

GAO

Report to the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

September 2010

# U.S. EMPLOYMENT IN THE UNITED NATIONS

## State Department Needs to Enhance Reporting Requirements and Evaluate Its Efforts to Increase U.S. Representation



GAO

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Highlights of [GAO-10-1028](#), a report to the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

The U.S. Congress has continuing concerns about U.S. underrepresentation in United Nations (UN) organizations. Some UN organizations establish targets for member state representation, and such positions are classified as geographic positions. GAO's 2006 report found that the State Department (State) could take additional steps to increase U.S. representation. This report examines (1) U.S. representation at five UN organizations; (2) issues affecting the employment of professional staff, including Americans at these organizations; and (3) efforts State has undertaken to increase U.S. representation. GAO analyzed employment data from five UN organizations that comprise over 50 percent of total UN professional staff and interviewed U.S. and UN officials, including 63 Americans employed at the five organizations.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of State (1) include data on U.S. representation in all professional positions in its annual report to Congress, (2) evaluate its ongoing activities to increase U.S. representation, and (3) consider a pilot program to fund Junior Professional Officers (JPO), who are entry-level employees funded by member states, at UN organizations where the United States currently does not have any JPOs. In commenting on a draft of this report, State concurred with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-10-1028](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact Thomas Melito at (202) 512-9601 or [melitot@gao.gov](mailto:melitot@gao.gov).

# U.S. EMPLOYMENT IN THE UNITED NATIONS

## State Department Needs to Enhance Reporting Requirements and Evaluate Its Efforts to Increase U.S. Representation

### What GAO Found

In 2009, the United States was underrepresented, based on formal and informal targets, at all five of the UN organizations GAO reviewed—the Secretariat, World Health Organization (WHO), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (see table). This follows general U.S. underrepresentation at most of these organizations from 2006 to 2009. At the four UN organizations that distinguish geographic and nongeographic positions, there was an increase in the percentage of nongeographic professional positions during 2006 to 2009. The United States is not as well represented in nongeographic as geographic positions at FAO and the Secretariat, which could affect future overall U.S. representation. In addition, U.S. representation in policymaking and senior-level positions generally decreased at these UN organizations from 2006 to 2009.

**U.S. Representation at Five UN Organizations, Year-end 2009**

UN organization	Percentage of total geographic positions targeted for Americans	Percentage of geographic positions filled by Americans	Equitability of U.S. representation based on targets	Percentage of nongeographic positions filled by Americans	Percentage of total professional positions filled by Americans
Secretariat	12.5%-16.9%	11.9%	Under	9.5%	10.2%
WHO <sup>a</sup>	8.3%-11.2%	8.2%	Under	8.5%	8.3%
FAO	13.7%-18.5%	12.7%	Under	6.9%	10.5%
IAEA	12.5%	11.2%	Under	20.1%	13.8%
UNHCR <sup>b</sup>	13%	data not applicable	Under	data not applicable	7.4%

Sources: GAO analysis of Secretariat, WHO, FAO, IAEA, and UNHCR data.

<sup>a</sup>WHO raised questions about the reliability of its data.

<sup>b</sup>UNHCR does not have geographic positions; State has determined U.S. representation at UNHCR should be at least 13 percent of total professional positions.

The five UN organizations GAO reviewed have challenges that affect the recruitment, hiring, and retention of professional staff, including Americans. Challenges include Americans' lack of proficiency in UN languages, difficulty for spouses to obtain employment in some locations, lengthy hiring processes, and limited opportunities for promotion and professional growth. For example, 45 out of 63 Americans we interviewed identified the lengthy hiring process as a challenge to recruiting and hiring. While these UN organizations have initiated human resource reforms that may address some of the issues, such as efforts to decrease hiring time, it is too early to determine their impact.

Since 2006, State has made efforts to increase U.S. representation in the UN, including implementing some of GAO's 2006 recommendations. State has improved its Web site; increased outreach initiatives; begun developing a Web-based database, so interested UN job applicants can receive automatic vacancy announcements; and conducted an informal review of funding JPOs, but it continues to allocate JPOs at only a few UN organizations. State has not assessed the effectiveness of most of its current efforts to increase U.S. representation. Despite State's efforts, many Americans employed at the five organizations learned about UN job opportunities through their own networks, not through State.

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## Abbreviations

AE	Associate Expert
ALD	Assignments of Limited Duration
APO	Associate Professional Officer
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CFE	Cost-Free Experts
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FTA	fixed-term temporary assistance
FTE	fixed-term extra budgetary
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ICSC	International Civil Service Commission
IO	State Department's Bureau of International Organization Affairs
ISN	State Department's Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation
JIU	United Nations Joint Inspection Unit
JPO	Junior Professional Officer
MST	monthly short term
PRM	State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture
WHO	World Health Organization

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United States Government Accountability Office  
Washington, DC 20548

September 30, 2010

The Honorable Daniel K. Akaka  
Chairman  
The Honorable George V. Voinovich  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Oversight of Government  
Management, the Federal Workforce,  
and the District of Columbia  
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
United States Senate

The U.S. Congress has long-standing concerns about U.S. underrepresentation in some United Nations (UN) organizations. The equitable representation of Americans at UN organizations is a priority to Congress in part because the United States is the largest financial contributor to most of these organizations. According to the State Department (State), the U.S. agency primarily responsible for leading U.S. efforts toward achieving equitable U.S. representation in UN organizations, Americans bring desirable skills, values, and experience that can have a significant impact on UN organizations' operational effectiveness. The UN Charter recognizes the importance of recruiting staff on as wide a geographic basis as possible.<sup>1</sup> In response, some UN organizations have created quantitative formulas that establish formal targets for member state representation. Other UN organizations have negotiated informal geographic targets with member states or give some consideration to geographic balance when filling positions. Positions that count toward these formal or informal targets are referred to in this report as geographic positions. UN organizations may also employ staff in professional positions not based on geography, referred to in this report as nongeographic positions.<sup>2</sup> According to State officials, geographic positions generally have better job security than the nongeographic positions. Since 1991, Congress has required the Secretary of State to provide it with annual reports on whether international organizations with

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<sup>1</sup>UN Charter art. 101, para. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Positions exempted from being counted geographically include linguist and peacekeeping positions, positions funded by special funds, short-term positions, staff tied to specific projects, gratis personnel, and consultants. Gratis personnel include Junior Professional Officers (JPO) and Cost-Free Experts (CFE) whose salaries are funded by member states.

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geographic targets were meeting their targets for Americans and whether organizations were making a good faith effort to hire more Americans.<sup>3</sup> Members of Congress have concerns that the United States is underrepresented with respect to the geographic employment targets set by several UN organizations. In its 2009 report to Congress, State reported that many of the 10 UN organizations it reviewed had not met their U.S. geographic targets.

In 2006, we reported on U.S. employment at five UN organizations: the UN Secretariat (the Secretariat); the United Nations Development Program; the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA); the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).<sup>4</sup> We found that the United States was underrepresented, or close to the lower end of its target range with respect to geographic employment targets, at many of these UN organizations. We also found that UN organizations face several challenges to recruiting and retaining professional staff, most of which are outside the U.S. government's control. In addition, we reported that State could take additional steps to target candidates for professional positions. We recommended that State (1) provide more consistent and comprehensive UN employment information on the State and U.S. Mission Web sites; (2) expand targeted recruiting and outreach to more strategically reach populations of Americans that may be qualified for and interested in entry- and mid-level UN positions; (3) evaluate the costs, benefits, and trade-offs of maintaining a roster of qualified candidates for high-priority positions; and (4) evaluate the costs, benefits, and trade-offs of funding Junior Professional Officers (JPO), who are entry-level employees funded by member states, where Americans are underrepresented. State's Bureau of International Organization Affairs (IO) is the lead entity responsible for promoting and seeking to increase U.S. representation at the UN and for implementing State's requirement to provide the annual reports to Congress on U.S. representation. State IO also relies on other bureaus within State, U.S. Missions to the UN, and other U.S. government agencies to assist with efforts to improve U.S.

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<sup>3</sup>22 U.S.C. § 276c-4. Although not required for its annual reports to Congress, State also reports on UN organizations it deems to be of high interest to the United States.

<sup>4</sup>GAO, *United Nations: Additional Efforts Needed to Increase U.S. Employment at UN Agencies*, [GAO-06-988](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 6, 2006). We also previously reported on this issue in 2001, having reviewed a different set of UN organizations. See GAO, *United Nations: Targeted Strategies Could Help Boost U.S. Representation*, [GAO-01-839](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 27, 2001).

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representation and support Americans currently employed in the UN. While State is responsible for promoting and seeking to increase U.S. representation in the UN, the UN organizations themselves are ultimately responsible for hiring their employees and achieving equitable representation.

In response to your request and to address the concerns discussed above, we examined (1) U.S. representation at five UN organizations; (2) issues affecting the recruitment, hiring, and retention of professional staff, including Americans at these five UN organizations; and (3) efforts State has undertaken to increase U.S. representation at UN organizations, including its implementation of our 2006 recommendations.

To address these objectives, we focused our review on U.S. employment at five UN organizations: the Secretariat<sup>5</sup> in New York; the IAEA<sup>6</sup> in Vienna; the Food and Agriculture Organization<sup>7</sup> (FAO) in Rome; and the UNHCR<sup>8</sup> and World Health Organization<sup>9</sup> (WHO) in Geneva. We reviewed three of these UN organizations in 2006 (the Secretariat, IAEA, and UNHCR) and selected two additional organizations (FAO and WHO) for this review. We selected these five organizations because, as of 2009, they had either formal—the Secretariat, FAO, and WHO—or informal—IAEA and

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<sup>5</sup>The United Nations was founded in 1945, and the 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 to maintain international peace and security; develop friendly relations among nations; cooperate in solving international problems and in promoting respect for human rights; and be a center for harmonizing the acts of nations.

<sup>6</sup>IAEA 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.

<sup>7</sup>FAO was established in 1945 with a mandate 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.

<sup>8</sup>UNHCR was established in 1950 with the mandate of leading and coordinating international efforts to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems. The organization's central purpose is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees.

<sup>9</sup>WHO was created in 1948 and is the directing and coordinating authority for health 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.

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UNHCR—geographic targets,<sup>10</sup> and together comprise over 50 percent of total UN organizations’ professional staff. To determine the staffing levels of Americans in these UN organizations, and how U.S. representation has changed, we analyzed employment data for 2006 through 2009 that we obtained from the five UN organizations. For the purpose of this report, the United States is considered equitably represented if the number of Americans is within the UN organizations’ geographic target range. We determined the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this review for the Secretariat, FAO, IAEA and UNHCR, while WHO raised questions about the reliability of its data. To examine issues affecting the recruitment, hiring, and retention of Americans at the five UN organizations, we analyzed documents from these organizations and interviewed UN human resources officials, 63 Americans employed at the five UN organizations, and U.S. government officials. The results of our interviews with the Americans employed at the five UN organizations are not generalizable to those organizations or the UN system. To assess efforts State has undertaken to increase U.S. representation at UN organizations, we reviewed documents from State, other U.S. agencies, and the UN. We also interviewed State officials, representatives of U.S. government agencies, human resources and other staff from the five UN organizations, and nongovernmental organizations engaged in issues related to U.S. representation in the UN.

We conducted this performance audit from November 2009 to September 2010, 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. Appendix I contains a more detailed description of our scope and methodology.

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## Results in Brief

Based on UN organizations’ formal and informal targets for equitable geographic representation in 2009, the United States was underrepresented at all five UN organizations we reviewed—the Secretariat, WHO, FAO, IAEA, and UNHCR. For example, the minimum geographic target for Americans at the Secretariat in 2009 was 12.5

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<sup>10</sup>Formal and informal targets vary by UN organizations. Details are discussed later in this report.

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percent, whereas U.S. representation was only 11.9 percent. From 2006 to 2009, the United States was generally underrepresented, or at the low end of the target range, at four of the five UN organizations—the Secretariat, FAO, IAEA, and UNHCR. Geographic positions are the only positions that State is required to include in its annual report to Congress. At each of the four organizations that distinguish between geographic and nongeographic positions, there was a notable increase in the percentage of nongeographic compared with all professional positions during the time period from 2006 to 2009, reflecting the considerably higher growth rate of nongeographic positions compared with geographic positions. Nongeographic positions are funded primarily from extrabudgetary sources, which are increasingly being used to supplement core resources. However, the United States is not as well represented in nongeographic positions compared with geographic positions in two of the four organizations with geographic and nongeographic positions—FAO and the Secretariat. This situation could affect future overall U.S. representation at these two organizations because the relative increase of nongeographic to geographic positions could result in a lowering of overall U.S. representation. The situation is reversed at IAEA where American representation in nongeographic positions is nearly twice as large as in geographic positions. U.S. representation in policymaking and senior-level positions generally decreased at these UN organizations from 2006 to 2009.

