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**UNITED NATIONS
ORGANIZATIONS**

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

Statement of Thomas Melito, Director
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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.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to appear today to discuss ways to improve the representation of American professionals at United Nations (UN) organizations. The U.S. Congress continues to be concerned about the underrepresentation of American professionals employed by some UN organizations and that insufficient progress has been made to improve U.S. representation. The equitable representation of Americans at UN organizations is a priority to Congress in part because the United States is the largest financial contributor to most of these organizations. Moreover, according to the U.S. Department of State (State), Americans bring desirable skills, values, and experience that can have a significant impact on UN organizations' operational effectiveness.

My testimony is based on a report that we issued on September 6, 2006.¹ Today I will discuss (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) State's efforts to improve U.S. representation and additional efforts that can be taken.

In preparing this testimony, we relied on our completed review of U.S. government efforts to increase U.S. employment at UN agencies. To address our objectives, we analyzed employment data for 2001 through 2005 that we obtained from five UN agencies; reviewed UN agency and State documents; and interviewed UN human resources officials, over 100 Americans employed at the five UN agencies, and U.S. officials. We reviewed the following five UN agencies: the International Atomic Energy Agency² (IAEA); the UN Secretariat; the UN Development Program (UNDP); the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). We selected these agencies because they represented a range of UN agencies with different funding mechanisms and methods for calculating geographic representation. These five agencies together comprised approximately 50 percent of UN organizations' total professional staff. In July 2007, State officials updated us on the actions

¹GAO, *United Nations: Additional Efforts Needed to Increase U.S. Employment at UN Agencies*, [GAO-06-988](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 6, 2006).

²Technically, the IAEA is an independent international organization that has a relationship agreement with the UN. For the purposes of this report, we refer to the IAEA as a UN agency or organization.

they have taken in response to our September 2006 recommendations. We conducted our work for the September 2006 report from July 2005 through July 2006 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Summary

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 agreed-upon employment targets. Based on UN agencies' formal or informal targets for equitable geographic representation, U.S. citizens were underrepresented at IAEA, UNESCO, and UNHCR, and equitably represented at the UN Secretariat, though close to the lower end of its target range. UNDP had not established a target for U.S. representation, although U.S. citizens filled about 11 percent of the agency's professional positions. Given projected staff levels, retirements, and separations for 2006 to 2010, the Secretariat, IAEA, UNESCO, and UNHCR would need to hire more Americans than they have hired in recent years to meet their minimum targets for equitable U.S. representation in 2010.

While the UN agencies we reviewed 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. Six barriers common to UN agencies we reviewed included nontransparent human resource practices; a limited number of positions open to external candidates; lengthy hiring processes; comparatively low or unclear compensation; required staff mobility and rotation policies; and limited U.S. government support during Americans' efforts to obtain, or be promoted at, a UN job. These barriers combined with distinct agency-specific factors to impede recruitment and retention. For example, candidates serving in professional positions funded by their member governments were more likely to be hired by the Secretariat than those who took the Secretariat's entry-level exam; however, the United States had not funded such positions at the Secretariat. In addition, IAEA had difficulty attracting U.S. employees because the number of U.S. nuclear specialists was decreasing.

State has increased its efforts to support the goal of achieving equitable U.S. representation at UN organizations, and additional options exist to target professional positions. State has targeted efforts to recruit U.S. candidates for senior and policymaking UN positions, and, although it was difficult to directly link State's efforts to UN hiring decisions, U.S. representation in senior and policymaking positions either improved or did not reflect a trend in each of the five UN agencies we reviewed. State

also has undertaken several efforts to improve overall U.S. representation, including adding staff to its UN employment office and increasing coordination with other U.S. agencies that work with UN organizations. For positions below the senior level, State focused on “getting the word out” by, for example, disseminating information on UN vacancies through its Web site, attending career fairs and conferences, and other means. Despite these efforts, U.S. representation in entry-level positions declined or did not display a trend in four of the five UN agencies we reviewed. Additional options to target potential pools of candidates for professional positions include: maintaining a roster of qualified American candidates; expanding marketing and outreach activities; increasing UN employment information on U.S. agency Web sites; and conducting an assessment of the costs and benefits of sponsoring Junior Professional Officers (JPO), who are entry-level employees that are financially supported by their home government.

