

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-24-106040](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

For many years, the U.S. has entered into bilateral agreements with certain other countries to facilitate acceptance of each other's certifications of aviation products. However, U.S. companies continue to report experiencing difficulties in obtaining approvals of their products in other countries.

GAO was asked to review the approvals process for U.S. aviation products. This report (1) describes the processes that FAA and CAAs in the most significant export markets for U.S. aviation products use to approve each other's product certifications, (2) examines validation challenges stakeholders identified, and (3) evaluates how FAA ensures that the international validations process is effective. GAO selected five international markets based on the number of validations and reviewed selected bilateral agreements and implementation procedures, FAA data, and FAA's validation policies and guidance. GAO also interviewed 14 aviation industry stakeholders and CAA officials from three countries.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making four recommendations, including that FAA (1) establish quantifiable goals for the international validations process; (2) identify quality information and performance metrics to track progress towards those goals; (3) use that information to assess results and inform decisions about any needed improvements to the process; and (4) establish a time frame and action plan for these efforts. FAA agreed with the recommendations.

View [GAO-24-106040](#). For more information, contact Heather Krause at (202) 512-2834 or krauseh@gao.gov.

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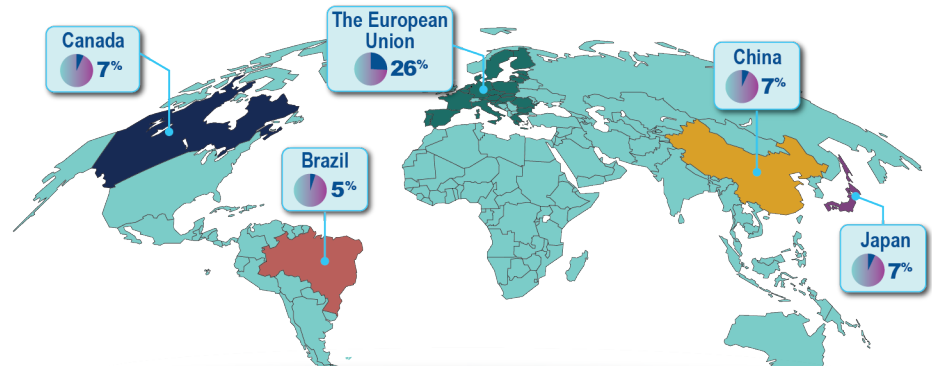
AVIATION CERTIFICATION

FAA Should Evaluate Effectiveness of the International Validation Process

What GAO Found

U.S. companies export billions of dollars' worth of aviation products, such as airplanes and engines, each year. These products require safety approval from both the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the importing countries' civil aviation authorities (CAA). Bilateral agreements between the U.S. and countries representing the five largest aviation export markets aim to facilitate these approvals through acceptance or validation of each other's product certifications. The approval processes laid out in the implementing procedures for these agreements vary depending on the product's type and complexity. For example, CAA's conduct detailed technical validations for higher risk products with new designs or technologies. These validations can involve extensive review of product designs and other information for the CAA to assess compliance with its own country's regulations and safety and environmental standards.

Five Largest Export Markets for U.S. Aviation Products, 2019-2021



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data. Map image: tovovan/stock.adobe.com. | GAO-24-106040

Note: Percentages reflect portion of U.S. total aviation exports. The European Union figure excludes the United Kingdom due to its exit from the European Union in 2020.

The fourteen stakeholders GAO interviewed reported that in recent years, validation time frames have become unpredictable as CAAs have requested more data from aviation manufacturers. Stakeholders cited contributing factors, including CAAs' decreased trust in FAA's certifications after the Boeing 737 MAX 8 accidents in 2018 and 2019. They said that receiving FAA's support—including resolving disputes with other countries' CAAs—can also be challenging due to limited FAA staffing and resources.

FAA recently began collecting and using more detailed information to improve its management of international validations, such as tracking the number of active validations by country. However, FAA has not evaluated the effectiveness of the validations process as a whole. FAA officials said they are beginning to develop an approach for assessing the process, including identifying performance goals and needed data. However, FAA has not yet identified specific steps or a time frame for developing the approach. Assessing the validations process could help FAA identify improvements that might lead to increased predictability in the process and improved accountability to bilateral agreements.