

Why GAO Did This Study

State operates and maintains over 9,000 owned real property assets, at over 275 overseas posts. These facilities require routine operations and maintenance overseen by a network of facilities maintenance and locally employed staff.

GAO was asked to review facilities maintenance and locally employed staff at overseas posts. This report (1) describes trends in the U.S. Foreign Service facilities maintenance workforce for fiscal years 2012 to 2022 and challenges State identified related to hiring and retaining these staff, (2) describes the workforce of locally employed facilities maintenance staff and challenges State identified related to hiring and retaining these staff, and (3) assesses the extent to which State has adopted leading practices for human capital management for both of these workforces.

GAO analyzed staffing data and State documentation related to human capital management. GAO also interviewed officials at State headquarters and five overseas posts. GAO selected these posts based on each post's type of facility manager, size, and geographic region.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations that State maintain an inventory of U.S. Foreign Service facilities maintenance skills, review which bureau should lead the U.S. Foreign Service facilities maintenance staff assignment process, and develop guidance for posts to maintain skills inventories of locally employed facilities maintenance staff. State concurred with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-23-105401](#). For more information, contact Nagla'a El-Hodiri, 202-512-7279 or ElHodiriN@gao.gov.

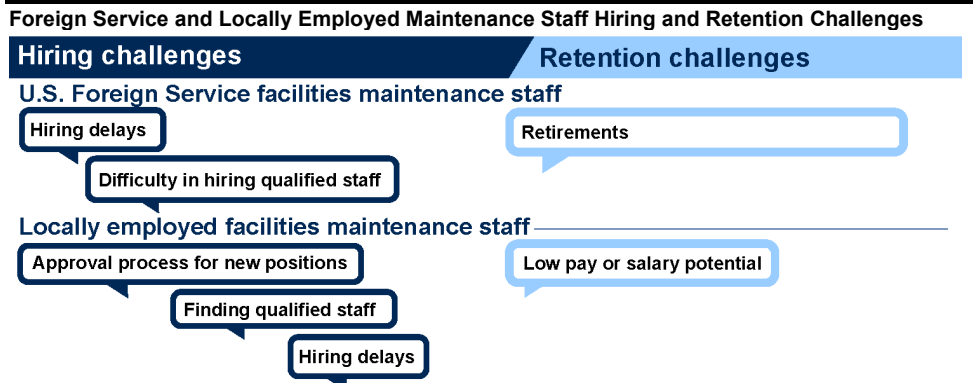
OVERSEAS REAL PROPERTY

State Should Improve Strategic Workforce Planning for Facilities Maintenance Staff

What GAO Found

The Department of State (State) has faced challenges hiring U.S. Foreign Service facilities maintenance staff, who are responsible for maintaining U.S. overseas properties that had a \$3 billion maintenance backlog as of fiscal year 2020. From fiscal year 2012 through 2022, the vacancy rate for these positions increased from 12 percent of 204 authorized positions to 23 percent of 244 authorized positions. State officials identified challenges in hiring and retaining these staff, including hiring delays and staff retirement.

State also employs more than 8,500 locally employed facilities maintenance staff to address overseas posts' maintenance needs. State officials identified challenges related to hiring and retaining locally employed facilities maintenance staff, such as English language requirements and low pay or salary potential.



Source: GAO analysis of Department of State interviews. | GAO-23-105401

For Foreign Service facilities maintenance staff, State has adopted five of the seven leading practices in strategic workforce planning that GAO evaluated. These include succession planning and assessing workforce needs. However, State does not maintain an inventory of Foreign Service facilities maintenance skills. Thus, it may not leverage these skills effectively. Further, State's current approach may limit its ability to match skills to the needs of overseas posts. Currently, State's regional bureaus are responsible for assigning these staff to posts in their regions, with advice from State's Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations. Regional bureau officials say they may be more aware of post-specific challenges, while officials from the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations maintain they have a more global view of needs across posts and the workforce. State may be missing opportunities to leverage its knowledge and optimize the assignment of these staff to posts.

For locally employed staff, State has adopted five of six leading practices that GAO evaluated. For example, State assesses current and future workforce needs and posts have processes to address skill gaps. However, GAO found that one of the five selected posts maintained an inventory of locally employed staff skills--the sixth leading practice evaluated. State does not have any agency-wide guidance related to maintaining skills inventories, which limits posts' ability to conduct workforce planning and training efficiently.