To improve U.S. efforts to increase the employment of Americans at UN agencies, our report made several recommendations. We recommended that the Secretary of State (1) provide more consistent and comprehensive information about UN employment on the State and U.S. mission Web sites and work with U.S. agencies to expand the UN employment information on their Web sites; (2) expand targeted recruiting and outreach to more strategically reach populations of Americans that may be qualified for and interested in entry- and mid-level UN positions; and (3) conduct an evaluation of the costs, benefits, and trade-offs of maintaining a roster of qualified candidates for professional and senior positions determined to be a high priority for U.S. interests and an evaluation of funding JPOs, or other gratis personnel, where Americans are underrepresented or could become underrepresented. In commenting on a draft of this report, State concurred with and agreed to implement all of our recommendations. In July 2007, State officials said they had begun to take some actions to implement our recommendations, such as outreaching to new groups of Americans and completing a preliminary analysis of the cost of maintaining a roster.

Background

The United Nations comprises six principal bodies, including the General Assembly and the Secretariat, as well as funds and programs, such as UNDP, and specialized agencies, such as UNESCO. These funds, programs, and specialized agencies have their own governing bodies and budgets, but follow the guidelines of the UN Charter. Article 101 of the UN Charter calls for staff to be recruited on the basis of “the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity” as well as from “as wide a

geographical basis as possible.” Each UN agency has developed its own human resource policies and practices, and staff rules.

Of the five agencies we reviewed, three—the Secretariat, IAEA, and UNESCO—had quantitative formulas that establish targets for equitable geographical representation in designated professional positions. UNHCR had not established a quantitative formula or positions subject to geographic representation, but had agreed to an informal target for equitable U.S. representation. UNDP generally followed the principle of equitable geographic representation, but had not adopted formal or informal targets. Agencies with formal quantitative targets for equitable representation do not apply these targets to all professional positions. Instead, these organizations set aside positions that are subject to geographic representation from among the professional and senior positions performing core agency functions, funded from regular budget resources. Positions that are exempt from being counted geographically include linguist and peacekeeping positions, positions funded by extra-budgetary resources, and short-term positions. In addition, these organizations utilize various nonstaff positions, such as contractors and consultants.

The Department of State is the U.S. agency primarily responsible for leading U.S. efforts toward achieving equitable U.S. employment representation in UN organizations. While State is responsible for promoting and seeking to increase U.S. representation in the UN, the UN entities themselves are ultimately responsible for hiring their employees and achieving equitable representation.

U.S. Was Underrepresented in Three of Five UN Agencies and Increased Hiring of Americans Is Necessary to Meet Employment Targets

U.S. citizens were underrepresented at three of the five UN agencies we reviewed: IAEA, UNESCO, and UNHCR. Given projected staff levels, retirements and separations for 2006-2010, these agencies need to hire more Americans than they have in recent years to meet their minimum targets for equitable U.S. representation in 2010.

U.S. Citizens Were Underrepresented Relative to Targets at Three UN Agencies

Relative to UN agencies' formal or informal targets for equitable geographic representation, U.S. citizens were underrepresented at three of the five agencies we reviewed—IAEA, UNESCO, and UNHCR. U.S. citizens were equitably represented at the UN Secretariat, though at the lower end of its target range, while the fifth agency—UNDP—had not established a target for U.S. representation. U.S. citizens filled about 11 percent of UNDP's professional positions. Table 1 provides information on U.S. representation at the five UN agencies as of 2005.

Table 1: U.S. Representation at Five UN Agencies, 2005

UN agency	Percentage of total geographic positions targeted for U.S. citizens ^a	Percentage of geographic positions filled by U.S. citizens ^a	Percentage of non-geographic positions filled by U.S. citizens ^b
Secretariat	11.5%-15.6%	12.1%	9.5%
IAEA	12.9%	11.5%	17.1%
UNESCO	6.2%-10.2%	4.1%	1.9%
UNHCR	13%	8.0%	11.1%
UNDP	Not applicable	10.8%	12.6%

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

Note: Geographic targets were an average of 2004 and 2005 data. All other percentages were based on 2005 data.

