

January 2025

Asian Americans in the Federal Sector



U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
Research, Evaluation, & Applied Data Division | Office of Federal Operations

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Executive Summary

Asian Americans¹ are one of the largest growing populations in the United States, projected to comprise as much as 10 percent of the U.S. population by 2060 (Huang, 2021). However, Asian Americans continue to experience employment discrimination, particularly with respect to their selection for leadership positions (Kim, 2021). Asian American women may be especially susceptible to discrimination, as their pay and employment continue to lag behind their male counterparts' (Rogers, 2019).

This report from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) summarizes selected EEO statistics for Asian Americans in the Federal workforce in fiscal year (FY) 2020. The analysis compares these statistics to the general Federal workforce and to the national civilian labor force (CLF).²

Main Findings

This report analyzes the participation rate, age distribution, voluntary and involuntary separation rates, advancement opportunities, and median pay of Asian Americans in the Federal workforce. The main findings from FY 2020 include:

- Overall, Asian Americans accounted for 7.1 percent of the Federal workforce, compared to 5.7 percent of the CLF.
- Asian American men accounted for 3.8 percent of the Federal workforce in FY 2020, while Asian American women accounted for 3.2 percent.
- Asian American men (3.1 percent) and women (2.5 percent) voluntarily separated—due to either retirement or resignation—from Federal agencies at lower rates than their representation in the Federal workforce.
- Asian American men (2.5 percent) and women (1.9 percent) involuntarily separated—due to either downsizing or removal from service—from Federal service at lower rates than their representation in the Federal sector.
- Asian Americans were relatively underrepresented among leadership roles compared to their representation in the Federal workforce. Asian American men accounted for 3.3 percent of Federal leaders and Asian American women for 2.3 percent.

¹ The EEOC defines "Asian American" as all employees who identify as Asian and no other race, and who did not answer "YES" to the question "Are you Hispanic or Latino?" for both males and females as indicated in the appropriate category. See https://eeocdata.org/pdfs/DEFINITIONS_OF_RACE_AND_ETHNICITY_CATEGORIES.pdf.

² The Civilian Labor Force refers to all people non-military persons age 16 and older who are classified as either [employed](#) and [unemployed](#), including those who are either working or actively seeking employment (Retrieved from: [Labor Force Characteristics \(CPS\) : U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) on 10-29-24).

- Asian Americans earned a median annual salary of \$107,221—about 19.0 percent more than the governmentwide median of \$90,097.
- Of the 14,812 EEO complaints filed in the Federal sector, 440 (3.0 percent) alleged Asian as a basis. This was lower than their Federal workforce representation.

This data serves as a baseline for those interested in researching the experiences of Asian Americans in the Federal workforce.

Background

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits unlawful discrimination in the workplace and established the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) as the oversight agency responsible for monitoring, investigating, and enforcing anti-discrimination laws. The EEOC enforces Federal laws that make it illegal to discriminate against job applicants or employees because of a person's race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, or genetic information. The EEOC also strives to prevent discrimination before it occurs through outreach, education, and technical assistance programs.

In 2008, the EEOC formed an Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Work Group, the first of such groups organized by the EEOC. Using both quantitative and interview data, the EEOC researched the concerns of the AAPI community with regards to employment, special emphasis programs, and the EEO complaint process. This led to the publication of the research report [*Asian American and Pacific Islander Work Group Report to the Chair of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission*](#) (EEOC, 2008). The report found that AAPI employees faced two primary challenges—low representation and a lack of advancement opportunities. The EEOC recommended:

- Disseminating an executive order to address issues of discrimination against AAPI employees in the Federal sector and promoting programs that encourage their professional advancement.
- Reinvigorating the governmentwide Senior Executive Service (SES) Candidate Development Program, with an emphasis on greater participant diversity.
- Providing skill development opportunities to help AAPI employees be more competitive for advancement within the agency.
- Creating requirements that hold senior leadership accountable to ensure selection and promotion of qualified AAPI candidates to the highest levels.
- Assisting agencies to enlist their affinity groups to become liaisons between employees and management.
- Providing assistance to AAPI employees and affinity groups seeking to engage with the agency's equal employment opportunity (EEO) office.

Subsequently, in 2010, the Chair's office released a follow up report of the challenges Asian Americans and Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders may face in a report entitled, [*"A Practical Guide to Common Issues and Possible Barriers Which Asian and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander Employees May Face in the Federal Work Force"*](#) (EEOC, 2010). The EEOC identified three primary challenges

Asian Americans may face in the Federal workforce: outreach, recruitment, and hiring; leadership opportunities and career advancement; and retention.

To address these challenges, the EEOC provided a list of best practices. For example, the EEOC recommended that agencies engage in barrier analysis to identify factors contributing to underrepresentation among Federal AAPI employees. The EEOC also recommended that agencies conduct outreach to the AAPI community to increase awareness of career opportunities in the Federal sector. Furthermore, the EEOC encouraged agencies to provide additional EEO training for recruiters and hiring officials. The EEOC suggested that agencies use exit interviews and separations data to better understand why AAPI employees leave their agencies.

