

QSS20S1 Final Project Memo 1

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1 What I learned

In March 2015, the US Government Accountability Office (GAO) published a report on the state of the H-2A and H-2B Visa programs. The report investigated the number of workers on those visas, methods employers use to recruit those workers, and vulnerabilities and abuses that workers on those visa programs face. To investigate these issues, the GOA made use of numerous data sources. Data from the Department of State and Department of Homeland Security provided information on H-2A and H-2B visas, including the number of visas given out, what occupations were filled through these visas, and demographic information about visa recipients. For information on abuses and vulnerabilities in the visa programs, the report used data from the Department of Labor, the Department of Justice, and the Department of Health and Human Services. Finally, these government data sources were augmented by survey data of H-2A and H-2B workers conducted by various NGOs. In compiling all of these data sources, the GAO confronted numerous obstacles. Notably, there was a lack of standardization in how data was recorded and a lack of data sharing between different government agencies. Many of the report's recommendations focused on ways to improve data practices within the various agencies.

2 Gaps and questions

One of the key issues highlighted in the GAO's report was a lack of data sharing between the Department of Labor, who record information on debarred employers, and the Department Homeland Security, who screen for debarred employers when reviewing visa petitions. As a result of this, the Kentucky Consular Center found that DHS occasionally approves petitions from employers who have been debarred by DOL. To address this issue DOL and DHS were supposed to reach a data sharing agreement by 2016. To see whether the data sharing problem has been resolved, our class could compare DOL and DHS data to see if petitions are still being approved for debarred employers.