^aUNHCR and UNDP did not have geographic positions; however, UNHCR had agreed to an informal 13 percent target with the U.S. government. For these agencies, we calculated the percentage of regular professional positions filled by U.S. citizens, which included staff under contracts of longer fixed term (100-series contracts in UNHCR and 100- and 200-series contracts in UNDP).

^bFor the Secretariat, IAEA, and UNESCO, nongeographic positions included regular professional positions not subject to geographic distribution, temporary positions, JPOs, and consultants and contractors. UNESCO was unable to provide nationality data for its 572 consultants and contractors, which comprised nearly two thirds of UNESCO's nongeographic staff; hence the U.S. percentage of nongeographic positions did not reflect U.S. citizen employment in this category. For UNHCR and UNDP, nongeographic positions were all other, nonregular professional staff, which included temporary staff (limited fixed term at UNHCR and assignments of limited duration at UNDP), JPOs, and consultants and contractors. Agency-provided data did not differentiate between support and professional level positions for consultants and contractors.

Table 1 also shows that the percentage of U.S. citizens employed in nongeographic positions (or nonregular positions in the case of UNHCR and UNDP) was higher at IAEA, UNHCR, and UNDP and lower at the Secretariat and UNESCO compared to the percentage of geographic (or regular) positions held by U.S. citizens.

As shown in table 2, U.S. citizen representation in geographic positions in "all grades" between 2001 and 2005 had been declining at UNHCR and displayed no clear trend at the other four UN agencies.

Table 2: Trends in U.S. Representation at Five UN Agencies (covering geographic positions at the Secretariat, IAEA, and UNESCO and regular positions at UNHCR and UNDP)

UN agency	Trend from 2001-2005				
	U.S. equitably represented based on agreed-upon targets ^a	U.S. citizens in all professional grade levels	U.S. citizens in policy-making and senior-level positions ^b	U.S. citizens in entry-level positions ^c	U.S. citizens in mid-level positions ^d
Secretariat	Yes	No trend	No trend	No trend	No trend
IAEA	No	No trend	Increasing	Decreasing	No trend
UNESCO	No	No trend	No trend	Increasing	No trend
UNHCR	No	Decreasing	No trend	Decreasing	Decreasing
UNDP	Not applicable	No trend	Increasing	Decreasing	No trend

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

Notes:

Trends in U.S. citizen representation refer to the number of U.S. citizens employed as a percentage of agency employment, in the respective grade, over the period 2001 to 2005. Increases or decreases were determined by positive or negative average changes over the period. For more information on our methodology, see [GAO-06-988](#), appendix I.

For the Secretariat, IAEA, and UNESCO, the trend analysis was for U.S. citizens in geographic positions from 2001 to 2005. For UNHCR and UNDP, the trend analysis, also for 2001 to 2005, was for U.S. citizens in regular professional positions since these agencies did not have geographic positions. Regular professional positions for UNHCR and UNDP included staff under contracts of longer fixed term (100-series contracts for UNHCR and 100- and 200-series contracts for UNDP).

^aThe three agencies with geographic targets were the Secretariat, IAEA, and UNESCO. UNHCR did not have geographic positions, although it had agreed to an informal target.

^bSenior-level positions represent UN position levels D1 and D2, roughly equivalent to U.S. government Senior Executive Service. Policy-making positions represent UN position levels of Deputy or Assistant Director General at IAEA and UNESCO and Under or Assistant Secretary General at the Secretariat, UNHCR, and UNDP.

^cRepresents UN position levels P1 to P3, roughly equivalent to U.S. government grade levels 9 to 12/13.

^dRepresents UN position levels P4 to P5, roughly equivalent to U.S. government grade levels 13 to 15.

U.S. representation in policy-making and senior-level positions increased at two agencies —IAEA and UNDP—and displayed no overall trend at the Secretariat, UNESCO, and UNHCR over the full five years. At the Secretariat, although no trend was indicated, U.S. representation had been decreasing in policy-making and senior-level positions since 2002. At UNESCO, the data for 2001 to 2004 did not reflect a trend, but the overall percentage of Americans increased in 2005, reflecting increased recruiting efforts after the United States rejoined UNESCO in 2003. At UNHCR, the representation of U.S. citizens in these positions grew steadily from 2001 to 2004, but declined in 2005.

