

# DOD Should Evaluate Programs in Relation to Department Goals

GAO-26-107601

January 2026

A report to congressional committees.

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## What GAO Found

Since 2020, the Department of Defense's (DOD) telework and remote work policies have changed to reflect federal guidance on the use of these flexibilities by federal employees. In January 2025, DOD directed the return to in-person work for all employees in compliance with a presidential memorandum requiring all executive branch employees to work in-person on a full-time basis, with limited exceptions. According to officials, as of July 2025, about 8 percent (62,000 of 780,000) of DOD employees had not returned to in-person work, with 6 percent (45,000) of those due to deferred resignation status or other exemptions and another 2 percent (17,000) due to reasonable accommodations.

DOD data for pay periods ending in calendar year 2024 shows that most work was conducted in person.

### Percentage of DOD Civilian Employee Hours by Work Type in Calendar Year 2024



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense's (DOD) Defense Civilian Payroll System data. | GAO-26-107601

GAO reviewed data for 13 selected dates from December 2021 through February 2025 and found that, although between 65 and 68 percent of DOD civilian employee *positions* were eligible for telework or remote work, data on actual employee *eligibility* were incomplete. Therefore, data on the number of teleworkers and remote workers DOD previously reported are likely inaccurate. For example, in May 2024, DOD publicly reported it had 61,549 remote employees. One month later in June 2024, DOD told GAO that it had 35,558 remote employees. The Office of Personnel Management and DOD policy require the collection of data about position and employee eligibility for telework and remote work, but DOD officials told GAO there is no formal process in place to ensure eligibility data are accurate, timely, or complete. Without formal processes for collecting data on employee eligibility, DOD lacks visibility into the use of these flexibilities and may not be able to ensure compliance with DOD policy to collect accurate and reliable data on use of these flexibilities.

DOD has not formally evaluated the effects of telework and remote work programs in relation to its agency goals, but officials reported perceived benefits and challenges. For example, officials told GAO their use of these flexibilities maintained or improved mission productivity and efficiency and supported employee recruitment and retention. Conversely, officials said that telework reduced opportunities for collaboration and information sharing and decreased morale and retention of employees ineligible for telework or remote work. Without clear and specific requirements for the formal evaluation of telework and remote work programs, DOD cannot determine if these programs help meet agency goals, including those related to recruitment and retention.

## Why GAO Did This Study

DOD's use of telework and remote work flexibilities has evolved since the department first issued its policy over a decade ago, with peak usage during the COVID-19 pandemic. In January 2025, the President issued a memorandum directing all agencies to require employees to return to in-person work on a full-time basis, essentially ending widespread use of these flexibilities at DOD, with limited exceptions as approved by the Secretary of Defense.

The Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2024, includes a provision for GAO to review the status of DOD's telework and remote work programs. This report (1) describes DOD policies since 2020; and assesses the extent to which DOD (2) collected data on civilian employee telework and remote work eligibility from December 2021 through February 2025 and used these programs in 2024, and (3) has evaluated the effects of using telework and remote work in meeting agency goals.

GAO reviewed federal and DOD telework and remote work policies; analyzed data on DOD employee telework and remote work eligibility and use; and interviewed officials from DOD and from 19 DOD components.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD (1) develop formal processes to ensure data on civilian employee eligibility for telework and remote work are accurate, timely, and complete; and (2) establish clear and specific requirements for evaluating the effects of telework and remote work in relation to the department's goals. DOD concurred with both recommendations and outlined actions it plans to take towards their implementation.