

Highlights of [GAO-13-427](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South and Central Asian Affairs, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

Pakistan is a key U.S. partner in the effort to combat terrorism and violent extremism. In fiscal years 2002 through 2012, Pakistan received more than \$26 billion in U.S. funding. To travel to Pakistan to implement and oversee programs, U.S. officials are required to obtain a Pakistani visa and, depending on the length of their stay, may need to apply for a visa extension once in Pakistan. U.S. officials have expressed concerns about delays in obtaining Pakistani visas. Congress has also expressed interest in receiving information on Pakistani visa delays, such as requiring that State and DOD certify information regarding timely issuance of visas to officials before providing or reimbursing certain funding for Pakistan.

GAO was asked to review issues related to visa delays. This report examines (1) the extent to which U.S. officials experience delays obtaining Pakistani visas and the effects of these delays and (2) steps U.S. agencies have taken to address Pakistani visa delays. GAO analyzed data on visa wait times, reviewed planning documents, and met with officials from DOD, DHS, DOJ, State, and USAID.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that State consult with U.S. agencies engaged in providing assistance to Pakistan to obtain information on visa delays and include this information in its reporting to Congress. State partially concurred, citing challenges with interagency coordination, but noted that GAO's report has prompted State to improve its tracking of visa applications to Pakistan government-wide.

View [GAO-13-427](#). For more information, contact Charles Michael Johnson, Jr. at (202) 512-7331 or [johnsoncm@gao.gov](mailto:johnsoncm@gao.gov).

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# PAKISTAN

## Reporting on Visa Delays That Disrupt U.S. Assistance Could Be Improved

## What GAO Found

U.S. officials have experienced delays in obtaining Pakistani visas that disrupt the delivery and oversight of U.S. assistance to Pakistan. According to Pakistani Consular Services, and as confirmed by the Department of State (State), the goal of the embassy of Pakistan is to issue visas for U.S. officials within 6 weeks. GAO's analysis of data provided by State, the Departments of Defense (DOD) and Justice (DOJ), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) found that U.S. officials experience delays in the issuance of both visas to travel to Pakistan and visa extensions. For instance, GAO found that of about 4,000 issued visas, approximately 18 percent took more than 6 weeks, with approximately 3 percent taking 16 weeks or longer. Moreover, of approximately 2,200 visa extensions, about 59 percent took longer than 6 weeks to be issued, with approximately 5 percent taking 16 weeks or longer. U.S. officials stated that they receive little specific information from Pakistan on the reasons for visa delays, but they noted that visa delays disrupt the effective implementation and oversight of U.S. programs and efficient use of resources in Pakistan. Visa delays also have created staffing gaps for critical embassy positions, such as Regional Security Officers and Marine Security Guards, and have necessitated the cancellation of training to assist the Pakistani government in areas such as antiterrorism, counternarcotics, and law enforcement assistance.

Agencies have taken various steps to address Pakistani visa delays, but reporting to Congress does not provide comprehensive information on the risk of visa delays government-wide. The Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act of 2009 requires State to identify and report to Congress on a semiannual basis about risks to effective use and oversight of U.S. funds to Pakistan, such as any shortfall in U.S. human resources. In addition, federal standards for internal control state that once agencies identify a risk to their programs, they should collect and analyze information to allow them to develop better approaches to manage it. According to officials, agencies have taken various steps to manage visa delays and their effects. For instance, State has conducted high-level discussions with the Pakistani government regarding visa delays and has reprogrammed \$10 million budgeted for antiterrorism trainings in Pakistan, which were canceled due to visa delays, toward other priority initiatives. However, GAO found that State's reporting does not include comprehensive information on the risks of visa delays government-wide. State has reported to Congress that visa delays create challenges to the implementation of its programs in Pakistan. However, State's reports do not include information regarding the risks of visa delays to the human resources of other agencies, although components of DOD, DOJ, and USAID told GAO that they experience staffing gaps caused by visa delays. Reporting comprehensive information about the risks of visa delays could provide a more complete picture of the challenges that the United States faces in managing and overseeing U.S. assistance to Pakistan. More comprehensive reporting may also help to better inform any potential diplomatic discussions between the United States and Pakistan regarding visa delays.