At all five of the UN organizations we reviewed, we identified challenges to the recruitment, hiring, and retention of professional staff, including Americans. Our 2006 report identified similar types of challenges to American employment, most of which are outside of direct U.S. government control. According to Americans employed at these UN organizations, UN human resources officials, and U.S. officials, challenges to recruiting, hiring, or retaining staff include, but are not limited to, the following:

- *American candidates lack proficiency in more than one UN language.* U.S. Mission officials in New York and Geneva said that many Americans are at a disadvantage in competing for UN jobs because they lack proficiency in multiple languages required for many UN organizations.
- *Difficulty obtaining spousal employment.* At the four UN organizations located in Europe, many spouses of American employees cannot obtain work visas, which could contribute to attrition of American employees at UN organizations. For example, FAO human resources officials acknowledged that the difficulty for American spouses to get employed in Rome causes major challenges among American candidates and

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employees. As a result, FAO has revised its policies and begun to explore ideas with other UN organizations in Rome to accommodate spousal employment.

- *Lengthy hiring process.* According to UN officials, the average length of time for UN organizations to hire regular staff positions ranges from approximately 6 months at the Secretariat to 9 months at WHO. Human resources officials at FAO and the Secretariat acknowledged that lengthy hiring times cause problems because applicants find work elsewhere while waiting to hear from the UN organizations.
- *Limited opportunity for promotion and professional growth.* Many Americans we spoke with said that limited opportunities for promotion and professional growth are a challenge to retaining Americans in their organizations. For example, at FAO, 24 percent of staff have been in the same job or grade level for 8 or more years.

In the last several years, the five UN organizations we reviewed have initiated a variety of human resource reforms to begin addressing some of these challenges. For example, most of the UN organizations we reviewed are working on initiatives to decrease the average time it takes to hire personnel and to implement or improve performance management systems.

While State has made efforts to increase U.S. representation, including the implementation of some of our 2006 recommendations, it has not evaluated the effectiveness of most of these efforts and allocates JPOs in only a few UN organizations. In response to our 2006 recommendations, State has taken the following actions:

- Improved its Web site beginning in 2007 to provide more information on UN employment.
- Increased its outreach initiatives, such as attending more career fairs, from 15 events in 2005 to 38 events in 2009.
- Begun developing a Web-based database in 2009 so that interested job applicants can receive UN vacancy announcements that fit their interests. As of August 2010, the database was near completion but not yet operational.
- Conducted an informal review of funding JPOs. U.S. and UN officials we interviewed found the JPO program to be a successful route for getting

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Americans hired by UN organizations, but the United States only sponsors JPO positions at certain UN organizations.

State has not assessed the effectiveness of most of its efforts to increase U.S. representation. For example, State has not surveyed attendees of its outreach events to determine ways to improve its presentations. During our fieldwork, we found that many Americans employed at the five UN organizations did not know about, or did not seek assistance from, State IO or a U.S. Mission when they considered working for UN organizations. Instead, many Americans we spoke to learned about UN job opportunities through their own personal or professional networks.

This report contains three recommendations to the Secretary of State. (1) To provide more complete information on the level of U.S. representation at UN organizations, we recommend that the Secretary of State include data on U.S. representation in all professional positions, similar to the information it currently provides on staff in geographic positions, in State's annual report to Congress on U.S. representation in UN organizations. (2) To improve U.S. efforts to increase the employment of Americans at UN organizations, we recommend that the Secretary of State develop a means to evaluate the effectiveness of State's efforts to increase U.S. representation. The evaluation should include an assessment of State's ongoing efforts, such as its Web-based database for sending UN vacancy announcements to interested job candidates. (3) Consider implementing a pilot program to fund JPOs at UN organizations where the United States currently does not have JPOs, such as the Secretariat.

We solicited comments on a draft of this report from State, FAO, IAEA, the Secretariat, UNHCR, and WHO. State concurred with our recommendations, noting that it plans to seek additional information on nongeographic positions to include in its annual report to Congress, develop a new Web-based tool as a key means for making decisions on priorities and directions for some of its approaches, and consider funding for JPOs at UN organizations in conjunction with other funding priorities. We also received technical comments from State, FAO, IAEA, the Secretariat, UNHCR, and WHO, which we have incorporated as appropriate. In its technical comments, WHO raised questions about the reliability of its data. A full description of this issue is contained in appendix I.

## Background

The UN is composed 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 United Nations Development Program, 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.<sup>11</sup> 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.”<sup>12</sup> Each UN organization has its own personnel policies, procedures, and staff rules that it uses to fulfill these recruitment goals. 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 and the approximate U.S. government equivalent. UN organizations also have their own governing bodies composed of member states that provide those countries with a method of influencing the policies of the organization.

**Table 1: UN Grade Scale and Approximate U.S. Government Equivalent**

UN grade	UN entry-level			UN mid-level		UN senior-level and policymaking	
	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.

Of the five agencies we reviewed, four—the Secretariat, FAO, WHO, and IAEA—have designated positions subject to geographic distribution. The Secretariat, FAO, and WHO have established formulas to determine member states’ targets for equitable representation, which consider three

<sup>11</sup>According to a 2007 UN Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) 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 noncore purposes in which case they are generally earmarked by the donor for specific purposes.

<sup>12</sup>UN Charter art. 101, para. 3.

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factors: membership status, financial contribution, and population size. IAEA informally calculates a member state to be underrepresented if its geographic representation is less than half of its percentage contribution to the budget. Using this method, we calculated a U.S. target for geographic representation at IAEA. UNHCR has not established a quantitative formula or positions subject to geographic representation, but it acknowledges U.S. concerns regarding the appropriate level of U.S. representation. According to State's 2009 report to Congress on U.S. representation in the UN, State has determined that, for organizations to which the United States contributes 22 percent, Americans should hold at least 13 percent of professional positions to be considered equitably represented.<sup>13</sup>

Figure 1 shows the number of total staff in geographic and nongeographic professional positions, in 2006 and 2009, at four UN organizations we reviewed.<sup>14</sup> Figure 2 shows the number of Americans in geographic and nongeographic positions at these four UN organizations in 2006 and 2009. Americans comprised the largest number of staff in geographic positions, as well as the largest number in all professional positions—except at FAO where the United States ranked second—at the organizations we reviewed.<sup>15</sup>

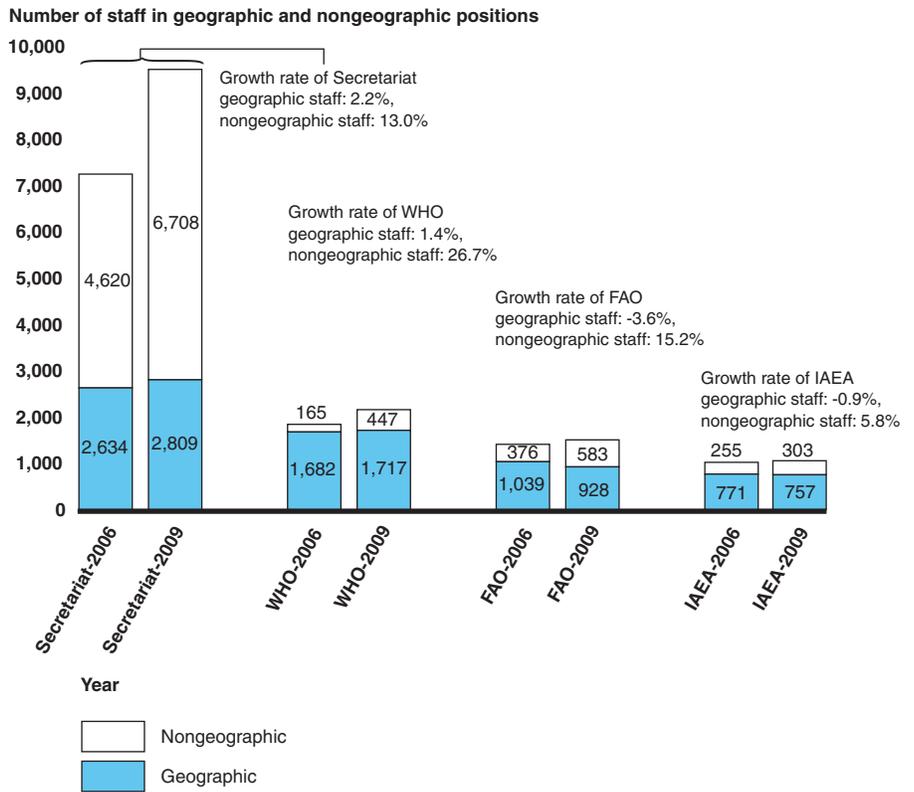
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<sup>13</sup>The United States contributed approximately 25 percent of UNHCR's annual budget in 2008.

<sup>14</sup>For the purpose of this report, GAO has defined professional positions at these UN organizations to include geographic and nongeographic positions. Nongeographic professional positions are regular professional positions without geographic status. Nongeographic positions include staff on both longer- and shorter-term contracts of varying duration. Four of the five UN organizations provided separate data for staff on these shorter-term appointments of varying duration, as follows: Assignments of Limited Duration at the Secretariat (contracts of 1 year or more) and FAO (contracts of less than 1 year); Fixed-Term Appointments at UNHCR (contracts of less than 1 year); and the following positions at IAEA—Fixed-Term Temporary Assistance (FTA—1 year), Fixed-term Extra Budgetary (FTEs—1 year), Monthly Short Term (MST—2 months to 2 years), and CFE—1 to 3 years). WHO, however, was unable to separate out comparable limited duration appointments, and instead combined the short-term appointments with the data on regular professional positions. JPOs are not included in this part of the analysis.

<sup>15</sup>This ranking analysis excludes U.S. professional staff in shorter-term appointments of varying duration as described in the preceding footnote.

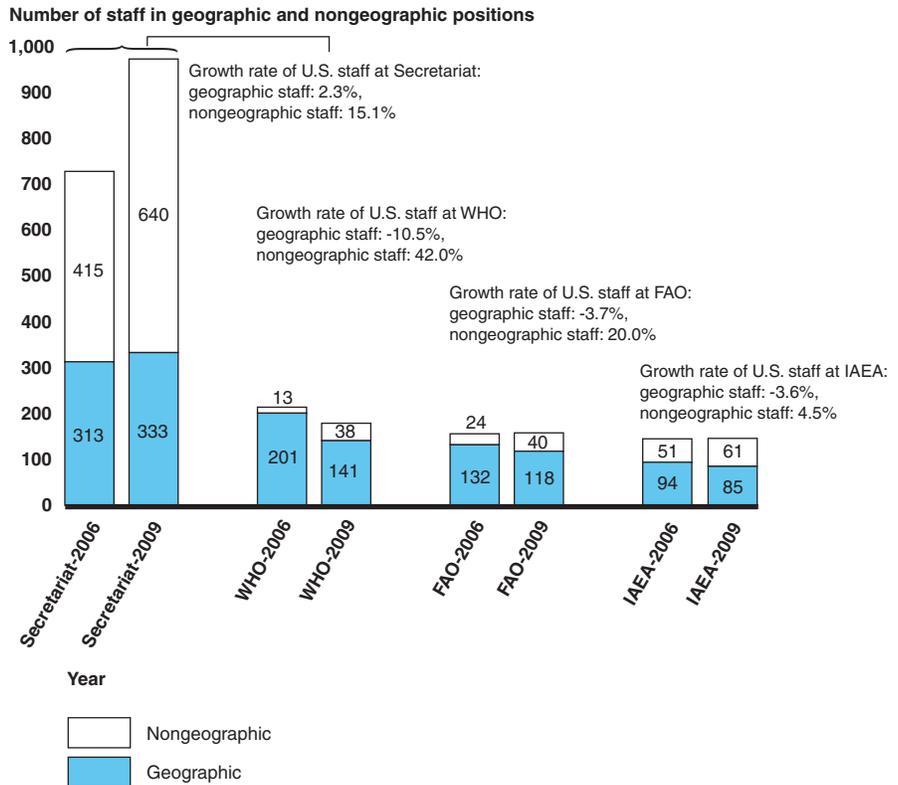
**Figure 1: Number of Geographic and Nongeographic Staff at Four UN Organizations, 2006 and 2009**



Sources: GAO analysis of Secretariat, WHO, FAO, and IAEA data.

Note: Because the Secretariat reports each year's staffing data as of June 30 rather than December 31 of the calendar year, all data reported for the Secretariat are for the year ending June 30.

**Figure 2: Number of Geographic and Nongeographic American Staff at Four UN Organizations, 2006 and 2009**



Sources: GAO analysis of Secretariat, WHO, FAO, and IAEA data.

UNHCR is not depicted above as it does not distinguish between geographic and nongeographic positions. Table 2 shows the total number of professional staff at UNHCR in 2006 and 2009, the number of Americans who filled those positions, and the respective growth rates of each.

**Table 2: Total Numbers of Professional and American Staff at UNHCR, 2006 and 2009**

Year	Total number of professional staff	Number of American professional staff
2006	1,586	130
2009	1,612	120
<b>Growth rate, 2006-2009</b>	<b>.8%</b>	<b>-2.3%</b>

Source: GAO analysis of UNHCR data.

