizations and will work to implement these recommendations to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation of its efforts.

Recommendation 1: The Secretary of State should ensure that the Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of International Organization Affairs assesses the actions contained in the "Strategy for Encouraging U.S. Citizens to Pursue Careers with International Organizations" to determine the extent to which they will contribute to the goal of encouraging U.S. employment in the UN system.

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation and plans to review the actions listed in the "Strategy for Encouraging U.S. Citizens to Pursue Careers with International Organizations" on a regular basis to ensure that they continue to contribute to the goal of encouraging U.S. citizen employment in the UN system. The Department has taken steps to advance some actions that are not reflected in the report. For example, IO has increased outreach to U.S. citizens regarding opportunities at the UN and international organizations by redesigning the IO Careers website (<https://iocareers.state.gov>) and conducting outreach at Model UN conferences, university career fairs, and other on-campus opportunities to increase awareness of the IO-sponsored Junior Professional Officer program, UN internships, and other employment opportunities.

Recommendation 2: The Secretary of State should ensure that the Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of International Organization Affairs identifies any actions, in addition to those in its "Strategy for Encouraging U.S. Citizens to Pursue Careers with International Organizations," to mitigate long-standing challenges to U.S. employment at UN organizations and takes steps to implement them.

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation and is committed to identifying and addressing barriers to U.S. citizen employment at the UN, as appropriate and consistent with its authorities. However, some of the challenges are longstanding, systemic challenges that are ultimately outside of the U.S. government's ability to change. For example, the language proficiency of U.S. citizen candidates and difficulty obtaining spousal employment at overseas UN posts

are not challenges that can be fully overcome solely through Departmental action. The IO Bureau will work to identify actions where the Department can effectively engage and will take steps to implement these actions where appropriate.

Recommendation 3: The Secretary of State should ensure that the Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of International Organization Affairs creates performance indicators for measuring progress of all actions contained in the “Strategy for Encouraging U.S. Citizens to Pursue Careers with International Organizations.”

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. The Department is developing a performance management plan for the strategy that includes indicators that will be used to track the Department’s implementation of the strategy.

Recommendation 4: The Secretary of State should ensure that the Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of International Organization Affairs develops targets for all performance indicators related to actions contained in the “Strategy for Encouraging U.S. Citizens to Pursue Careers with International Organizations.”

Department Response: The Department concurs with this recommendation. The Department is developing a performance management plan for the strategy that includes indicators and targets and will be used to track the Department’s implementation of the strategy.

Additional Clarifications: The Department would like to clarify the data presented on U.S. contributions to the five audited UN organizations:

- The report states that the United States withheld much of its WHO extrabudgetary contributions in 2020 and 2021. The Department and other contributing agencies withheld funding from WHO while withdrawal from the organization was pending in 2020. However, the United States provided \$357.6 million in WHO extrabudgetary contributions in January 2021.
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Appendix V: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgements

GAO Contact

Nagla'a El-Hodiri, (202) 512-7279 or elhodirin@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgements

In addition to the contact named above, Leslie Holen (Assistant Director), Claude Adrien (Analyst in Charge), Bahareh Etemadian, Michael Fienberg, Andrew Kincare, Donna Morgan, and Deirdre Sutula made key contributions to this report. Ashley Alley and Gina Hoover provided technical assistance.

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