

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-19-77](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Human trafficking is a pervasive problem throughout the world. Victims are often held against their will in slave-like conditions.

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 includes a provision for GAO to report on the programs conducted by specific agencies, including State, DOL, and USAID, that address trafficking in persons. Among other objectives, this report (1) identifies the recent projects in international counter-trafficking in persons that key U.S. agencies have awarded to implementing partners; and, for selected projects, assesses the extent to which key agencies have (2) documented their monitoring activities and (3) ensured the reliability of project performance information.

GAO reviewed State, DOL, and USAID project documents and interviewed agency officials. GAO reviewed monitoring documents for 54 of the 57 projects that were active from the beginning of fiscal year 2016 through the end of fiscal year 2017. Of these 54 projects, GAO selected a nongeneralizable sample of 5 projects, based primarily on largest total award amounts, for review of the reliability of project performance information.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making four recommendations to State and one recommendation to USAID, including that both agencies establish additional controls to improve the consistency and completeness of project performance information, and that State maintain monitoring activity documentation and establish targets for each performance indicator. State and USAID concur with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-19-77](#). For more information, contact Jennifer Grover at (202) 512-7141 or groverj@gao.gov.

December 2018

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

State and USAID Should Improve Their Monitoring of International Counter-trafficking Projects

What GAO Found

The Departments of State (State), Labor (DOL), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)—through agreements with implementing partners—managed 120 international counter-trafficking in person projects during fiscal year 2017.

GAO reviewed a selection of 54 counter-trafficking projects (37 State, 3 DOL, and 14 USAID), and found that DOL and USAID had fully documented their monitoring activities, while State had not. All three agencies used similar tools to monitor the performance of their projects, such as monitoring plans, performance indicators and targets, progress reports, and site visits. GAO found, however, that State did not fully document its monitoring activities for 16 of its 37 projects (43 percent). GAO found that State did not have the monitoring plans or complete progress reports for one-third of its projects and often lacked targets for performance indicators in its final progress reports. State officials said they had not required targets for each performance indicator for the projects GAO reviewed, or had not set targets due to limited resources in prior years. State has taken steps to improve its monitoring efforts, including issuing a November 2017 policy that requires targets to be set for each performance indicator and developing an automated data system that would require targets to be recorded. However, because the pilot data system allows targets to be recorded as “to be determined” and does not have controls to ensure entry of actual targets, it is uncertain whether performance targets will be regularly recorded. Without full documentation of monitoring activities and established performance targets, State has limited ability to assess project performance, including project efficiency or effectiveness.

GAO reviewed the reliability of project performance information for 5 of the 54 counter-trafficking projects (2 State, 1 DOL, and 2 USAID) and found that State and USAID used inconsistent and incomplete performance information, while DOL used consistent and complete information. For example, some quarterly indicator results in State and USAID progress reports were inconsistent with annual total results, and narrative explanations for significant deviations from performance targets were sometimes not present in quarterly reports. According to agency officials, performance information from these projects is regularly used not only for direct project oversight but also for internal and external reporting, program decisions, and lessons learned. GAO found that State's and USAID's processes lack sufficient controls to ensure the reliability of project performance information, but did not find inadequate controls in DOL's process. For example, neither State nor USAID consistently used automated checks on indicator results to ensure consistency and completeness of performance indicator result calculations. In contrast, DOL used automated checks as part of its process. Without implementing controls to ensure that performance information is consistent and complete, State and USAID officials cannot fully or accurately understand what projects are, or are not, achieving, and how their efforts might be improved.