

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-106840](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

FEMA leads our nation's efforts to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. In recent years, the increasing frequency and costs of disasters, the COVID-19 pandemic and other responsibilities have placed additional pressures on FEMA.

This testimony discusses GAO's prior work and recommendations related to FEMA workforce management and coordination of federal disaster recovery programs, among other issues.

This statement is based on products GAO issued from October 2019 to May 2023. For those products, GAO reviewed and analyzed federal law, agency guidance, and other agency documentation and analyzed data on FEMA's workforce, and disaster assistance, among others. GAO also interviewed knowledgeable officials from FEMA and other selected federal agencies, state, local, and territorial officials impacted by disasters. More detailed information on the scope and methodology of our prior work can be found in each of the issued reports cited throughout this statement.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO has made numerous recommendations in prior reports designed to address the various mission and management challenges discussed in this testimony. FEMA has taken steps to address these recommendations. GAO will continue to monitor FEMA's implementation of its efforts to determine if they address the challenges we identified.

View [GAO-23-106840](#). For more information, contact Chris Currie at (404) 679-1875 or [CurrieC@gao.gov](mailto:CurrieC@gao.gov).

May 17, 2023

## FEMA

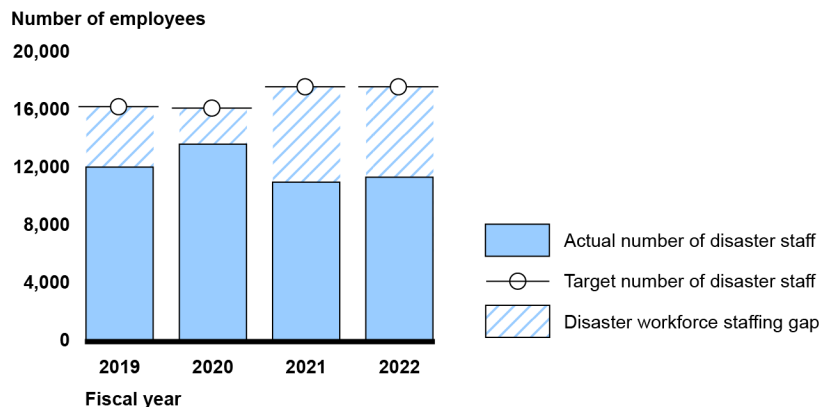
# Opportunities to Strengthen Management and Address Increasing Challenges

## What GAO Found

GAO's past work has identified various mission and management challenges the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is facing in implementing its 2022 to 2026 strategic plan to achieve its goals.

For example, FEMA faces workforce challenges that have affected its ability to achieve its mission. In May 2023, GAO reported that at the beginning of fiscal year 2022, FEMA had an overall staffing gap of approximately 35 percent (6,200 staff) across different positions such as logistics and information technology. While FEMA is taking steps to address staffing gaps such as hiring events and use of contractors, GAO found that it is unclear if these efforts are effective. GAO recommended that FEMA document plans to monitor and evaluate the agency's hiring efforts to address staffing gaps, among other recommendations. Such plans would help FEMA determine how effective hiring efforts are at closing staffing gaps and prioritize these efforts accordingly. FEMA concurred and described planned actions such as developing a recruiting implementation plan by September 2023.

**Staffing Gaps for the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA's) Disaster Workforce, Fiscal Years 2019-2022**



Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data. | GAO-23-106840

In November 2022, GAO reported that the federal approach to disaster recovery involves numerous programs fragmented across 30 federal agencies and departments. While there are benefits to having multiple entities involved, state and local officials GAO met with said that they had difficulty navigating multiple federal recovery programs and their differing requirements, time frames, federal authorities, and limited data sharing by federal agencies. These challenges complicate disaster recovery as a whole. GAO recommended that FEMA and other agencies identify and take steps to better manage fragmentation. Agencies agreed, but have made little progress in this area. Additionally GAO recommended that Congress consider establishing an independent commission to recommend reforms.