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State is the U.S. agency primarily responsible for leading U.S. efforts toward achieving equitable U.S. representation in UN organizations. In doing so, State cooperates with at least 17 federal agencies that have interests in specific UN organizations. For example, Brookhaven and Argonne National Laboratories, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) all play active roles in recruiting Americans to work for IAEA, FAO, and WHO, respectively. A 1970 executive order assigns the Secretary of State responsibility for leading and coordinating the federal government's efforts to increase and improve U.S. participation in international organizations through transfers and details for federal employees.<sup>16</sup> The order further calls for each agency in the executive branch "to the maximum extent feasible" promote details and transfers to international organizations through measures such as (1) notifying well-qualified agency employees of vacancies in international organizations and (2) upon request of an appropriate authority, providing international organizations with detailed assessments of the qualifications of employees being considered for specific positions. Some U.S. agencies allow for secondments, in which the agency's employees are detailed to a UN organization for a certain period of time, while the U.S. agency pays the salaries, benefits, and other allowances for these secondees. The Department of Health and Human Services has about 45 officials, usually from CDC, seconded to WHO worldwide. Similarly, Argonne and Brookhaven National Laboratories currently have 25 American CFEs working at IAEA, according to these agencies' officials. These are technical specialists, mid- to senior-level staff, who work on short-term projects at IAEA for periods of 2 to 5 years.

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<sup>16</sup>Exec. Order No. 11,552, 35 Fed. Reg. 13,569 (Aug. 24, 1970).

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## The United States Was Generally Underrepresented in Geographic Positions, and the Growth of Nongeographic Positions Could Further Weaken U.S. Representation

In 2009, the United States was underrepresented at all five UN organizations we reviewed—the Secretariat, WHO, FAO, IAEA, and UNHCR.<sup>17</sup> During the period 2006 to 2009, the United States was generally underrepresented, or at the low end of the target range, at four of the five UN organizations—the Secretariat, FAO, IAEA, and UNHCR. However, during that same time period, the relative number of nongeographic positions in the five UN organizations, positions primarily funded by extrabudgetary sources, has significantly increased. An assessment of the full picture of professional employment, which includes both geographic and nongeographic positions, shows that the relative increase in nongeographic positions at these organizations could result in even lower overall U.S. representation at FAO and the Secretariat but lead to an increase in overall representation at IAEA. U.S. representation in policymaking and senior-level positions generally decreased at most UN organizations we reviewed.

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## The United States Was Generally Underrepresented at All Five UN Organizations

Based on UN organizations' formal and informal targets for equitable geographic representation in 2009, the United States was underrepresented at all five of the UN organizations we reviewed—the Secretariat, WHO, FAO, IAEA, and UNHCR. For example, the minimum geographic target for Americans at the Secretariat in 2009 was 12.5 percent, whereas U.S. representation was 11.9 percent. Table 3 shows the targets for geographic positions for each of the UN organizations for 2009 and the percentage of those positions filled by Americans. In addition, table 3 also shows the percentage of nongeographic positions filled by Americans. The percentage of nongeographic positions filled by Americans is higher at WHO and IAEA and lower at the Secretariat and FAO compared with the percentage of geographic positions held by Americans at these organizations. From 2006 to 2009, the United States was generally underrepresented, or at the low end of the target range, at four of the five UN organizations—the Secretariat, FAO, IAEA, and UNHCR, but became underrepresented in all of the organizations by

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<sup>17</sup>In raising questions about the reliability of its data, WHO advised us to use earlier data from WHO's Human Resources Annual Report, dated April 2010, which showed the United States as equitably represented in 2009. We instead use the more recent data WHO provided us in July 2010. We had numerous communications with WHO data officials and went through multiple steps to establish the accuracy, consistency, and completeness of the data we report. For further discussion of this issue, see appendix I.

2009.<sup>18</sup> See appendix II for details of U.S. representation at the five organizations during 2006 to 2009.

**Table 3: U.S. Representation at Five UN Organizations, as of Year-end 2009**

UN organization	Percentage of total geographic positions targeted for Americans	Percentage of geographic positions filled by Americans	Equitability of U.S. representation based on targets	Percentage of nongeographic positions filled by Americans	Percentage of total professional positions filled by Americans <sup>a</sup>
Secretariat <sup>b</sup>	12.5%-16.9%	11.9%	Under	9.5%	10.2%
WHO <sup>c</sup>	8.3%-11.2%	8.2%	Under	8.5%	8.3%
FAO	13.7%-18.5%	12.7%	Under	6.9%	10.5%
IAEA	12.5%	11.2%	Under	20.1%	13.8%
UNHCR <sup>d</sup>	13%	data not applicable	Under	data not applicable	7.4%

Sources: GAO analysis of Secretariat, WHO, FAO, IAEA, and UNHCR data.

<sup>a</sup>Total professional positions is the sum of geographic and nongeographic positions.

<sup>b</sup>Data are for end of calendar year, except for the Secretariat, which is for the year ending June 30.

<sup>c</sup>WHO raised questions about the reliability of its data.

<sup>d</sup>State has determined U.S. representation at UNHCR should be at least 13 percent of total professional positions. As UNHCR does not distinguish between geographic and nongeographic positions, we also calculated the percentage of core professional positions, which GAO defines as including only indefinite contracts and contracts of longer fixed term, filled by Americans. This was 7.6 percent in 2009.

Only the number of Americans employed in UN organizations' geographic positions, not those in nongeographic positions, is required and tracked for congressional reporting and represents State IO's performance indicator for U.S. employment at the UN. However, State officials told us that their goal is to increase U.S. representation overall, regardless of the grade level or type of position, or whether positions count toward the U.S.'s geographic targets at UN organizations. State officials said that their recruitment efforts are not targeted solely toward geographic positions, in part because UN vacancy announcements do not distinguish between geographic and nongeographic positions.

<sup>18</sup>The United States was near the low end of the minimum target range at the Secretariat and became underrepresented in 2009. Americans went from being overrepresented at WHO in 2006 to being equitably represented in 2007 and 2008, toward the middle of WHO's target range, and became underrepresented in 2009 as a result of the increase in WHO's geographic target for Americans. At FAO, the United States was near the low end of the minimum target in 2006 and became underrepresented beginning in 2007. At both IAEA and UNHCR, the United States was underrepresented throughout the entire period.

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## The Relative Increase of Nongeographic to Geographic Positions Could Lower Overall U.S. Representation in Two UN Organizations

From 2006 to 2009, in the four organizations with geographic positions, the growth rate of staff in nongeographic positions was considerably higher compared with the growth rate of staff in geographic positions. For example, from 2006 to 2009, the annual growth rate of nongeographic positions at the Secretariat was 13 percent, leading to an increase in nongeographic positions as a percentage of all professional positions from about 64 percent in 2006 to 70.5 percent in 2009. Correspondingly, the growth rate of American staff in nongeographic positions at the Secretariat was 15 percent, and the percentage of Americans in nongeographic positions (computed as a percentage of total American professional positions) increased from 57 percent to nearly 66 percent. Meanwhile, both overall geographic positions at the Secretariat and geographic positions held by Americans grew by slightly more than 2 percent.

Examining employment data for both geographic and nongeographic positions shows that the relative increase in the number of nongeographic positions at these organizations could result in even lower overall U.S. representation at FAO and the Secretariat but lead to an increase in overall U.S. representation at IAEA.<sup>19</sup> As previously shown in table 3, in 2009, the United States had a lower percentage of Americans in nongeographic positions compared with geographic positions at the Secretariat and FAO. For example, at FAO, U.S. nongeographic representation was 6.9 percent, and geographic representation was 12.7 percent. On the other hand, a relative increase in nongeographic positions could mean an improvement in overall U.S. representation at IAEA, where the United States had nearly twice the representation in nongeographic (20.1 percent) as compared with geographic positions (11.2 percent). At WHO, U.S. representation in geographic and nongeographic positions was relatively equal in 2009.

The majority of the funding for nongeographic professional positions in 2009 came from extrabudgetary funds at three of the four UN organizations with geographic positions—the Secretariat, WHO, and FAO. At IAEA, about one-third of the nongeographical positions are funded from extrabudgetary sources. At UNHCR, extrabudgetary funds are the primary funding source for nearly all professional positions (see app. IV). In particular, the funding for the shorter-term or more limited-duration

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<sup>19</sup>IAEA moved many of its temporary staff into geographic positions in 2010. The number of temporary staff was 264 in 2009; in January 1, 2010, that number was reduced to 152. This contributed to an increase in geographic staff from 757 in 2009 to 869 in 2010.

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positions—the fastest growing component of nongeographic professional staff positions during the 2006 to 2009 time period<sup>20</sup>—comes almost exclusively from extrabudgetary sources rather than the regular budget at the Secretariat, FAO, and UNHCR.<sup>21</sup> For example, at the Secretariat, Assignments of Limited Duration (ALD), which are funded almost entirely from extrabudgetary funds, grew by 18.2 percent, increased from 950 positions in 2006 to 1,538 in 2009.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, at FAO, ALDs, also primarily funded from extrabudgetary funds, grew by 29.5 percent, increasing from 32 to 65 positions over this time period. The UN JIU noted in a 2007 report that some UN organizations were facing critical shortages of core resources and were using their extrabudgetary resources to close gaps and fund key functions and staff.<sup>23</sup> The same report also stated that the increase in extrabudgetary resources affects the management of UN organizations.

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## U.S. Representation in Policymaking and Senior-Level Positions Generally Decreased at UN Organizations

With regard to Americans in geographic policymaking and senior-level positions,<sup>24</sup> we found that, from 2006 to 2009, U.S. representation in these positions decreased at three of the four organizations that distinguish between geographic and nongeographic positions—the Secretariat, WHO, and IAEA. In addition, U.S. representation in policymaking and senior-level positions at UNHCR, which does not differentiate geographic and nongeographic positions, also declined. (See table 4. See app. III for U.S. representation, by grade, at the five UN organizations from 2006 to 2009.)

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<sup>20</sup>Except at UNHCR, where professional positions grew by about 1 percent and fixed-term positions declined by nearly 8 percent.

<sup>21</sup>WHO was unable to provide a breakout of temporary positions.

<sup>22</sup>UN Secretariat officials indicated that with the recent reform to contractual arrangements, the application and use of ALD contracts is being phased out.

<sup>23</sup>The JIU is the external oversight body of the UN mandated to conduct evaluations, inspections, and investigations system-wide. Joint Inspection Unit, United Nations, *Voluntary Contributions in United Nations System Organizations: Impact on Program Delivery and Resource Mobilization Strategies* (JIU/REP/2007/1) (Geneva: 2007).

<sup>24</sup>Policymaking positions include the Under-Secretary-General and Assistant-Secretary-General at the Secretariat and UNHCR, the UG, or 'Ungraded' staff at WHO, and the Deputy Director-General and Assistant Director-General at FAO and IAEA. Senior-level positions are Director positions designated as follows: Secretariat (D2/L7, D1/L6); WHO (D2, D1, P6); and FAO, IAEA, and UNHCR (D2, D1).

**Table 4: Geographic Policymaking and Senior-Level Positions at the Five UN Organizations and Percentage-Held by Americans, 2006 and 2009**

	2006		2009		2006	2009
	Total	U.S.	Total	U.S.	U.S. percentage	U.S. percentage
Secretariat	340	52	354	51	15.3%	14.4%
WHO	140	12	80	4	8.6%	5.0%
FAO	153	18	134	19	11.8%	14.2%
IAEA	43	5	45	5	11.6%	11.1%
UNHCR	86	11	110	9	12.8%	8.2%

Sources: GAO analysis of Secretariat, WHO, FAO, IAEA, and UNHCR data.

Note: There are no geographic positions at UNHCR. The UNHCR numbers in the table include all policymaking and senior-level positions.

Additionally, we found that the relative increase in nongeographic positions translates into a substantial increase in the total number of policymaking and senior-level positions at the Secretariat, WHO, and FAO, along with an increase in the number of Americans holding these positions. For example, the total number of policymaking and senior-level positions at the Secretariat in 2009 increased from 354 positions (see table 4) to 722 (see table 5) when the nongeographic positions are included as well. However, comparing the percentage of these positions held by Americans in 2009 from both tables shows that, at the Secretariat and IAEA, the percentage of policymaking and senior-level positions held by Americans, when these nongeographic positions are included, is lower compared with these geographic positions held by Americans; whereas at WHO and FAO, U.S. representation in nongeographic policymaking and senior-level positions is somewhat higher when compared with the geographic positions held by Americans. Table 5 shows the total number of all policymaking and senior-level positions—geographic and nongeographic—for each UN organization and the percentage of these positions held by Americans.