It has been roughly fifteen years since the EEOC published the report from the Asian American and Pacific Islander Work Group. This current report focuses on the employment status of Asian Americans in particular. Research suggests that this group may experience discrimination, particularly with respect to selection for leadership positions (Kim, 2021). In addition, Asian American women continue to experience discrimination compared to their male counterparts in pay and employment (Rogers, 2019).

The EEOC recently published profiles of Latina women, American Indian and Alaska Native women, and Black women in the Federal sector (EEOC, 2023a; EEOC, 2023b; EEOC, 2023c). This report continues that series. The EEOC's Office of Federal Operations will continue to profile other populations in concurrent and future reports as the 60th anniversaries of the EEOC approaches.

Data Sources and Methodology

Data for this report were drawn from the following sources:

- **Fiscal Year (FY) 2015-20 Management Directive 715 (MD-715) Workforce Tables** – The EEOC's annual data collection on Federal sector workforce distributions by the various protected categories.
- **FY 2015-20 Enterprise Human Resources Integration Data** – The U.S. Office of Personnel Management's quarterly data collection of Federal sector workforce distributions by key personnel data items.
- **The American Community Survey EEO Tabulation 2014-18 (5-year American Community Survey data) Table EEO-CIT02R** – The Census Bureau's tabulation table used by the EEOC to track workforce distributions in the larger American workforce.
- **FY 2015-20 Annual Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Statistical Report of Discrimination Complaints (Form 462)** – Form 462 collects data on agencies complaint process from the informal to the

formal phase. Form 462 is used by the EEOC to monitor EEO complaint activity across Federal agencies.

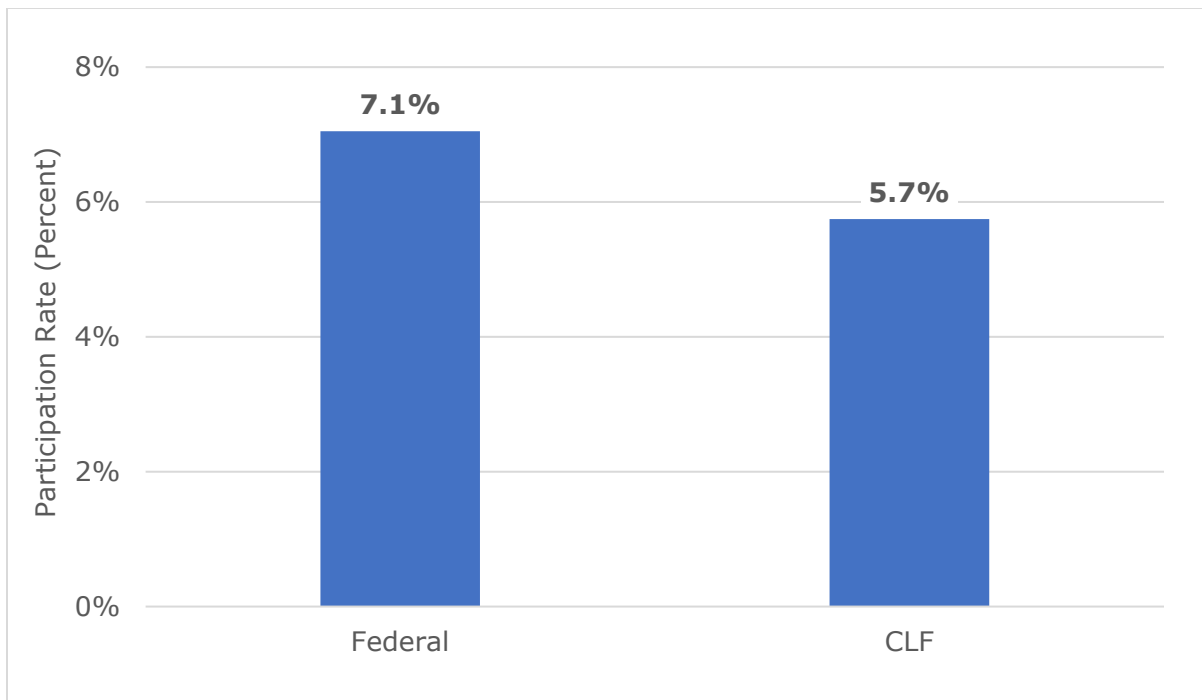
EEOC researchers compared Federal sector workforce data for Asian Americans to the civilian labor force (CLF) and the overall Federal workforce. Researchers also compared the data by gender across the following EEO measures: representation, voluntary and involuntary separations, participation in management positions, and pay. Researchers analyzed these data for trends and offered recommendations for EEO practitioners and policymakers based on the report's findings.