Increased Hiring of Americans Needed to Meet Several UN Agencies' Minimum Targets

We estimated that each of the four agencies with geographic targets—the Secretariat, IAEA, UNESCO, and UNHCR—would need to hire U.S. citizens in greater numbers than they had in recent years to achieve their minimum targets by 2010, given projected staff levels, retirements, and separations; otherwise, with the exception of UNESCO, U.S. geographic representation will decline further. As shown in table 3, IAEA and UNHCR would need to more than double their current average hiring rate to achieve targets for U.S. representation. The Secretariat could continue to meet its minimum geographic target for U.S. citizens if it increased its annual hiring of U.S. citizens from 20 to 23. UNESCO could achieve its minimum geographic target by increasing its current hiring average of 4.5 Americans to 6 Americans. Although the fifth agency, UNDP, did not have a target, it would have to increase its annual hiring average of U.S. citizens from 17.5 to 26 in order to maintain its current ratio of U.S. regular professional staff to total agency regular professional staff.

Table 3: Estimated Numbers of U.S. Citizens to be Hired to Meet Geographic and Other Targets for 2006 to 2010

UN agency	Average annual number of total staff hired into geographic positions each year, 2001-2005 ^a	Average number of U.S. citizens hired into geographic positions each year, 2001-2005 ^a	Percentage of total geographic positions targeted for U.S. citizens ^b	Minimum average number of U.S. citizens to be hired each year, 2006-2010, to reach geographic target in 2010	Resulting geographic representation in 2010 if agency follows 2001-2005 hiring average for U.S. citizens
Secretariat	170	20	11.5%-15.6%	23	10.9%
IAEA	77	6	12.9%	16	7.1%
UNESCO	55	4.5	6.2%-10.2%	6	5.1%
UNHCR ^c	148	10	13%	25	7.9%
UNDP	153	17.5	Not applicable	26	8.6%

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

^aFor UNHCR and UNDP, which did not have geographic positions, we calculated the average number of regular professional U.S. staff hired each year (2001 to 2005), including separations and retirements. Regular professional included staff under contracts of longer fixed term (100-series contracts in UNHCR and 100- and 200-series contracts in UNDP).

^bFor UNHCR, we used the informal target of 13 percent for U.S. citizens, agreed upon by UNHCR and the U.S. government. For UNDP, we used the target of 11.1 percent, the average U.S. employment from 2001 to 2005.

^cThe minimum average number of U.S. citizens to be hired each year, 25, was based on a zero percent rate of growth of staff, which UNHCR officials indicated was appropriate for 2006 to 2010. From 2001 to 2005, UNHCR's staff grew at an average annual rate of 6 percent. Under this assumption, the minimum number of U.S. citizens to be hired annually would increase to 40.

If current hiring levels are maintained through 2010, two of the five agencies—IAEA and UNHCR—would fall substantially below their minimum targets. In only one agency—UNESCO—would the percentage of geographic

positions filled by U.S. citizens increase under current hiring levels, due in part to the recent increased hiring of U.S. citizens.

While Common Barriers to Increasing U.S. Representation Existed, UN Agencies Also Faced Distinct Employment Challenges

A combination of barriers, including some common factors as well as agency-specific factors, adversely affected recruitment and retention of professional staff, including Americans, at each of the five UN agencies. These barriers combined with distinct agency-specific factors to impede recruitment and retention.

Common Barriers Adversely Affected U.S. Representation at Several UN Agencies

We identified the following six barriers that affected U.S. representation in the UN agencies we reviewed, though often to differing degrees:

- **Nontransparent human resource practices.** A key barrier to American representation across the five UN agencies was the lack of transparent human resource management practices, according to Americans employed at UN organizations. For example, some UN managers circumvented the competitive hiring process by employing individuals on short-term contracts—positions that were not vetted through the regular, competitive process—for long-term needs.
- **Limited external opportunities.** Recruiting U.S. candidates was difficult because agencies offered a limited number of posts to external candidates. Each of the organizations we reviewed, except IAEA, advertised professional vacancies to current employees before advertising them externally in order to provide career paths and motivation for their staff. We found that three of the five agencies—UNESCO, UNHCR, and UNDP—filled 50 percent or more of new appointments through promotions or with other internal candidates rather than by hiring external candidates. IAEA filled a large percentage of its positions with external candidates because, in addition to not giving internal candidates hiring preference, the agency employed the majority of its staff members for 7 years or less. Although the data indicated that the Secretariat hired a significant percentage of external candidates, the Secretariat’s definition of “external candidates” included staff on temporary contracts and individuals who had previous experience working at the agency.

