

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-105243](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

Incidents of employee discrimination and harassment can detract from an agency's mission and hamper its ability to maintain public trust if not effectively addressed. In 2020, the RAND Corporation—under a FEMA contract—estimated that 29 percent of FEMA employees experienced discrimination or harassment related to sex, or race/ethnicity, based on self-reported responses to a 2019 survey.

GAO was asked to review FEMA's efforts to improve workplace culture. This report examines (1) actions FEMA took since fiscal year 2019 to prevent and respond to discrimination and harassment; (2) the extent to which EEOC has found that FEMA has complied with requirements; (3) the extent to which FEMA's actions have met EEOC recommended practices for preventing harassment; and (4) the extent to which FEMA is overseeing and evaluating its efforts. GAO analyzed FEMA and DHS policies and documentation, compared them with EEOC recommendations, and interviewed FEMA and EEOC officials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making four recommendations to DHS and nine to FEMA. Among them, DHS should update its anti-harassment policy and training. FEMA should implement a control to ensure—consistent with agency policy—those who allege harassment are notified of whether corrective action has been or will be taken, designate an entity responsible for overseeing cultural improvement efforts, and establish associated goals and measures for its efforts. DHS concurred with these recommendations.

View [GAO-23-105243](#). For more information, contact Chris Currie at (404) 679-1875 or [curriec@gao.gov](mailto:curriec@gao.gov).

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## FEMA WORKFORCE

### Additional Actions Needed to Help Prevent and Respond to Discrimination and Harassment

## What GAO Found

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)—a component of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)—has taken action since fiscal year 2019 to prevent and respond to discrimination and harassment. FEMA created an office to investigate harassment allegations and developed response policies. FEMA also issued its Culture Improvement Action Plan, which includes anti-harassment and anti-discrimination training and communication campaigns.

In April 2022, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) found that FEMA did not meet 13 requirements in its equal employment opportunity program. FEMA officials said they are taking steps to address these deficiencies and plan to provide EEOC a required compliance report outlining its efforts and progress to address these deficiencies in October 2022.

Further, the EEOC has issued recommended practices for preventing harassment, and FEMA has met most of these practices. For example:

#### Extent to Which the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Met Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's (EEOC) Recommended Practices, July 2022

Recommendation Category	Anti-Harassment policy	Training	Complaint System	Leadership and Accountability	Total
Met	12	13	9	6	40
Partially Met	1	7	4	2	14
Not Met	2	2	0	1	5

Source: GAO analysis of information from FEMA compared with EEOC's *Promising Practices for Preventing Harassment*. | GAO-23-105243

- DHS established the anti-harassment policy and training that apply to FEMA, but these do not fully meet recommended practices. For example, DHS's policy does not include a statement that DHS (or the relevant component agency, such as FEMA) will provide a prompt, impartial, and thorough investigation. Policy and training that is more consistent with EEOC recommended practices could more effectively communicate key information to employees.
- FEMA's harassment complaint system generally met recommended practices, but FEMA does not consistently notify employees who allege harassment whether the agency took or will take corrective action. FEMA policy requires managers to provide such notification, but GAO found that managers have not consistently done so. By implementing a control to ensure consistent notification from management, FEMA could better adhere to its policy and promote trust in its complaint processes.

Although FEMA has taken actions to address workplace discrimination and harassment, it has not taken steps that would enable it to determine the effectiveness of its efforts. Specifically, FEMA has not designated an individual or entity responsible for oversight nor has it established goals and measures for its cultural improvement efforts. Taking these steps could help FEMA better monitor its efforts, demonstrate results to its employees, and make any needed adjustments for improvement.