**Table 5: Geographic and Nongeographic Policymaking and Senior-Level Positions at the Five UN Organizations and the Percentage-Held by Americans, 2006 and 2009**

	2006		2009		2006		2009	
	Total	U.S.	Total	U.S.	U.S. percentage	U.S. percentage	U.S. percentage	U.S. percentage
Secretariat	632	78	722	95	12.3%		13.2%	
WHO	278	23	275	21	8.3%		7.6%	
FAO	172	21	151	22	12.2%		14.6%	
IAEA	45	5	48	5	11.1%		10.4%	
UNHCR	86	11	110	9	12.8%		8.2%	

Sources: GAO analysis of Secretariat, WHO, FAO, IAEA, and UNHCR data.

Note: There are no geographic positions at UNHCR. The UNHCR numbers in the table include all policymaking and senior-level positions. For the other four UN organizations, policymaking and senior-level positions comprise all professional staff positions, including staff with appointments of more limited duration.

When nongeographic policymaking and senior-level positions are included with the geographic positions, U.S. representation declines in two organizations and increases in two organizations. For example, in 2009, U.S. representation in geographic policymaking and senior-level positions at the Secretariat was 14.4 percent, but it falls to 13.2 when nongeographic policymaking and senior-level positions are included. However, at WHO, U.S. representation in geographic policymaking and senior-level positions in 2009 was 5.0 percent, but increases to 7.6 percent when nongeographic policymaking and senior-level positions are included.

## Challenges within UN Organizations Affect the Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention of Professional Staff, including Americans, but Human Resource Reforms May Help Mitigate These Issues

All five of the UN organizations we reviewed face challenges to recruiting, hiring, and retaining professional staff, including Americans, most of which are outside direct U.S. government control. The UN organizations have taken steps to mitigate the effects of some of these challenges, including a variety of human resource reform initiatives, and the U.S. government has also made some efforts to lessen the effect of these challenges on Americans.

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## UN Organizations Face Challenges to Recruiting, Hiring, and Retaining Professional Staff, Including Americans

Based on our interviews with 63 Americans employed at the UN organizations, UN human resources officials, and U.S. officials, we identified eight issues that present challenges to recruiting, hiring, and retaining American professional staff at the five UN organizations we reviewed. These issues range from challenges related to the organizations' human resource policies and practices, such as policies limiting hiring opportunities, to the particular situations of individual candidates, such as whether they have proficiency in more than one UN language. Our 2001 and 2006 reports identified similar types of human resource challenges.<sup>25</sup> These challenges are as follows:

- *American candidates lack proficiency in more than one UN language.* UN organizations face challenges finding qualified Americans who sometimes lack proficiency in more than one UN language, a requirement for many UN organizations. For example, a FAO human resources official said that, while most other nationals know at least two languages, Americans and Japanese particularly struggle to meet FAO's language requirement. As a result, for unrepresented and underrepresented countries, FAO is working on reducing the barrier created by lack of another foreign language by offering language training once the candidate is hired. U.S. Mission officials in New York and Geneva also commented that many Americans are at a disadvantage in competing for UN jobs because they lack knowledge of multiple languages. UNHCR human resources officials said that knowledge of English, French, and one other language is important for the organization, particularly for promotion, and Americans experience difficulties in meeting this requirement.
- *Difficulty obtaining spousal employment.* At the four UN organizations located in Europe, many spouses of American employees have difficulty finding employment, which could contribute to the attrition of American employees at those organizations. In contrast, citizens of European Union countries have the right to employment without a work permit in any European Union country. As we reported in 2006, at many overseas UN duty stations, work permits can be difficult to obtain, the local economy may offer few employment opportunities, and knowledge of the local language may be required. According to a Brookhaven National Laboratory discussion paper on obstacles to recruiting Americans for IAEA positions, since "U.S. families tend to have two wage earners, lack of employment for the spouse represents a loss of wages and the

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<sup>25</sup>See [GAO-01-839](#) and [GAO-06-988](#).

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unemployed spouse can feel unfulfilled.”<sup>26</sup> FAO, UNHCR, and IAEA human resources officials said that it is difficult for American spouses to get employed in Rome, Geneva, and Vienna, which is a major challenge for American candidates and employees. The majority of Americans we spoke with also identified spousal employment as a challenge to recruiting, hiring, and retaining Americans in UN organizations. For example, at IAEA, several Americans said that their spouses gave up jobs to move to Vienna, and one said that she would leave the organization when her contract ends if her spouse remained unemployed. U.S. government officials acknowledge the challenge of spousal employment, and State IO’s Web site now has a booklet with resources for families seeking employment abroad. The Brookhaven National Laboratory also plans to develop resources for spousal employment in Vienna in 2010. The UN organizations we reviewed allow spousal employment; however, at most of these organizations, spouses must obtain jobs through the normal competitive process. FAO and IAEA have explored ideas with other UN organizations in Rome and Vienna to accommodate spousal employment, although human resources officials at IAEA said they have not yet been successful in finding employment for spouses at other UN organizations. FAO said that it has been designated the lead organization in a pilot program to negotiate with the Italian government on obtaining work permits for UN spouses.

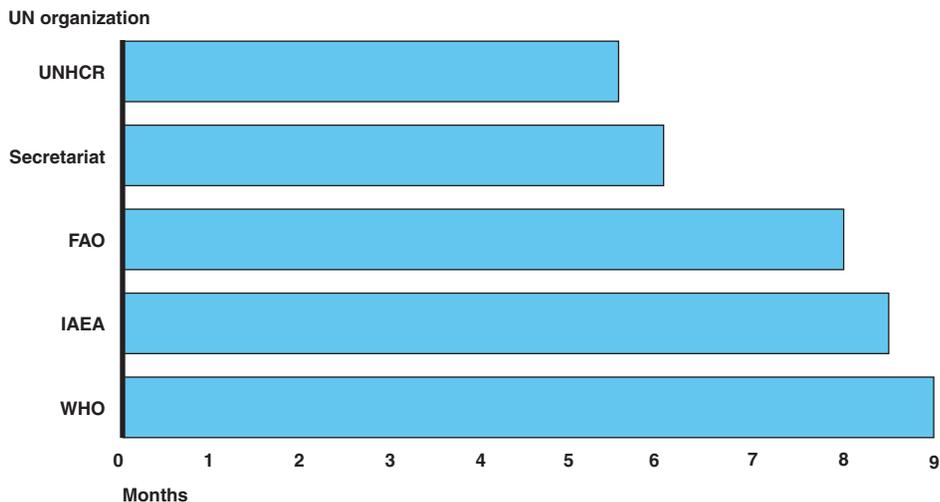
- *Lengthy hiring process.* UN organizations’ lengthy hiring processes can deter candidates from accepting employment. According to UN human resources officials, the average hiring process can take from approximately 6 to 9 months. (See fig. 3 for the average length of the hiring process at the five UN organizations we reviewed.) As we noted in 2006, a report from the Secretary-General stated that the average hiring process is too slow, taking 174 days from the date a vacancy announcement is issued to the date a candidate is selected. An independent external evaluation of FAO in 2007 found that FAO’s recruitment processes were slow, complex, and overly centralized. Human resources officials at FAO and the Secretariat acknowledged that lengthy hiring times cause problems because applicants find work elsewhere while waiting to hear from the UN organization. Human resources officials at the Secretariat and WHO also said that the lengthy hiring process can cause some hiring managers to

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<sup>26</sup>Brookhaven National Laboratory, *White Paper: Obstacles to Recruiting U.S. Citizens for IAEA Safeguards Positions*. Prepared by the International Safeguards Project Office, April 2005, updated April 2010.

circumvent the process by hiring people on short-term contracts. For example, at WHO, candidates can obtain temporary contracts of less than 6 months without having to go through the competitive hiring process. Of the 63 Americans we spoke with, 45 identified the length of the hiring process as a challenge to recruitment and hiring. Most of the organizations we reviewed are working on initiatives to decrease average hiring time at their organizations. For instance, IAEA is preparing to implement an initiative to reduce the hiring time to 15 weeks by advertising job vacancies for a shorter period of time and having hiring managers review applications as they come in, rather than after the vacancy announcement has closed. In response to the independent external evaluation, FAO has begun streamlining its hiring process, for instance, eliminating the “onerous” requirement to enter data on all job applicants, regardless of whether they meet the job qualifications.

**Figure 3: Average Length of the Hiring Process for Five UN Organizations, as of 2010**



Sources: GAO analysis of Secretariat, WHO, FAO, IAEA, and UNHCR information.

Note: Average length of hiring time as of April 2010 for the Secretariat; May 2010 for UNHCR, IAEA, and WHO; and September 2010 for FAO.

- Limited opportunity for promotion and professional growth.* According to many Americans employed at the five UN organizations, limited opportunities for promotion and professional growth present a challenge to retaining Americans. Promotion is generally achieved by applying to a new position at a higher grade level rather than through the reclassification of one’s current position. For example, IAEA human resources officials said that only about 5 percent of promotions at each

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grade level occur through the reclassification of a position to a higher grade-level and that the primary means of moving to a higher grade level is by competing for a new position. Likewise, at WHO, promotion occurs through applying for a new job at a higher grade level, although human resources officials said that their human resource reform initiatives will change the promotion process. Human resources officials at FAO also told us about the limited availability for promotion at their organization, where 24 percent of staff have been in the same job or grade level for 8 or more years. At UNHCR, a 2008 survey of headquarters and field staff found that only 23 percent of staff surveyed thought that promotion at UNHCR was based on merit.

- *Low or unclear benefits or compensation.* Officials at three of the five UN organizations said that either their organizations could do a better job explaining their employment benefits to prospective employees or that low compensation makes it difficult to recruit and retain Americans. At FAO, for example, vacancy announcements do not provide consistent information on benefits and salary. Some FAO announcements provide a link to the general Web site of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC),<sup>27</sup> some provide a link to the specific ICSC Web page that has information on salaries and benefits, and some only provide the salary range without giving any information on other employment benefits. Representatives of the staff association at FAO said that benefit and salary information is not clear when applying for FAO positions and even difficult to obtain after being hired. FAO human resources officials acknowledged that it could be helpful to provide more compensation and benefits information in their vacancy announcements. At IAEA, a human resources official explained that it is difficult for people outside the organization to understand all of the benefits of UN employment, which vary significantly from candidate to candidate. For example, people often do not understand that their salary at IAEA would be composed of a base salary plus a post-adjustment that depends on the location where they will be working. IAEA provides prospective employees with a link to a salary estimation calculator created by the United Nations Development Program that allows them to estimate items such as the post-adjustment, as well as dependency and hardship allowances but does not include information on other benefits, such as education grants. The U.S. government provides

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<sup>27</sup>The ICSC is an independent expert body established by the UN General Assembly. Its mandate is to regulate and coordinate the conditions of service of staff in the UN common system, while promoting and maintaining high standards in the international civil service.

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prospective UN employees with some information on UN benefits and salary. For instance, some Americans at IAEA said that Brookhaven National Laboratory's Web site provides helpful information on salary and benefits. State IO's Web site also provides a general list of the UN's benefits.

- *Noncompetitive practices.* The 2007 independent external evaluation of FAO found a strong and consistent perception among FAO staff that the appointment process for FAO representatives lacks transparency and results in politicized appointments. Additionally, the Office of the UN Ombudsman and Mediation Services reported in 2009 that it received cases from individuals who said that the recruitment and selection processes in the UN lacked rigor and were not transparent. Of the 63 American employees at the five UN organizations we interviewed, 28 said that noncompetitive human resource practices at their organizations present challenges to recruitment, hiring, and retention. Some Americans expressed the perception that friends and fellow nationals help each other within their organization. Other Americans also noted that some UN officials have ways to bypass an organization's procedures and policies, or vacancy announcements appear to be written for specific candidates. Several Americans at IAEA expressed the perception that promotion based on merit is almost nonexistent and that Americans who start at the entry to midcareer level cannot move up through the organization.<sup>28</sup> UNHCR's Office of the Ombudsman reported in 2009 that, in its opinion, UNHCR had failed to come up with a methodology for promotion that staff see as credible and fair. However, several Americans said that the hiring process at their organizations were rigid with many steps or were very competitive processes. UN human resources officials described competitive recruitment processes for professional staff— such as selection panels composed of officials from various parts of the organization, interviews, and tests—while also needing to be responsive to organizations' commitments to gender and geographic diversity.
- *Preference for hiring internal candidates.* As we reported in 2006, increased recruitment and hiring of U.S. candidates may be difficult because some UN organizations give preference to internal candidates. For example, both the Secretariat and UNHCR have human resource policies that give priority to internal job candidates, which could make it

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<sup>28</sup>Entry to midcareer positions in the UN system are at the P1 to P5 level using the UN grade scale.

