



Highlights of [GAO-07-1152T](#), a testimony before 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 continues to be concerned about the underrepresentation of U.S. professionals in some UN organizations and that insufficient progress has been made to improve U.S. representation. This testimony is based on GAO’s September 2006 report that reviewed (1) U.S. representation status and employment trends at five UN organizations, (2) factors affecting these organizations’ ability to meet U.S. representation targets, and (3) the U.S. Department of State’s (State) efforts to improve U.S. representation and additional steps that can be taken. GAO reviewed five UN organizations that together comprised about 50 percent of UN organizations’ total professional staff.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommended that the Secretary of State provide more UN employment information on State Web sites; expand recruiting to reach qualified Americans; and evaluate the costs and benefits of maintaining a roster of qualified U.S. candidates for high priority positions, and of funding entry-level professional staff where Americans are underrepresented. In commenting on a draft of GAO’s 2006 report, State concurred with GAO’s recommendations. In July 2007, State officials updated GAO on the actions they have taken in response to these recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-1152T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Thomas Melito at (202) 512-6571 or melitot@gao.gov.

UNITED NATIONS ORGANIZATIONS

Enhanced Efforts Needed to Increase U.S. Employment at UN Agencies

What GAO Found

The United States was underrepresented in three of the five UN agencies we reviewed, and increased hiring of U.S. citizens is needed to meet employment targets. The three agencies where the United States was underrepresented were the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA); the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). U.S. citizens were equitably represented at the UN Secretariat, though close to the lower end of its target range. The UN Development Program had not established a target for U.S. representation, although U.S. citizens filled about 11 percent of its professional positions. Given projected staff levels, retirements, and separations, IAEA, UNESCO, and UNHCR would need to increase hiring of U.S. citizens to meet their minimum targets for U.S. representation in 2010.

While the five UN agencies faced some common barriers to recruiting and retaining professional staff, including Americans, they also faced distinct challenges. Most of these barriers and challenges were outside of the U.S. government’s control. The common barriers included nontransparent human resource practices; limited external hiring; lengthy hiring processes; comparatively low or unclear compensation; required mobility; and limited U.S. government support. UN agencies also faced distinct challenges. For example, at the Secretariat, candidates serving in professional UN positions funded by their governments were more likely to be hired than those who took the entry-level exam; however, the United States had not funded such positions at the Secretariat. Also, IAEA had difficulty recruiting U.S. employees because the number of U.S. nuclear specialists was decreasing.

Since 2001, State has increased its efforts to achieve equitable U.S. representation at UN agencies, and additional options exist. State targeted efforts to recruit U.S. candidates for senior and policymaking UN positions, and although it was difficult to link State’s efforts to UN hiring decisions, U.S. representation in these positions improved or displayed no trend in the five UN agencies. U.S. representation in entry-level positions, however, declined or did not show a trend in four of the five UN agencies despite State’s increased efforts. Additional options include maintaining a roster of qualified U.S. candidates, expanding marketing and outreach, increasing UN employment information on U.S. agency Web sites; and assessing the costs and benefits of sponsoring entry-level employees at UN agencies.

Estimated Number of U.S. Citizens to be Hired to Meet Geographic Targets

UN agency	Average number of total staff hired into geographic positions each year, 2001-2005	Average number of U.S. citizens hired into geographic positions each year, 2001-2005	Minimum average number of U.S. citizens to be hired each year to reach geographic target in 2010
IAEA	77	6	16
UNESCO	55	4.5	6
UNHCR	148	10	25

Source: GAO analysis of IAEA, UNESCO, and UNHCR hiring data.