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- **Lengthy hiring process.** The agencies' lengthy hiring processes can deter candidates from accepting UN employment. For example, a report from the Secretary General³ stated that the average hiring process was too slow, taking 174 days from the time a vacancy announcement was issued to the time a candidate was selected, causing some qualified applicants to accept jobs elsewhere. Many Americans that we interviewed concurred with the report, saying that it was difficult to plan a job move when there was a long delay between submitting an application and receiving an offer. In March 2006, the Secretary General proposed cutting the average recruitment time in half.
 - **Low or unclear compensation.** Comparatively low salaries and benefits that were not clearly explained were among the most frequently mentioned deterrents to UN employment for Americans. American employees we interviewed noted that UN salaries, particularly for senior and technical posts, were not comparable with U.S. government and private sector salaries. When candidates consider UN salaries in tandem with UN employee benefits, such as possible reimbursement for U.S. taxes and school tuition allowances through college, UN compensation may be more attractive. However, U.S. citizens employed at IAEA and UNESCO said that their agency did not clearly explain the benefits, or explained them only after a candidate had accepted a position. Incomplete or late information hampered a candidate's ability to decide in a timely manner whether a UN position was in his or her best interests. In addition, difficulty securing spousal employment can decrease family income and may also affect American recruitment since many U.S. families have two wage earners. At many overseas UN duty stations, work permits can be difficult to obtain, the local economy may offer few employment opportunities, and knowledge of the local language may be required.
 - **Required mobility or rotation.** UNHCR and UNDP required their staff to change posts at least every 3 to 6 years with the expectation that staff serve the larger portion of their career in the field; the UN Secretariat and UNESCO were implementing similar policies. While IAEA did not require its employees to change posts, it generally only hired employees for 7 years or less. Such policies dissuaded some Americans from accepting or staying in a UN position because of the disruptions to personal or family life such frequent moves can cause.

³UN General Assembly, 60th Session. *Investing in the United Nations for a Stronger Organization Worldwide: Report of the Secretary-General (A/60/692)*. 7 March 2006.

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- **Limited U.S. government support.** At four of the five agencies we reviewed—all except IAEA—a number of American employees said that they did not receive U.S. government support during their efforts to obtain a UN job or to be promoted at the job they held. The U.S. government supported candidates applying for director-level, or higher, posts, and put less emphasis on supporting candidates seeking lower-level professional posts. Although UN employees are international civil servants directly hired by UN agencies, some countries facilitate the recruitment of their nationals by referring qualified candidates, conducting recruitment missions, and sponsoring JPOs or Associate Experts.⁴

**Agency-specific Factors
Adversely Affected U.S.
Representation at Several
UN Agencies**

Distinct agency-specific factors also impeded recruitment and retention. For example,

- Candidates serving in professional positions funded by their member governments were more likely to be hired by the Secretariat than those who took the Secretariat's entry-level exam; however, the United States had not funded such positions at the Secretariat. At the entry level, hiring for professional positions was limited to an average of 2 percent of individuals invited to take the Secretariat's National Competitive Recruitment Exam. In contrast, the Secretariat hired an average of 65 percent of Associate Experts sponsored by their national government.
- Continuing U.S. underrepresentation at the IAEA was described by U.S. government officials as a "supply-side issue," with the pool of American candidates with the necessary education and experience decreasing, as nuclear specialists are aging and few young people are entering the nuclear field.
- The United States' 19-year withdrawal from UNESCO contributed to its underrepresentation. When the United States left UNESCO in 1984, Americans comprised 9.6 percent of the organization's geographic professional staff. When it rejoined in 2003, Americans comprised only 2.9 percent. By 2005 that number had increased to 4.1 percent—the third

⁴JPO or Associate Expert positions are funded by member states for periods of 2 or 3 years and provide opportunities for young professionals to gain experience in UN organizations. While, upon completion of the programs, these young professionals are not guaranteed employment at the agency and must apply for positions through the regular process, UN officials stated that the JPO experience provides applicants an advantage over their competitors.

largest group of nationals UNESCO employed, although still below the minimum geographic target.