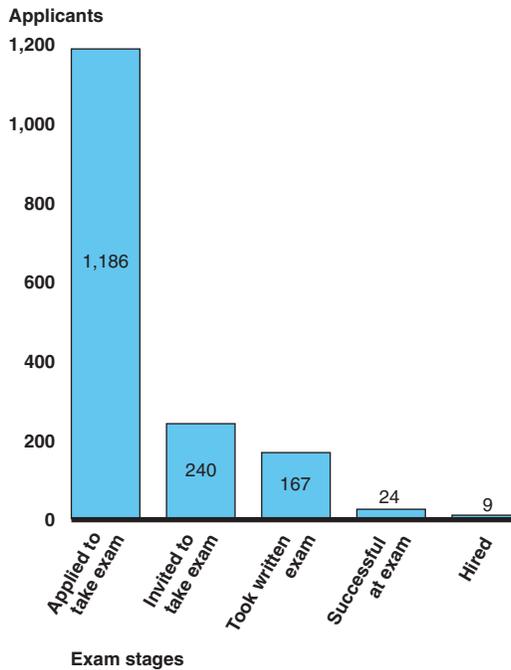
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more difficult for external applicants to obtain jobs.<sup>29</sup> All of the Americans we spoke to at the Secretariat and UNHCR perceived limited opportunities for external candidates to be a barrier to hiring. The Secretariat's human resources officials said that, prior to a recent change, the Secretariat's policy ensured that hiring managers reviewed internal candidates' applications for vacancies 30 to 45 days prior to those submitted by external candidates. One path for external candidates to be hired into entry-level positions at the Secretariat involves taking the National Competitive Recruitment Exam, which the Secretariat offers to candidates in underrepresented countries such as the United States. However, of the 240 Americans invited to take the exam, only 9 were hired on average each year between 2006 and 2009. (See fig. 4.)

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<sup>29</sup>The Secretariat and UNHCR have different definitions of who qualifies as an external or internal candidate. Internal candidates at the Secretariat are staff who were recruited after a competitive examination or after the advice of a Secretariat review body. UNHCR gives internal status to international professional staff, JPOs, international UN Volunteers, and National Professional Officers who meet certain eligibility requirements such as length of service.

**Figure 4: Four-Year Average of American Applicants at Each Stage of the Secretariat's National Competitive Recruitment Exam, 2006-2009**



Source: GAO analysis of Secretariat data.

- *Required mobility or rotation.* UNHCR requires most professional staff to change posts every few years, while IAEA requires the majority of its regular staff to leave the agency after 5 to 7 years. UNHCR expects its staff to be mobile and work in different locations worldwide during their career. At IAEA, the organization's position is that the rotation policy provides it with a continuous influx of new knowledge and experience. However, such a policy may dissuade some Americans from accepting or staying in a UN position because moves to different locations may cause disruptions to personal or family life. A majority of Americans we interviewed at UNHCR and IAEA indicated that required mobility or rotation is a challenge to recruitment, hiring, and retention. At UNHCR, officials said that the hardship of rotation is a major challenge for the organization, and the frequent reassignment of staff can destabilize families and also causes staff to feel insecure about their career development. Most Americans we spoke with at IAEA cited the policy requiring rotation out of the organization as a primary reason why Americans leave IAEA.

## UN Organizations Are Currently Implementing Human Resources Reform Initiatives

The five UN organizations we reviewed have initiated or are in the process of implementing a variety of human resource reforms that may lessen some of the human resource challenges affecting the recruitment, hiring, and retention of Americans and other nationals. See table 6 for an overview of selected human resource reforms at the five UN organizations. For instance, initiatives to reform the performance management processes could help address concerns over promotion processes and perception of limited professional growth in the UN organizations we reviewed. According to UN officials, many of these reforms have recently been completed or are still under way. For example, contract reforms to consolidate the different types of contracts at the Secretariat went into effect in July 2009, although agreement on the terms of one type of contract, the continuing appointment, has yet to be reached by the General Assembly. UNHCR officials said that they are waiting for the General Assembly's decision on this type of appointment before finishing UNHCR's own contract reforms. Since many of these reforms are in the process of being implemented, the full impact of these initiatives has yet to be realized.

**Table 6: Selected Human Resource Reform Initiatives Under Way or Recently Completed at the Five UN Organizations Reviewed**

	<b>Secretariat</b>	<b>UNHCR</b>	<b>WHO</b>	<b>FAO</b>	<b>IAEA</b>
<b>Recruitment and hiring policies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shorten hiring time by streamlining selection process</li> <li>• National Competitive Recruitment Exam; streamline selection process for P2 staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement Professional Recruitment Induction and Deployment Exercise to recruit generalists</li> <li>• Improve gender balance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shorten hiring time</li> <li>• Update recruitment and placement policies and practices for gender and geographic balance</li> <li>• Develop measures for reaching target recruitment audience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shorten hiring time by streamlining process</li> <li>• Started a new internship program</li> <li>• Wider publication of vacancies</li> <li>• Revise policy for gender and geographic representation</li> <li>• Decentralize hiring authority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shorten hiring time to 15 weeks</li> <li>• Improve gender balance</li> </ul>

	<b>Secretariat</b>	<b>UNHCR</b>	<b>WHO</b>	<b>FAO</b>	<b>IAEA</b>
<b>Performance management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase staff training</li> <li>Integrate performance management into other human resource processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Change in staff performance evaluation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop managerial competence</li> <li>Improve staff development and learning</li> <li>Establish performance-based rewards and sanctions</li> <li>Induction and mentoring program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase staff training</li> <li>Link performance to FAO objectives in staff appraisal system</li> <li>Establish incentive based rotation policy to promote movement to and from headquarters to field</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Move to 360 review process</li> </ul>
<b>Streamlining and restructuring</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Streamline contracts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Streamline contracts</li> <li>Decentralize staff from headquarters to field</li> <li>Limit growth of professional staff size</li> <li>Move select human resource services to Budapest service center</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Streamline contracts</li> <li>Move select human resource services to Kuala Lumpur</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce D-level positions to flatten the organization</li> <li>Move select human resource services to Budapest service center</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Streamline contracts</li> </ul>
<b>Human resource management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reform workforce planning</li> <li>Consolidate multiple data systems in headquarters and field</li> <li>New personnel management system</li> <li>Harmonize conditions of service in field and headquarters locations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Institutionalize results based management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Revised rotation and mobility policy</li> <li>Improve cross-organization planning</li> <li>Link human resource planning linked to WHO short- and medium-term strategic plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Upgrade data system and improve human resource information reporting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement Oracle human resource management tool</li> </ul>

Sources: GAO analysis of Secretariat, FAO, WHO, IAEA, and UNHCR documents.

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**State Has Made Efforts to Increase U.S. Representation but Has Not Evaluated the Effectiveness of Most of These Efforts and Allocates JPOs at Only a Few UN Organizations**

State has taken steps to increase U.S. representation in UN organizations, including the implementation of some of our 2006 report recommendations. However, State has not evaluated the effectiveness of most of its ongoing efforts to increase U.S. representation. In addition, State continues to sponsor JPO programs, used to place Americans in entry-level UN jobs, at only a few UN organizations.

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**State Has Taken Actions Intended to Increase U.S. Representation**

Since 2006, State has continued its activities toward its goal of increasing U.S. representation at UN organizations, including the following:

- compiling and disseminating a biweekly list of international vacancy announcements, accessible on State's Web site;
- attending recruiting events such as career fairs and information sessions;
- responding to questions from individuals interested in UN positions or from candidates who are finalists for UN positions; and
- coordinating with other U.S. agencies, including holding annual interagency task force meetings, to discuss strategies for increasing U.S. representation at specific UN organizations.

State has also undertaken further efforts in response to some of our 2006 recommendations to increase U.S. representation at UN organizations, as follows:

- *Improved Web site information.* In 2006, we reported that State, U.S. Missions, and agency Web sites had limited information on UN employment opportunities. For example, the Web site did not provide a means for applicants to obtain more specific information on their expected total compensation, which may hamper a candidate's ability to decide whether a UN position is in his or her best interest. Since 2007, State has provided more information on its Web site, such as information

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on UN benefits and compensation; an updated and expanded fact sheet on UN employment; and information on resources for spousal employment.

- *Expanded recruitment activities.* In 2006, we reported that State's recruitment and outreach efforts did not reach some potential applicants. State officials attended career fairs and other conferences to discuss UN employment opportunities with attendees, but they had not taken advantage of other opportunities to expand the audience for their outreach activities. Since then, State reported that it had increased its number of outreach events from 15 events in 2005 to 38 in 2009, including outreach to new groups.
- *Roster of prospective American applicants.* In 2006, we reported that State no longer maintained a roster of qualified American candidates for professional and technical positions. Other U.S. government and UN officials informed us that some countries maintained rosters of prescreened, qualified candidates for UN positions and that this practice was an effective strategy for promoting their nationals. In August 2010, State officials noted that they were in the process of finalizing the implementation of a roster database, in which people interested in UN jobs could self-populate information about their skills and interests, then receive an automated e-mail listing relevant UN organizations' vacancy announcements.

In addition, the U.S. Missions to the UN in New York, Rome, Geneva, and Vienna work with State IO to promote U.S. employment. However, the U.S. Missions have varying levels of involvement to support Americans at the five UN organizations we reviewed. According to U.S. and UN officials, U.S. Missions to the UN have open dialogues with UN organizations' human resources officials to promote the U.S. presence at these organizations. For example, the U.S. Mission to the UN in Rome has provided lists of professional associations to FAO officials to identify targeted groups of American candidates. State IO officials told us that, in their meetings with Americans employed by UN organizations, they found that many Americans were interested in a forum where they could discuss concerns with other Americans. In 2008, State IO requested that the U.S. Missions intensify their efforts to improve support of Americans working at UN organizations by maintaining active and open communication with them, such as regularly holding events to foster relationships. However, we found that different U.S. Missions provided different levels of support. For example, the U.S. Mission in Rome has periodically hosted meetings for Americans employed at UN organizations there to discuss their common concerns, but the U.S. Mission in New York has not held such a

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meeting, which some American employees of the Secretariat we interviewed noted would be beneficial. Several American employees of UN organizations in Geneva said they experienced problems overseas, but they did not have the means for seeking out other Americans in order to share information. According to State officials, the U.S. Mission's level of involvement depends on different factors, such as the size of the mission.

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### State Has Not Evaluated the Effectiveness of Most of Its Ongoing Efforts to Increase U.S. Representation

According to State, two bureaus outside of IO have made some efforts to determine the effectiveness of a few U.S. recruitment efforts. For example, State, through Argonne National Laboratory, has been working on a survey to determine the effectiveness of current IAEA recruitment efforts. However, State has not assessed the effectiveness of most of its efforts to increase U.S. representation. For instance, despite the increased number of outreach events State officials attend, State does not survey the attendees to determine ways to improve its presentation of information. Recognizing the need to understand recruitment problems at IAEA, Brookhaven National Laboratory convened a workshop with participants who have expertise in the technical area or with recruitment issues, to discuss ways in which the laboratory can increase U.S. representation. The report resulting from the workshop provided specific recommendations, such as polling Americans currently working at IAEA to gather information about how they learned about IAEA. State has not conducted such formal analysis of its approach to increasing American presence in UN organizations overall. In its fiscal year 2011 Bureau Strategic Plan, State IO has a performance indicator of the average percentage of Americans as part of UN organizations' workforce in geographic positions. As discussed earlier, in 2009, the United States was underrepresented in all five UN organizations we reviewed. State officials' position remains that it is difficult to make a direct link between current or proposed efforts by the department and the number of Americans ultimately hired by the UN because of the many factors that State cannot control. For example, interested American candidates may not attend State's outreach events and may not be aware of State IO's Web site. Furthermore, UN organizations ultimately make their own hiring decisions, and State has limited influence over these decisions.

We found that many Americans we interviewed did not seek assistance from State IO or the U.S. Missions when they considered working for UN organizations. Many did not know that State IO and U.S. Missions to the UN provided information or assistance on UN employment opportunities. Instead, many Americans we spoke with learned about UN job opportunities through their own personal or professional networks. Only 9

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out of 59 Americans we interviewed sought the assistance of State IO or U.S. Missions when they applied for UN positions. Some of the Americans noted that the U.S. government could increase its support for Americans during the application and hiring process to better promote the hiring of Americans at UN organizations. State officials told us that any means to increase American employment at UN organizations, whether through State's assistance or not, would help the United States toward achieving its goal of equitable representation.

