

## DOD CIVILIAN WORKFORCE

### Actions Needed to Analyze and Eliminate Barriers to Diversity

#### Why GAO Did This Study

DOD employs over 700,000 federal civilians—over one-third of the total federal civilian workforce—and recognizes the importance of a diverse workforce to achieve its critical missions. However, DOD has faced challenges ensuring its workforce reflects the diversity of the nation it serves.

House Report 116-617, accompanying the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021, includes a provision for GAO to examine diversity in the DOD federal civilian workforce. This report analyzes (1) the demographic composition of the DOD civilian workforce by gender and racial or ethnic group; (2) promotion outcomes among these demographic groups; and (3) the extent to which DOD has developed policies and plans to identify any barriers and track progress eliminating them.

GAO analyzed DOD data for appropriated-fund civilian employees in the three military departments and across the other DOD components from fiscal year 2012 through fiscal year 2021 and conducted a multivariate regression analysis of promotions by gender and racial or ethnic group. GAO also analyzed DOD diversity and EEO policies, strategic plans, and federal standards to analyze barriers and track progress.

#### What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD (1) update policies to ensure it collects barrier-related data, (2) assign clear oversight roles, and (3) establish measures to track progress in eliminating barriers. DOD concurred with these recommendations.

View GAO-23-105284. For more information, contact Brenda S. Farrell at (202) 512-3604 or [farrellb@gao.gov](mailto:farrellb@gao.gov).

#### What GAO Found

Over the 10 years of Department of Defense (DOD) data GAO analyzed, the representation of women and of employees from historically disadvantaged racial or ethnic groups (historically disadvantaged groups) in DOD's civilian workforce generally remained unchanged and below total federal civilian workforce levels. Overall, from fiscal year 2012 through fiscal year 2021, the proportion of women decreased slightly, from 33.0 to 32.1 percent, but increased slightly for historically disadvantaged groups, from 31.0 to 32.6 percent. GAO also analyzed the General Schedule (GS) workforce and found that women and historically disadvantaged groups remained less represented at upper GS grades and the executive level.

**Demographic Representation in the DOD Civilian Workforce: Changes from Fiscal Year (FY) 2012–2021 and in General Schedule (GS) Grades and Senior Executive Service in FY 2021**



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) data. | GAO-23-105284

Note: Data reflect percentage-point change in the military departments and other DOD components from FY 2012 to 2021 (left) and percentages in FY 2021 (right). Historically disadvantaged groups include Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and two or more races.

Promotion outcomes were generally lower for historically disadvantaged groups than for White employees, and varied for women relative to men, based on GAO analysis of DOD data. For example, when controlling for factors such as occupation and education level, historically disadvantaged groups—particularly Black or African American employees—were less likely to be promoted in nearly all grades at or above GS-7. This analysis does not completely explain reasons for different promotion outcomes or establish causal relationships but can provide agencies additional insight.

DOD has developed policies and plans to manage department-wide diversity, and it has taken steps to identify potential barriers to diversity and equal employment opportunity (EEO) in the military departments and other DOD components. However, GAO found that little has changed in terms of demographic representation. DOD has developed mechanisms to improve department-wide data analysis, but does not have clear policies for collecting barrier-related data, which may limit their utility. Unclear oversight roles and measures for tracking DOD progress to eliminating barriers—a top DOD and federal priority—may also hinder meaningful progress overcoming disparities in representation and promotion outcomes. Without additional actions, DOD lacks reasonable assurance its many efforts will effectively contribute to achieving its goals.