- The difficult conditions that accompany much of UNHCR's work, coupled with the requirement to change duty stations every 4 years, contributed to attrition at the mid-career levels. UNHCR's requirement that employees change duty stations every 4 years was one of the most frequently cited barriers to retaining staff among the American employees we interviewed. UNHCR's mission to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees necessitates work in hardship and high-risk locations. As such, UNHCR has twice as many hardship duty stations as any other UN agency.
- Several barriers to increasing U.S. representation were the leading factors at UNDP and were also present at other UN agencies, according to American employees and other officials. In addition, UNDP's Executive Board had traditionally managed the organization with the understanding that its staff be equally represented from northern (mostly developed) and southern (mostly developing) countries, and had recently focused on improving the north-south balance of staff at management levels by increasing the hiring of candidates from southern countries.

State Increased Efforts to Promote U.S. Representation, but Additional Options Exist to Target Professional Positions

State targeted its recruitment efforts for senior and policy-making UN positions, and, although it was difficult to directly link State's efforts to UN hiring decisions, U.S. representation in these positions either improved or displayed no trend in the five UN agencies we reviewed. State also increased its efforts to improve overall U.S. representation; however, despite these efforts, U.S. representation in entry-level positions declined or did not reflect a trend in four of the five UN agencies. Additional options exist to target potential pools of candidates for these positions.

State Recruiting Efforts Focused on Senior Positions, and U.S. Representation in These Positions Improved or Showed No Trend

State focused its recruiting efforts for U.S. citizen employment at UN agencies on senior-level and policy-making positions because of the influence that these positions have within the organization. Although it is difficult to directly link State's efforts to UN hiring decisions, the percentage of U.S. representation in senior and policymaking positions either increased or did not display a trend at each of the five UN agencies we reviewed between 2001 and 2005. The U.S. share of senior and policymaking positions increased at IAEA and UNDP, whereas the U.S.

share of these positions at the other three UN agencies displayed no trend over that period.

State Increased Activities to Support Greater U.S. Representation, but the Employment of Americans in Entry-level Positions Declined or Displayed No Trend in Four Agencies

Since 2001, State has devoted additional resources and undertaken several new initiatives in its role as the lead U.S. agency for supporting and promoting the employment of Americans in UN organizations. First, State increased resources for disseminating UN vacancy information. State increased the number of staff positions from two to five, and added a sixth person who worked part-time on UN employment issues. One of the new staff focused on recruiting Americans for senior-level positions at UN organizations.⁵ According to State, the other staff have been recruiting candidates for professional positions at career fairs and other venues; however, a large portion of their work has been focused on providing information to potential applicants and disseminating information on UN vacancies and opportunities. In addition, State has increased outreach for the Secretariat's annual National Competitive Recruitment Exam for entry-level candidates by advertising it in selected newspapers. The number of Americans invited to take the exam increased from 40 in 2001 to 277 in 2004. State reported that 178 Americans in 2007 were invited to take the exam. Second, U.S. missions have shared U.S. representation reports and discussed openings with UN officials. State prepares annual reports to Congress that provide data on U.S. employment at UN agencies as well as State's assessment of U.S. representation at selected UN organizations and these organizations' efforts to hire more Americans. State is providing these reports to UN agencies, as we recommended in 2001. U.S. mission officials told us that they periodically meet with UN officials to discuss U.S. representation and upcoming vacancies.

Finally, State has increased coordination with U.S. agencies. In 2003, State established an interagency task force to address the low representation of Americans in international organizations. Since then, task members have met annually to discuss U.S. employment issues. Task force participants told us that at these meetings, State officials reported on their outreach activities and encouraged agencies to promote the employment of Americans at UN organizations. One of the topics discussed by task force members was how to increase support for details and transfers of U.S. agency employees to UN organizations. In May 2006, the Secretary of State sent letters to the heads of 23 federal agencies urging that they review

⁵State officials said this staff member left the department in June 2007.

their policies for transferring and detailing employees to international organizations to ensure that these mechanisms are positively and actively promoted.⁶ While the Secretary's letters may help to spur U.S. agencies to clarify their support for these initiatives, agency officials told us that their offices lacked the resources for staff details, which involve paying the salary of the detailed staff as well as "backfilling" that person's position by adding a replacement.⁷ State also has been periodically meeting one-on-one with U.S. agencies to discuss the employment situation and recruiting efforts at specific UN organizations. A State official told us that State's UN employment office meets with a few U.S. agencies per year to discuss UN agency staffing issues.

