



Highlights of [GAO-06-988](#), a report to congressional requesters

# UNITED NATIONS

## Additional Efforts Needed to Increase U.S. Employment at UN Agencies

### 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. In 2001, GAO reported that several UN agencies fell short of their targets for U.S. representation and had not developed strategies to employ more Americans. This report reviews (1) U.S. representation status and employment trends at five UN agencies, (2) factors affecting these agencies' ability to meet employment targets, and (3) the U.S. Department of State's (State) efforts to improve U.S. representation and additional steps that can be taken. We reviewed five UN agencies that together comprise about 50 percent of total UN organizations' professional staff.

### What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends 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 this report, State said it concurred with GAO's recommendations.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-988](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-988).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Thomas Melito at (202) 512-9601 or [melitot@gao.gov](mailto:melitot@gao.gov).

### What GAO Found

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

While the five UN agencies face some common barriers to recruiting and retaining professional staff, including Americans, they also face their own distinct challenges. Most of these barriers and challenges are outside of the U.S. government's control. The common barriers include 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 face distinct challenges. For example, at the Secretariat, candidates serving in professional UN positions funded by their governments are more likely to be hired than those who take the entry-level exam; however, the United States has not funded such positions. Also, IAEA has difficulty recruiting U.S. employees because the number of U.S. nuclear specialists is decreasing.

Since 2001, State has increased its efforts to achieve equitable U.S. representation at UN agencies, and additional options exist. State has targeted efforts to recruit U.S. candidates for senior and policymaking UN positions, and although it is difficult to link State's efforts to UN hiring decisions, U.S. representation in these positions has improved or displayed no trend in the five UN agencies. U.S. representation in entry-level positions, however, has declined or did not reflect a trend in four of the five UN agencies despite State's increased efforts. Additional steps include maintaining a roster of qualified U.S. candidates, expanding marketing and outreach activities, 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 Secretariat, IAEA, and UNESCO hiring data.