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## State Allocates JPOs at Only a Few UN Organizations

JPO, Associate Expert (AE), and Associate Professional Officer (APO) programs provide UN organizations with young professionals who usually work in entry-level positions for a period of 2 to 4 years.<sup>30</sup> JPOs are considered staff members of the UN organizations but are funded by member states. The U.S. government, including State entities, sponsors JPOs to work at three of the five UN organizations we reviewed.<sup>31</sup> State officials noted that State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) and International Security and Nonproliferation (ISN) can fund JPOs at UNHCR and IAEA, respectively, because funding JPOs to work at these UN organizations is aligned with the PRM's and ISN's missions and activities. Information about JPO and APO programs sponsored by the United States at each of the three UN organizations is as follows:

- *JPOs at UNHCR.* PRM sponsors the JPO program at UNHCR. According to State officials, about 88 JPOs have completed the program since 1983. About 60 percent of American JPOs returned to work at UNHCR. State officials noted that, on an annual basis, PRM informally evaluates the effectiveness of the JPO program performance in getting Americans hired at UNHCR.
- *JPOs at IAEA.* ISN funds the JPO program at IAEA. The program is implemented by the Argonne and Brookhaven National Laboratories. In 2009, 11 out of a total of 16 JPOs at IAEA were American. IAEA officials

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<sup>30</sup>For the purposes of this report, we use the term JPO to also include AEs and APOs. Upon completion of the programs, these young professionals are not guaranteed employment at the UN organization and must apply for positions through the regular process. However, UN officials stated that the JPO experience provides applicants an advantage over their competitors.

<sup>31</sup>According to a 2008 JIU report, costs per JPO range between \$90,000 and \$195,000 per JPO per year, depending on duty station. U.S. officials informed us that JPO costs include salaries and benefits.

noted that the organization intends for JPOs to eventually return to IAEA after gaining additional work experience.

- *APOs at FAO.* USDA funds the APO program. Since 2000, USDA has sponsored approximately 1 to 3 American APOs annually at FAO.

Table 7 provides 2009 data on the number of American JPOs compared with the total number of JPOs at the five UN organizations we reviewed.

**Table 7: Number of JPOs at Five UN Organizations, 2009**

	Secretariat	WHO	FAO	IAEA	UNHCR	Total number, all five organizations
Number of American JPOs	0	0	2	11	10	23
<b>Total number of JPOs, all nationalities</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>471</b>

Sources: GAO analysis of data from Secretariat, WHO, FAO, IAEA, and UNHCR.

Note: JPOs includes JPOs, APOs, and AEs at these organizations.

In 2006, we recommended that State evaluate the overall costs and benefits of supporting JPOs as a mechanism for increasing U.S. representation across UN organizations. Such an evaluation would help determine which UN organization the United States should prioritize in terms of increasing U.S. employment by funding JPOs. We noted that the assessment would also involve weighing the trade-offs between funding JPOs and other agency programs. According to a State official, State did not conduct its own formal assessment of funding JPOs. Instead, its informal review of funding the JPO program consisted of relying on and agreeing with the findings of a 2008 JIU report that reviewed JPO programs across the UN system.<sup>32</sup> The JIU report noted that countries may use the JPO program as a tool to remedy their underrepresentation in UN organizations, and UN organizations have high retention rates of JPOs. State officials informed us that they support the program and acknowledge the program’s general benefits as noted in the JIU report.

<sup>32</sup>Joint Inspection Unit, United Nations, *Junior Professional Officer/Associate Expert/Associate Professional Officer Programmes in United Nations System Organizations* (JIU/REP/2008/2) (Geneva: 2008).

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According to the JIU report on JPOs, the largest sponsors of JPOs make periodic evaluations of their programs and, according to changes in circumstances, modify their priorities or reformulate the scope and focus. State does not currently make determinations about how to prioritize which UN organization could benefit most from having JPOs. The overall result is that State has funded as many as 11 JPOs at one UN organization and none at some other organizations that may benefit from having JPOs. For example, in 2009, 39 countries sponsored 248 JPOs at the Secretariat, with no representation from the United States where the Secretariat headquarters is located. Many U.S. and UN officials told us that the JPO program is a good entry point into the UN system. In addition, we found that 33 of the 61 American respondents we interviewed would recommend that the U.S. government fund JPOs to increase American representation in the UN, the primary suggestion among these Americans for increased U.S. government involvement.

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## Conclusions

Despite State's ongoing efforts, the United States is underrepresented in geographic positions at a number of UN organizations. While many of the factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of Americans at these organizations are outside U.S. control, actions by the U.S. government may still have a positive effect. However, State's lack of information on the effectiveness of its current efforts limits State's ability to modify its approach by expanding on its best practices and eliminating ineffective activities. The JPO program represents one area with the potential for positive impact on improving U.S. representation at the UN; however, State allocates JPOs at only a few UN organizations. Furthermore, geographic positions only represent a subset of the overall level of employment at UN organizations. Examining employment data for both geographic and nongeographic positions shows the UN organizations in which the United States may have an even more difficult time achieving equitable representation. Although State's recruitment efforts are directed at increasing U.S. representation without regard to geographic or nongeographic positions, its current reporting does not capture important trends of U.S. representation in UN organizations. Without a more accurate and complete representation of overall U.S. professional employment in UN organizations, State will not have the necessary information to target its efforts, particularly in light of the many challenges that Americans experience while employed in the UN. Congress could also benefit from receiving more complete reporting on the overall level of U.S. employment at UN organizations.

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## Recommendations for Executive Action

This report contains three recommendations to the Secretary of State. (1) To provide more complete information on the level of U.S. representation at UN organizations, we recommend that the Secretary of State include data on U.S. representation in all professional positions, similar to the information it currently provides on staff in geographic positions, in State's annual report to Congress on U.S. representation in UN organizations. (2) To improve U.S. efforts to increase the employment of Americans at UN organizations, we recommend that the Secretary of State develop a means to evaluate the effectiveness of State's efforts to increase U.S. representation. The evaluation should include an assessment of State's ongoing efforts such as its Web-based database for sending UN vacancy announcements to interested job candidates. (3) Consider implementing a pilot program to fund JPOs at UN organizations where the United States currently does not have JPOs such as the Secretariat.

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## Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We solicited comments on a draft of this report from State, FAO, IAEA, the Secretariat, UNHCR, and WHO. We received comments from State, which are reprinted in appendix V. State concurred with our recommendations. State noted the challenges in obtaining employment data from the various UN organizations, but said that it plans to seek additional information on nongeographic positions to include in its annual report to Congress. In concurring with our recommendation to evaluate the effectiveness of State's efforts to increase U.S. representation at UN organizations, State said that a key tool for making decisions on priorities and directions for some its approaches will be its new Web-based tool, designed to enhance outreach to Americans on opportunities in the UN system. State also agreed to consider funding for JPOs at UN organizations in conjunction with other funding priorities. In addition, we received technical comments from State, FAO, IAEA, the Secretariat, UNHCR, and WHO, which we have incorporated as appropriate. In its technical comments, WHO raised questions about the reliability of its data. A full description of this issue is contained in appendix I.

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We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Secretary of State, the United Nations Secretariat, the World Health Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The report also is available at no charge on the GAO Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>.

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If you or your staff members have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-9601 or [melitot@gao.gov](mailto:melitot@gao.gov). Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Other contacts and major contributors are listed in appendix VI.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas M" followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Thomas Melito, Director  
International Affairs and Trade

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# Appendix I: Scope and Methodology

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The objectives of this report were to examine (1) U.S. representation at five United Nations (UN) organizations; (2) issues affecting the recruitment, hiring, and retention of professional staff, including Americans at these five UN organizations; and (3) efforts the State Department (State) has undertaken to improve U.S. representation at UN organizations, including its implementation of our 2006 recommendations. Our scope included five UN organizations: the UN Secretariat (the Secretariat), International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and World Health Organization (WHO). Technically, the IAEA is an independent international organization that has a special relationship with the UN. For the purposes of this report, we refer to the IAEA as a UN organization. We reviewed three of these UN organizations in 2006 (the Secretariat, IAEA, and UNHCR) and selected two additional organizations (FAO and WHO). We selected these five organizations because they have the largest professional staff sizes among UN organizations with formal or informal geographic targets and also to provide some overlap with the organizations we reviewed in 2006. Together they comprised over 50 percent of total UN organizations' professional staff as of December 2008. We conducted our work in Washington, D.C.; New York; Geneva, Switzerland; Rome, Italy; and Vienna, Austria.

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## Methodology for Reviewing U.S. Representation Status and Employment at Five UN Organizations

To determine U.S. representation status, trends in the number of professional positions held by Americans, and the growth in nongeographic positions, we analyzed employment data for 2006 through 2009 that we obtained from the five UN organizations. Data are for end of calendar year, except for the Secretariat, which is for the year ending June 30. We had extensive communications with the staff responsible for providing each organization's personnel data to clarify details regarding the data. We determined the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this review for the Secretariat, FAO, IAEA and UNHCR. However, WHO raised questions about the reliability of its data. See below for discussion.

To determine U.S. geographic representation at the four UN organizations with geographic targets (the Secretariat, WHO, FAO, and IAEA), we calculated the percentage of geographic positions filled by Americans and compared this percentage with the organization's target. We calculated the geographic target for the Secretariat, WHO, and FAO as a percentage range, in which the minimum and maximum number of national staff, as provided by the organization, is divided by the actual geographic staff in

the organization. IAEA informally calculates a member state to be underrepresented if its geographic representation is less than half of its percentage contribution to the budget. Using this method, we calculated a U.S. target. UNHCR has not adopted a formal geographic representation target but acknowledges U.S. concerns regarding the appropriate level of U.S. representation. We based our target representation for Americans at UNHCR on State's determination that, for organizations to which the United States contributes 22 percent, American representation should be at least 13 percent to be considered equitably represented. To determine U.S. representation at UNHCR in comparison to this target, we calculated the percentage of total professional positions (including both geographic and nongeographic positions) filled by Americans. For the purpose of this report, the United States is considered equitably represented if the number of Americans is within the UN organizations geographic target range.

We also calculated U.S. representation, as shown in table 3, in nongeographic positions and in total professional positions. Nongeographic positions are regular professional positions without geographic status. These positions include staff on both longer- and shorter-term contracts of varying duration. Total professional positions include both geographic and nongeographic positions. U.S. representation in nongeographic positions is calculated as the percentage of each UN organization's nongeographic positions filled by Americans. U.S. representation in total professional positions is calculated as the percentage of each UN organization's total professional positions filled by Americans. For the four UN organizations with geographic positions, as seen in figures 1 and 2, we calculated the change from 2006 to 2009 in the number of geographic and nongeographic positions and the annual growth rate of both geographic and nongeographic positions for each organization's total staff and for Americans. For details on U.S. representation in each of the UN organizations we reviewed, see tables 8 through 12 in Appendix II.

U.S. representation in geographic policymaking and senior-level positions in 2006 and 2009, as shown in table 4, is computed as the number of Americans in these geographic positions as a percentage of the organization's total geographic policymaking and senior-level positions. U.S. representation in all policymaking and senior-level positions—including both geographic and nongeographic—as shown in table 5, is computed as the number of Americans in these positions as a percentage of the organization's total number of geographic and nongeographic policymaking and senior-level positions. For UNHCR, U.S. representation in policymaking and senior level positions in both tables is computed as

the number of all Americans in these positions as a percent of UNHCR's total policymaking and senior level positions.

For all five organizations, we have also included graphs (see figs. 5 to 9 in app. III) to illustrate U.S. geographic representation (or, in the case of UNHCR, U.S. representation in total professional positions) at each grade—policymaking and senior-level (such as USG/ASG, D1/D2), mid-level (P4/P5), and entry-level (P1-P3)—as well as for all grades combined. U.S. geographic grade-level employment representation is calculated by dividing the number of U.S. staff at that grade level by the organization's total geographic employment for the corresponding grade level. At UNHCR, U.S. representation at each grade level is calculated by dividing the number of U.S. staff at that grade level by UNHCR's total employment for the corresponding grade level.

#### Reliability of WHO data

For our review, we used the data that WHO provided for our analysis. During the course of our review of these data, we had numerous communications with WHO data officials and went through multiple steps to establish the accuracy, consistency, and completeness of the data we report. At our briefing with State, officials noted a discrepancy between the numbers WHO provided GAO in July 2010 and the official numbers used by State, which were based on WHO's Human Resources Annual Report published in April 2010. We alerted WHO of this discrepancy well in advance of sending WHO a copy of our draft report. We did not receive a response until just prior to publication. In their response, WHO noted that its new Global Management system is not fully implemented and that, since the system's inception in July 2008, it has created some problems for WHO, such as data consolidation. WHO advised us to use the data it published in WHO's Human Resources Annual Reports as "this data is tracked and verified manually." However, WHO was unable to substantiate this assertion in response to our request to provide evidence demonstrating that the more outdated Annual Report numbers would be more reliable than the more recent data they provided us. As such, throughout the report, we have decided to use the more recent numbers that WHO provided us beginning in July 2010.