Despite the new and continuing activities undertaken by State, U.S. representation in entry-level positions declined or displayed no trend in four of the five agencies we reviewed. U.S. representation in these positions declined at IAEA, UNHCR, and UNDP. The representation of Americans in entry-level positions at the Secretariat displayed no trend during the time period. At UNESCO, U.S. representation increased from 1.3 percent in 2003 to 2.7 percent in 2004, reflecting the time period when the United States rejoined the organization.

Additional Options to Target Professional Positions Exist

We identified several options to target U.S. representation in professional positions, including the following:

- **Maintaining a roster of qualified candidates.** Prior to 2001, State had maintained a roster of qualified American candidates for professional and technical positions, but discontinued it. State officials told us that they have not maintained a professional roster, or the prescreening of candidates, despite the recent increase in staff resources, because maintaining such a roster had been resource intensive and because the office does not actively recruit for UN professional positions at the entry-

⁶Executive Order 11552, issued in 1970, mandates that federal agencies shall assist and encourage details and transfers of their employees to international organizations and that State shall lead and coordinate these efforts. The order also specifies that vacancies in international organizations should be brought to the attention of well-qualified federal employees and that upon the return of an employee to his agency, the agency shall give due consideration to the experience the employee may have gained during the detail or transfer.

⁷Transferred employees are paid by the UN organization, while detailed employees would remain on the U.S. agency's payroll.

and mid-levels. However, State acknowledged that utilizing new technologies, such as developing a Web-based roster, may reduce the time and cost of updating a roster. Other U.S. government and UN officials told us that some other countries maintained rosters of prescreened, qualified candidates for UN positions and that this practice was an effective strategy for promoting their nationals. In July 2007, State officials said that they began researching Internet-based options for compiling a roster of potential U.S. candidates. State estimated the cost to set up such a roster at about \$100,000, but had not received funding for the roster.

- **Expanding marketing and outreach activities.** State had not taken steps that could further expand the audience for its outreach efforts. For example, while State had increased its coordination with other U.S. agencies on UN employment issues and distributed the biweekly vacancy announcements to agency contacts, U.S. agency officials that received these vacancy announcements told us that they lacked the authority to distribute the vacancies beyond their particular office or division. One official commented that State had not established the appropriate contacts to facilitate agency-wide distribution of UN vacancies, and that the limited dissemination had neutralized the impact of this effort. Several inter-agency task force participants also stated that no specific follow-up activities were discussed or planned between the annual meetings, and they could not point to any tangible results or outcomes resulting from the meetings. State also had not taken advantage of opportunities to expand the audience for its outreach activities. For example, State did not work with the Association of Professional Schools of International Affairs to reach potential candidates or advertise in some outlets that reach Peace Corps volunteers. In July 2007, State officials said they continue to outreach to new groups and attend new career fairs but have faced difficulty in identifying pools of candidates with the required skills and experience.
- **Increasing and improving UN employment information on U.S. agency Web sites.** State's UN vacancy list and its UN employment Web site had limitations. For example, the list of vacancies was not organized by occupation, or even organization, and readers had to search the entire list for openings in their areas of interest. Further, State's UN employment Web site had limited information on other UN employment programs and did not link to U.S. agencies that provide more specific information, such as the Department of Energy's Brookhaven National Laboratory Web site. In addition, the Web site provided limited information or tools to clarify common questions, such as those pertaining to compensation and benefits. For example, the Web site did not provide a means for applicants to obtain more specific information on their expected total compensation,

including benefits and U.S. income tax. Since we issued our report, State has added a UN pamphlet on benefits and compensation to its Web site. In July 2007, State officials told us they are exploring ways to improve the information available on UN compensation and benefits. For our 2006 report, we reviewed 22 additional U.S. mission and U.S. agency Web sites, and they revealed varying, and in many cases limited, information on UN employment opportunities. Overall, 9 of the 22 U.S. mission and agency Web sites did not have links to UN employment opportunities. Nearly 60 percent of the missions and agencies provided some information or links to information on salaries and benefits. We updated our analysis in July 2007 and found the situation had worsened somewhat. Eleven of the 22 U.S. mission and agency Web sites did not have links to UN employment opportunities⁸ and only about 50 percent of these Web sites provided some information or links to information on salaries and benefits.

