

Why GAO Did This Study

Federal agencies use telework to help accomplish their missions and maintain operations, especially during emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, the Office of Management and Budget instructed agencies to maximize the use of telework to allow federal employees to remain safe while working from alternative locations and maintaining mission critical workforce needs.

The CARES Act includes a provision for GAO to report on ongoing COVID-19 monitoring and oversight efforts. In this report, GAO (1) assesses OPM's progress in addressing telework data limitations and describes federal agencies' use of telework during the COVID-19 pandemic, and (2) describes actions agencies have taken to address telework-related challenges identified during the COVID-19 pandemic and considerations for future operating postures.

For this report, GAO collected and analyzed telework data and related documents from 24 major federal agencies from selected time periods before and during the pandemic. GAO also interviewed OPM and selected agencies' officials.

What GAO Recommends

Congress should consider requiring OPM to set a deadline to develop an implementation plan to improve the reliability of information in its federal payroll data system, Enterprise Human Resources Integration, including telework information.

Nine of the 24 agencies provided technical comments, which GAO incorporated as appropriate.

View [GAO-22-104282](#). For more information, contact Alissa H. Czyz at (202) 512-6806 or czyza@gao.gov.

COVID-19

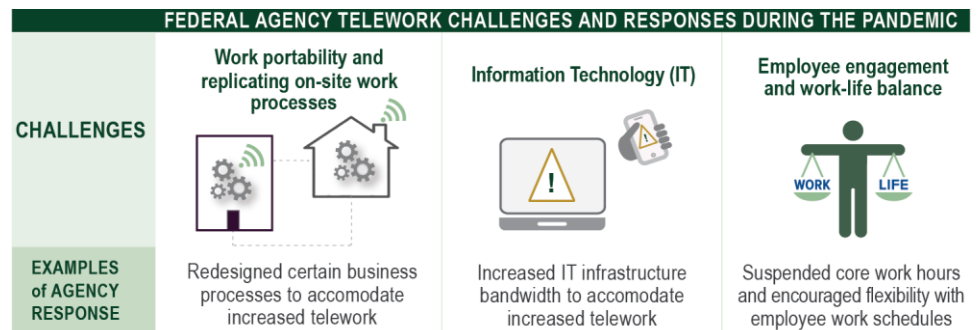
Federal Telework Increased during the Pandemic, but More Reliable Data Are Needed to Support Oversight

What GAO Found

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) collects data on federal telework to report annually to Congress, but has made limited progress addressing long-standing data issues. In 2016, GAO made four recommendations to OPM related to improving the reliability of its federal payroll data system, including telework information. OPM agreed with the recommendations and has implemented one related to data standards. However, OPM has not developed a plan to address the remaining three recommendations—consistently monitor error reports, integrate payroll data into a larger suite of databases, and strengthen internal control activities. Developing a plan to address these recommendations would better position OPM to improve its reporting of telework and provide more accurate and useful information to Congress.

Given the issues with OPM's data, GAO collected telework information directly from 24 agencies. These data initially had limitations so GAO followed up with each agency to clarify outliers and collect missing data. The data showed that all 24 agencies increased their use of telework in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Pre-pandemic, in January 2020, 13 agencies reported at least a quarter of their employees teleworked to some degree. By April 2020, all 24 agencies reported at least a quarter of employees teleworked, with nine agencies reporting at least 90 percent of their employees teleworked. Similarly, by April through June 2020, more agencies had employees teleworking full-time. Pre-pandemic, at nearly all 24 agencies, less than a quarter of teleworking employees did so full time. During the pandemic, 14 agencies had at least a quarter of teleworking employees doing so full time.

Agencies described a range of telework-related challenges during the pandemic and tried to address them (see figure).



Source: GAO analyses of agency information. | GAO-22-104282

Agencies are considering future workplace changes that include modifications to requirements to report regularly to an agency worksite. Additionally, agencies are considering reducing facilities and infrastructure.

As agencies contemplate the future of work for millions of federal employees, it is important for OPM to have accurate data on federal telework to support oversight. GAO reiterates the importance of having its recommendations implemented promptly.