



HIGHLIGHTS

Office of Inspector General
United States Department of State

ESP-20-06

What OIG Reviewed

The Department of State (Department) is required by the Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM) to promptly address and investigate reports of sexual harassment. The Department's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and the Bureau of Diplomatic Security Office of Special Investigations (OSI) are responsible for investigating reports of sexual harassment and sexual assault. The Bureau of Global Talent Management (GTM) reviews sexual harassment investigations and determines the appropriate disciplinary action, if any, for cases that OCR and OSI refer.

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) conducted an evaluation of the Department's handling of sexual harassment reports. Specifically, OIG reviewed (1) the extent to which employees report sexual harassment; (2) how the Department addresses employees' reports of sexual harassment; and (3) the extent to which the Department ensures consistent outcomes for individuals who were found to have engaged in sexual harassment. Because the FAM definition of sexual harassment encompasses sexual assault as well, OIG took the same approach and separately discussed sexual assault only if the Department's own policies or procedures did so.

What OIG Recommends

OIG made six recommendations to the Department related to updating supervisory guidance to include reporting sexual harassment; developing and implementing guidance for coordinating sexual harassment cases; developing and implementing timeliness standards; and developing and implementing a common tracking mechanism for the length to resolution and outcomes of sexual harassment reports. The Department concurred with all of the recommendations.

September 2020

OFFICE OF EVALUATIONS AND SPECIAL PROJECTS

Evaluation of the Department's Handling of Sexual Harassment Reports

What OIG Found

OCR received 636 reports of sexual harassment from 2014 to 2017. However, sexual harassment is likely underreported at the Department. According to an OIG survey of direct-hire employees selected on a random basis, 47 percent of employees who stated that they had experienced or observed sexual harassment within the last 2 years responded that they did not report the harassment to OCR or OSI.

The Department has taken steps to address sexual harassment but lacks coordination and guidance on the investigative and disciplinary processes for these reports. The Department does not have joint guidance that coordinates OCR, OSI, and GTM's Conduct, Suitability, and Discipline Division (CSD) activities throughout the investigation and disciplinary review of sexual harassment cases and has not updated supervisory guides to include sexual harassment reporting. OCR, OSI, and CSD have internal policies for their roles in the investigative and disciplinary processes for sexual harassment cases, but the policies do not discuss coordination with all relevant bureaus and offices. Because guidance is lacking, coordination among the offices is inconsistent. For example, OIG reviewed 20 sexual harassment cases and found two cases that CSD did not review for discipline because of inconsistent coordination.

Additionally, the Department lacks data on the consistency of the investigative and disciplinary processes. For example, OIG could not assess the timeliness of sexual harassment cases from 2014 to 2017 as CSD and OCR did not have timeliness standards that guided work on sexual harassment reports. Additionally, OIG could not assess the length and outcomes of sexual harassment cases during the same timeframe because the Department does not have a mechanism to consistently track outcomes of sexual harassment reports.