- **Analyzing the costs and benefits of sponsoring JPOs.** The U.S. government sponsored JPOs at two of the five UN agencies that we reviewed, but had not assessed the overall costs and benefits of supporting JPOs as a mechanism for increasing U.S. representation across UN agencies. Among the five agencies, State had funded a long-standing JPO program only at UNHCR, sponsoring an average of 15 JPOs per year between 2001 and 2005. The Department of Energy's Brookhaven National Laboratory also had supported two JPOs at IAEA since 2004.⁹ For four of the five agencies we reviewed,¹⁰ the percentage of individuals that were hired for regular positions upon completion of the JPO program ranged from 34 to 65 percent. In some cases, former JPOs were offered regular positions and did not accept them, or took positions in other UN organizations. The estimated annual cost for these positions to the sponsoring government ranged from \$100,000 to \$140,000 at the five UN agencies. State officials told us in July 2007 that they had not assessed the overall costs and benefits of supporting JPOs.

Conclusions

Achieving equitable U.S. representation will be an increasingly difficult hurdle to overcome at UN organizations. Four of the five UN organizations

⁸Four of the six U.S. missions have Web sites. All four Web sites have links to State's employment page.

⁹According to officials, Brookhaven and State's Bureau for International Security and Non-Proliferation also fund Cost-Free Experts at IAEA. These are technical specialists who work on short-term projects at IAEA for periods of 1 to 3 years.

¹⁰IAEA did not provide JPO retention rate data.

we reviewed, all except UNESCO, will have to hire Americans in increasing numbers merely to maintain the current levels of U.S. representation. Failure to increase such hiring will lead the four UN organizations with geographic targets to fall below or stay below the minimum thresholds set for U.S. employment.

As the lead department in charge of U.S. government efforts to promote equitable American representation at the UN, State will continue to face a number of barriers to increasing the employment of Americans at these organizations, most of which are outside the U.S. government's control. For example, lengthy hiring processes and mandatory rotation policies can deter qualified Americans from applying for or remaining in UN positions.

Nonetheless, if increasing the number of U.S. citizens employed at UN organizations remains a high priority for State, it is important that the department facilitate a continuing supply of qualified applicants for UN professional positions at all levels. State focuses much of its recruiting efforts on senior and policy-making positions, and U.S. citizens hold over 10 percent of these positions at four of the five agencies we reviewed. While State has increased its resources and activities in recent years to support increased U.S. representation overall, additional actions to facilitate the employment of Americans in entry- and mid-level professional positions are needed to overcome declining U.S. employment in these positions and meet employment targets.

Because equitable representation of Americans employed at UN organizations has been a high priority for U.S. interests, we recommended that the Secretary of State take the following actions:

- provide more consistent and comprehensive information about UN employment on the State and U.S. mission Web sites and work with U.S. agencies to expand the UN employment information on their Web sites. This could include identifying options for developing a benefits calculator that would enable applicants to better estimate their potential total compensation based on their individual circumstances;
- expand targeted recruiting and outreach to more strategically reach populations of Americans that may be qualified for and interested in entry- and mid-level UN positions; and
- conduct an evaluation of the costs, benefits, and trade-offs of:

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- maintaining a roster of qualified candidates for professional and senior positions determined to be a high priority for U.S. interests;
 - funding Junior Professional Officers, or other gratis personnel, where Americans are underrepresented or in danger of becoming underrepresented.

In commenting on a draft of our 2006 report, State concurred with and agreed to implement all of our recommendations. In July 2007, State officials updated us on the actions they have taken in response to our 2006 report recommendations.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, this concludes my prepared statement. I would be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.

GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

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