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## Methodology for Reviewing Issues Affecting the Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention of Professional Staff at UN Organizations

To assess issues affecting the recruitment, hiring, and retention of Americans at the five UN organizations, we reviewed UN organizations' human resource policies and other documents and interviewed UN human resources officials; U.S. government officials from State, Brookhaven and Argonne National Laboratories, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and Nuclear Regulatory Commission; and 63 Americans employed at the five UN organizations' headquarters. Using a structured interview questionnaire, we received the views of a total of 63 Americans' employed across the five UN organizations on various UN employment issues.<sup>1</sup> We gathered information from these employees through individual interviews, small-group interviews, and a large-group interview. We also received written answers to our questionnaire from some American employees. Because of time constraints, not all questions were asked of every individual. Questions with less than 63 respondents are identified as such in the body of this review. We met with employees in a range of professional grade levels from P1 (entry-level) to D2 (senior-level) and contract types (such as temporary, fixed-term, and indefinite). We did not select representative samples of American employees at any organization. Therefore, the results of our interviews with the Americans employed at the five UN organizations are not generalizable to those organizations or the UN system. The structured interview questionnaire included a set of 25 closed and open-ended questions covering interviewees' backgrounds, work experience, and experiences within their organization. In conjunction with information we gathered from UN and U.S. officials and our analysis of UN documents, we used responses to the closed-ended question on factors that might hinder UN organizations from recruiting, hiring, and retaining Americans to select the factors affecting U.S. representation discussed in the body of this review. To analyze how current human resource reform initiatives may affect these challenges, we used information collected from interviews with UN human resources officials and UN documents.

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<sup>1</sup>Specifically, we gathered information from 8 Americans employed at the Secretariat, 19 at IAEA, 11 at FAO, 14 at WHO, and 11 at UNHCR.

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Methodology for  
Reviewing U.S. State  
Department's Efforts to  
Increase U.S.  
Representation at UN  
Organizations

To assess State's efforts to increase U.S. representation, including the implementation of our 2006 recommendations, we reviewed documents and interviewed officials from State's Bureau of International Organization Affairs (IO). We discussed improvements that State has made since our 2006 report on U.S. representation in UN organizations, in response to recommendations made in that report, and reviewed State's documentation of these activities. We reviewed other State documents, including its annual reports to Congress, *U.S. Representation in United Nations Agencies and Efforts Made to Employ U.S. Citizens*, and State IO's fiscal year 2011 strategic plan. In addition, we met with State officials outside of IO, and other U.S. agency officials that have participated in State's interagency task force on UN employment or been involved with recruiting Americans to work at the UN organizations we reviewed. We reviewed documents these U.S. agencies provided on their strategies to improve U.S. employment at UN organizations. Furthermore, we met with UN human resources officials, American employees of UN organizations, officials representing the U.S. Missions to the UN, and representatives of nongovernmental organizations, to obtain their views on U.S. efforts for increasing representation at UN organizations. We also reviewed the UN Joint Inspection Unit report that assessed the JPO program at the UN.

We conducted this performance audit from November 2009 to September 2010, 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.

# Appendix II: U.S. Representation in Geographic and Nongeographic Positions at Five UN Organizations, 2006-2009

For the four organizations that distinguish between geographic and nongeographic positions, the following tables show the percentage and numerical target for U.S. representation in geographic positions set by each organization, the number of geographic positions that Americans hold, the percentage of geographic positions that Americans fill, and the equitability of this representation based on the targets. In addition, tables 8 to 12 show the percentage of nongeographic positions filled by Americans and the percentage of total professional positions (geographic and nongeographic, where applicable, and the more limited duration appointments) held by Americans, at all five UN organizations we reviewed. The table for UNHCR, which does not distinguish between geographic and nongeographic positions, indicates, in addition to the informal target percentages and numbers, U.S. representation in core professional positions (indefinite contracts and contracts of longer fixed term), as well as U.S. representation in total professional positions, which also includes fixed-term appointments (contracts for less than 1 year).

**Table 8: U.S. Representation in Geographic, Nongeographic, and Total Professional Positions at Secretariat, 2006 to 2009**

Secretariat							
	Percentage of total geographic positions targeted for Americans	Target range (in numbers)	Number of Americans in geographic positions	Percentage of geographic positions filled by Americans	Equitability of U.S. representation based on targets	Percentage of nongeographic positions filled by Americans	Percentage of total professional positions filled by Americans
2006	11.7%-15.9%	309-418	313	11.9%	Equitable	9.0%	10.0%
2007	11.7%-15.9%	320-433	327	12.0%	Equitable	8.9%	10.0%
2008	11.8%-16.0%	330-447	341	12.2%	Equitable	8.9%	10.0%
2009	12.5%-16.9%	352-476	333	11.9%	Under	9.5%	10.2%
<b>Growth rate</b>			<b>2.3%</b>				

Source: GAO analysis of Secretariat data.

**Appendix II: U.S. Representation in  
Geographic and Nongeographic Positions at  
Five UN Organizations, 2006-2009**

**Table 9: U.S. Representation in Geographic, Nongeographic, and Total Professional Positions at WHO, 2006 to 2009**

WHO							
	Percentage of total geographic positions targeted for Americans	Target range (in numbers)	Number of Americans in geographic positions	Percentage of geographic positions filled by Americans	Equitability of U.S. representation based on targets	Percentage of nongeographic positions filled by Americans	Percentage of total professional positions filled by Americans
2006	8.4%-11.5%	142-193	201	12.0%	Over	7.9%	11.6%
2007	7.6%-10.4%	142-193	168	9.0%	Equitable	21.0%	10.0%
2008	7.1%-9.6%	142-193	160	8.0%	Equitable	52.4%	9.8%
2009	8.3%-11.2%	142-193	141	8.2%	Under	8.5%	8.3%
<b>Growth rate</b>			<b>-10.5%</b>				

Source: GAO analysis of WHO data.

**Table 10: U.S. Representation in Geographic, Nongeographic, and Total Professional Positions at FAO, 2006 to 2009**

FAO							
	Percentage of total geographic positions targeted for Americans	Target range (in numbers)	Number of Americans in geographic positions	Percentage of geographic positions filled by Americans	Equitability of U.S. representation based on targets	Percentage of nongeographic positions filled by Americans	Percentage of total professional positions filled by Americans
2006	12.4%-16.8%	129-175	132	12.7%	Equitable	6.4%	11.0%
2007	13.0%-17.7%	129-175	126	12.7%	Under	5.6%	10.6%
2008	13.1%-17.8%	127-172	121	12.5%	Under	6.8%	10.6%
2009	13.7%-18.5%	127-172	118	12.7%	Under	6.9%	10.5%
<b>Growth rate</b>			<b>-3.7%</b>				

Source: GAO analysis of FAO data.

**Appendix II: U.S. Representation in  
Geographic and Nongeographic Positions at  
Five UN Organizations, 2006-2009**

**Table 11: U.S. Representation in Geographic, Nongeographic, and Total Professional Positions at IAEA, 2006 to 2009**

IAEA							
	Percentage of total geographic positions targeted for Americans	Informal target number	Number of Americans in geographic positions	Percentage of geographic positions filled by Americans	Equitability of U.S. representation based on target	Percentage of nongeographic positions filled by Americans	Percentage of total professional positions filled by Americans
2006	12.5%	96	94	12.2%	Under	20.0%	14.1%
2007	12.5%	98	94	12.0%	Under	23.3%	14.9%
2008	12.5%	95	88	11.6%	Under	20.2%	14.0%
2009	12.5%	95	85	11.2%	Under	20.1%	13.8%
<b>Growth rate</b>			<b>-3.6%</b>				

Source: GAO analysis of IAEA data.

**Table 12: U.S. Representation in Nongeographic and Total Professional Positions at UNHCR, 2006 to 2009**

UNHCR							
	Past informal target	Informal target number	Number of Americans in core professional positions	Percentage of core professional positions filled by Americans	Equitability of U.S. based on informal target	Percentage of total professional positions filled by Americans	
2006	13.0%	197	121	8.0%	Under	8.2%	
2007	13.0%	197	117	7.7%	Under	8.0%	
2008	13.0%	202	121	7.8%	Under	7.8%	
2009	13.0%	203	118	7.6%	Under	7.4%	
<b>Growth rate</b>				<b>-0.4%</b>			

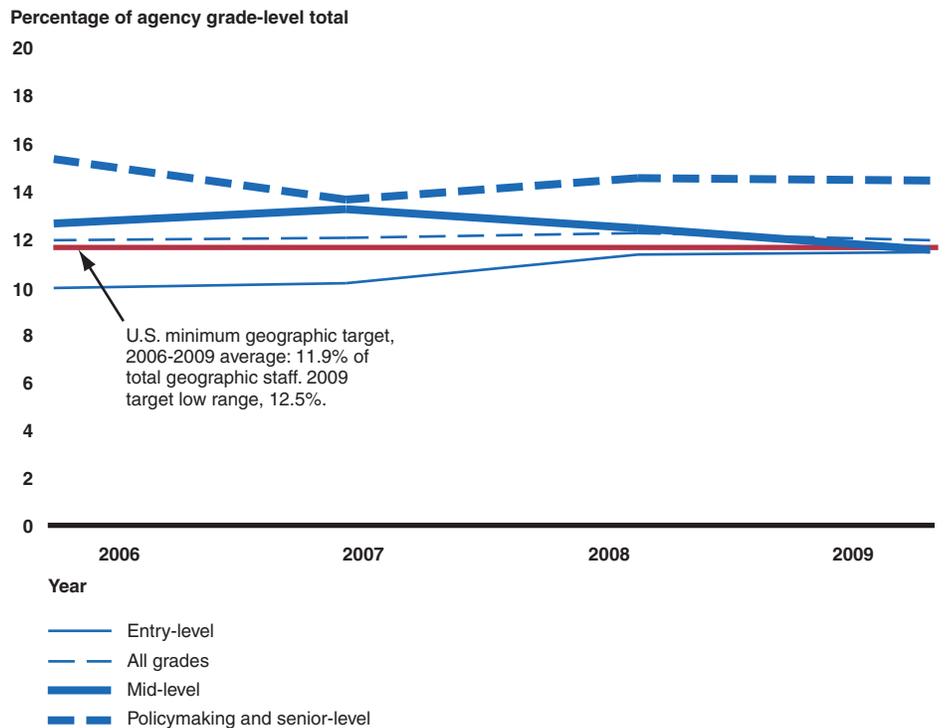
Source: GAO analysis of UNHCR data.

Note: Core professional positions at UNHCR exclude staff on appointments of less than 1 year. Total professional positions includes those staff.

# Appendix III: U.S. Representation, by Grade, in Geographic Positions in Four UN Organizations and in Total Professional Positions at UNHCR, 2006-2009

Figures 5 to 8 show U.S. representation in geographic positions at each grade level—policymaking and senior-level (USG/ASG, D1/D2); mid-level (P4/P5); entry-level (P1-P3); and “all grades”—in the four UN organizations that distinguish between geographic and nongeographic positions. Figure 9 shows U.S. representation at UNHCR—a UN organization that does not differentiate between geographic and nongeographic positions—in total professional positions at each of these grade levels. The bold line in the figures indicates the average minimum target for U.S. representation over the period from 2006 to 2009. At IAEA and UNHCR, this target was constant over this period. For the Secretariat, WHO, and FAO, the minimum target varied within 2 percentage points over this period.

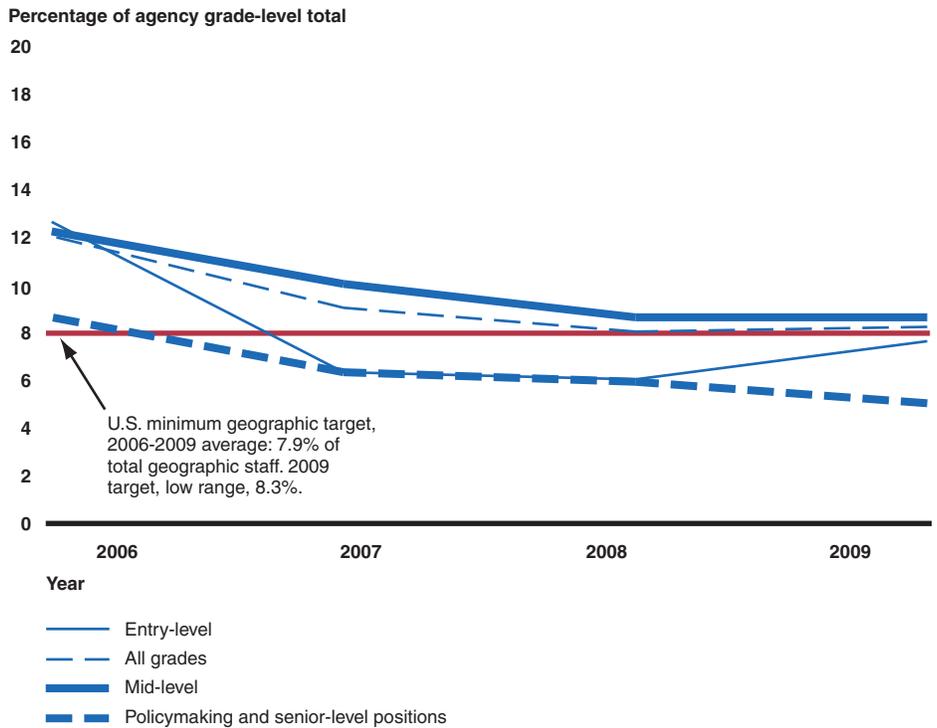
**Figure 5: U.S. Representation in the UN Secretariat Geographic Positions by Grade Level**



Source: GAO analysis of Secretariat data.

**Appendix III: U.S. Representation, by Grade,  
in Geographic Positions in Four UN  
Organizations and in Total Professional  
Positions at UNHCR, 2006-2009**

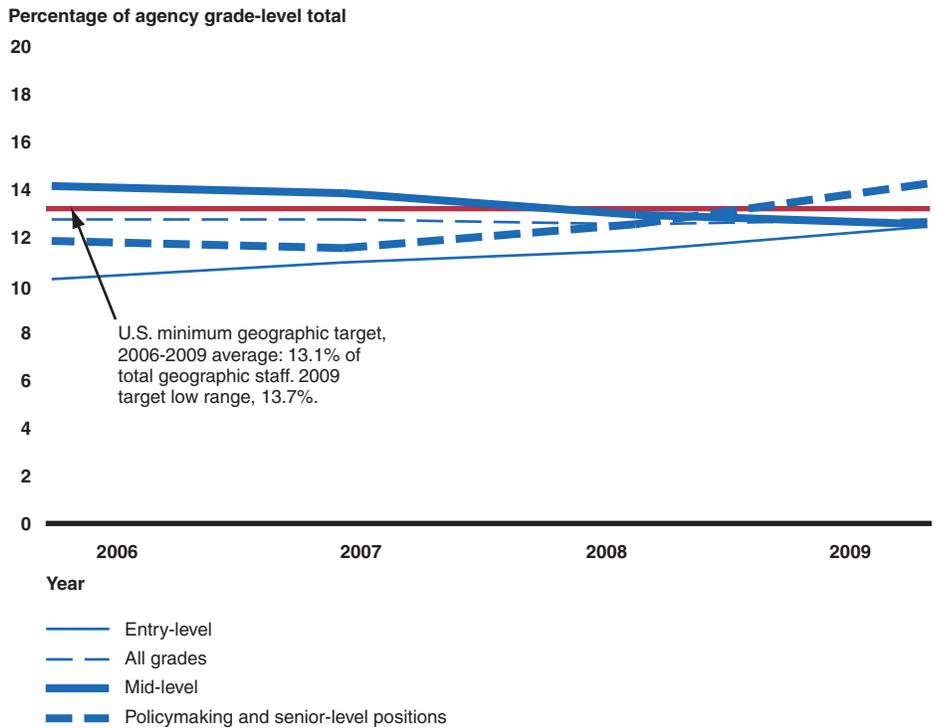
**Figure 6: U.S. Representation in WHO Geographic Positions by Grade Level**



Source: GAO analysis of WHO data.

**Appendix III: U.S. Representation, by Grade,  
in Geographic Positions in Four UN  
Organizations and in Total Professional  
Positions at UNHCR, 2006-2009**

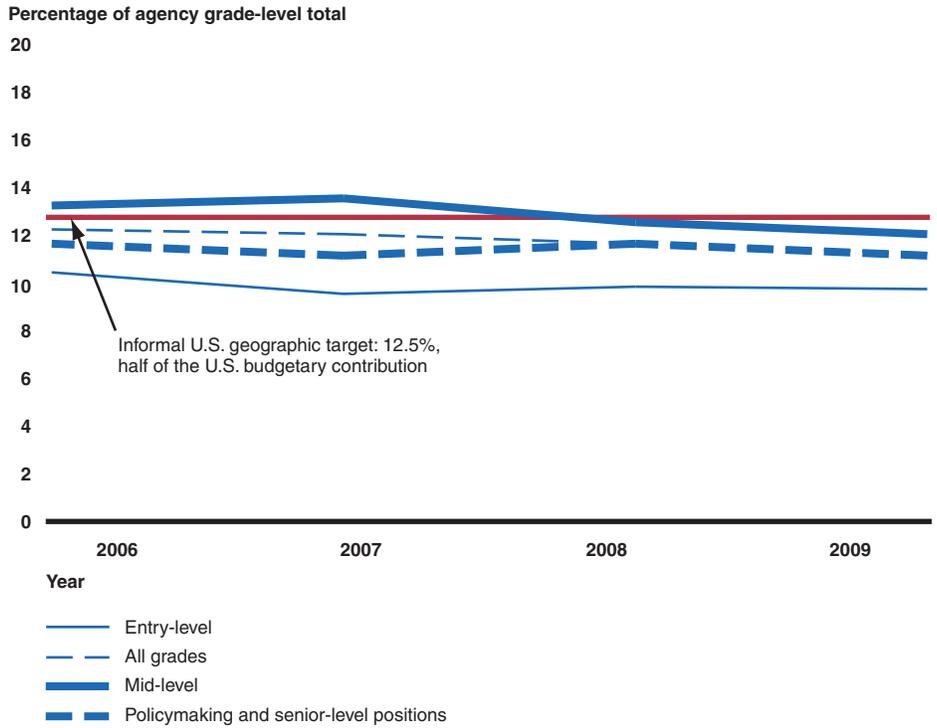
**Figure 7: U.S. Representation in FAO Geographic Positions by Grade Level**



Source: GAO analysis of FAO data.

**Appendix III: U.S. Representation, by Grade,  
in Geographic Positions in Four UN  
Organizations and in Total Professional  
Positions at UNHCR, 2006-2009**

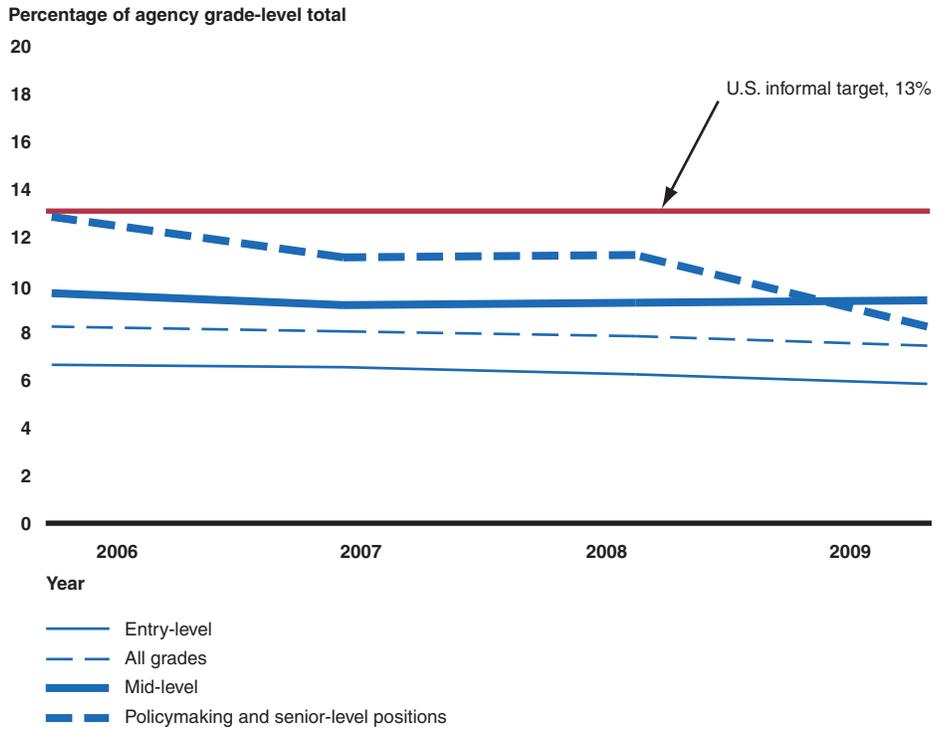
**Figure 8: U.S. Representation in IAEA Geographic Positions by Grade Level**



Source: GAO analysis of IAEA data.

**Appendix III: U.S. Representation, by Grade,  
in Geographic Positions in Four UN  
Organizations and in Total Professional  
Positions at UNHCR, 2006-2009**

**Figure 9: U.S. Representation in UNHCR Total Professional Positions by Grade Level**



Source: GAO analysis of UNHCR data.

# Appendix IV: Use of Extrabudgetary Resources to Fund Nongeographic Professional Staff

Table 13 shows that extrabudgetary resources are funding a growing percentage of nongeographic positions in the four organizations that distinguish between geographic and nongeographic positions. In addition, at the Secretariat and WHO, an increasing percentage of extrabudgetary resources are also being used to fund geographic positions.

**Table 13: Percentage of Geographic and Nongeographic Professional Staff Funded from Extrabudgetary Funds, for each UN Organization, 2006-2009**

	Secretariat		WHO		FAO		IAEA		UNHCR	All professionals
	Geographic	Nongeographic	Geographic	Nongeographic	Geographic	Nongeographic	Geographic	Nongeographic	Geographic	
2006	15%	79%	37%	47%	0%	73%	0%	34%	NA	95%
2007	17%	80%	44%	48%	0%	71%	0%	35%	NA	95%
2008	18%	81%	49%	7%	0%	77%	0%	34%	NA	95%
2009	19%	81%	63%	67%	0%	78%	0%	36%	NA	95%

Sources: GAO analysis of UN Secretariat, WHO, FAO, IAEA, and UNHCR data.

Note: Nongeographic professional positions also include temporary positions, of varying duration. For WHO, in 2008, nearly all professionals funded from “other” budgetary sources were geographic. Hence a small percentage of nongeographic professionals were funded from “other” budget.

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# Appendix V: Comments from the State Department

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United States Department of State

*Chief Financial Officer*

Washington, D.C. 20520

SEP 17 2016

Ms. Jacquelyn Williams-Bridgers  
Managing Director  
International Affairs and Trade  
Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20548-0001

Dear Ms. Williams-Bridgers:

We appreciate the opportunity to review your draft report, "U.S. EMPLOYMENT IN THE UNITED NATIONS: State Department Needs to Enhance Reporting Requirements and Evaluate Its Efforts to Increase U.S. Representation," GAO Job Code 320735.

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

If you have any questions concerning this response, please contact Lynette Podolsky, Sr. Staffing Management Officer, Bureau of International Organization Affairs (202) 647-6396.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Barbara Retzlaff".

Barbara Retzlaff

cc: GAO – Tom Melito  
IO – Esther Brimmer  
State/OIG – Evelyn Klemstine

**Department of State Comments on GAO Draft Report**

**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, GAO Code: 320735)**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on your draft report entitled U.S. Employment in the United Nations, State Department Needs to Enhance Reporting Requirements and Evaluate Its Efforts to Increase U.S. Representation. The Department of State places a high priority on increasing the representation of U.S. nationals, at all levels, on the staffs of the United Nations and other international organizations. This is the third GAO review concerning issues relevant to this subject since 2001, inclusive.

We appreciate that GAO has highlighted some of the Department of State's efforts to improve the representation of U.S. nationals in international organizations and to comply with recommendations made by GAO in its 2006 report. We note that many of the challenges in increasing the employment of U.S. nationals in international organizations that were found in 2006 continue to exist, and GAO correctly points out that many of these are beyond U.S. control.

This report contains three recommendations to the Secretary of State. (1) To provide more complete information on the level of U.S. representation at UN organizations, it recommends that the Secretary include data on U.S. representation in all professional positions, in State's annual report to Congress on this subject. (2) To improve U.S. efforts to increase the employment of Americans at UN organizations, the report recommends that the Secretary develop a means to evaluate the effectiveness of State's efforts to increase U.S. representation. This evaluation should include an assessment of State's ongoing efforts for sending UN vacancy announcements to interested job candidates. (3) The report suggests implementing a pilot program to fund Junior Professional Officers (JPOs) at UN organizations where the U.S. currently does not have JPOs.

Regarding GAO's first recommendation, we envision that the challenges we often experience in obtaining data on positions subject to geographic distribution from the various organizations will be even more acute for nongeographic positions. We are not certain of the usefulness of such data in that nongeographic positions are often funded from extrabudgetary sources and can reflect conditions

2

or requirements placed by the donor regarding the programs to which they are attached. Nevertheless, we find the recommendation acceptable and plan to seek additional summary information on nongeographic positions to include in our annual report to Congress on U.S. representation in UN agencies. Regarding the second recommendation, the Department concurs. We currently are developing a new web-based tool to enhance outreach to American citizens on opportunities in the UN system and to provide the Department with improved data on aspects of that outreach. We expect this will be one of our key tools on which to base decisions on priorities and direction for some of our approaches. Lastly, we agree with the third recommendation, and in conjunction with the Department's and President's budget process, we will consider funding for JPOs at UN organizations where there are no American JPOs. As with all funding issues, this will be considered in conjunction with other funding priorities.

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# Appendix VI: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

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## GAO Contact

Thomas Melito, (202) 512-9601, or [melitot@gao.gov](mailto:melitot@gao.gov)

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## Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the individual named above, Phillip Thomas, Assistant Director; Rachel Girshick; Victoria Lin; and Roberta G. (RG) Steinman made key contributions to this report. The team benefited from the expert advice and assistance of Debbie Chung, Joyce Evans, Joel Grossman, and Grace Lui.

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