Asian Americans and Federal Sector Employment

Representation in the Workforce

Figure 1 shows that the representation of Asian Americans employed in the Federal sector (7.1 percent) exceeded their representation in the CLF (5.7 percent) in FY 2020. That year, the Federal Government employed 233,474 Asian American workers.

Figure 1. Representation of Asian Americans by Sector, FY 2020

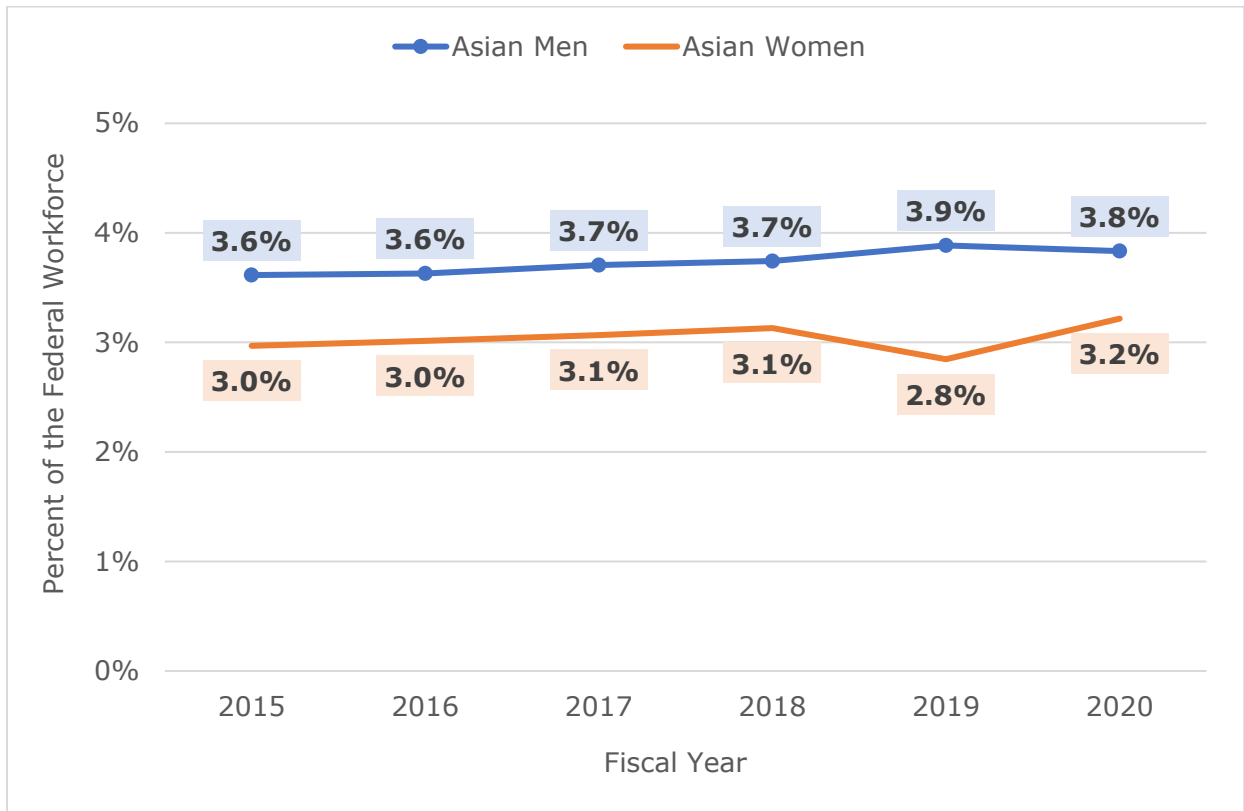


Sector	Total Workforce	Number Asian	% Asian
Federal	3,311,540	233,474	7.1
Civilian Labor Force (CLF)	149,465,705	8,590,070	5.7

Source: U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Management Directive 715 (MD-715), Workforce Table A1.

Figure 2 shows that the representation of Asian Americans in the Federal sector has remained relatively consistent since FY 2015. Asian American men, however, had a higher participation rate than Asian American women. In FY 2015, Asian American men accounted for 3.6 percent of the Federal workforce, while Asian American women accounted for 3.0 percent. By FY 2020, Asian American men accounted for 3.8 percent and women for 3.2 percent.

Figure 2. Representation of Asian Americans in the Federal Sector by Gender, FY 2015-20



FY	Total Workforce	% Men	% Women	% Asian Men	% Asian Women
2015	2,778,701	55.4%	44.5%	3.6%	3.0%
2016	2,845,141	55.2%	44.8%	3.6%	3.0%
2017	2,845,141	54.8%	44.8%	3.7%	3.1%
2018	2,810,795	54.9%	45.1%	3.7%	3.1%
2019	2,902,343	56.6%	42.9%	3.9%	2.8%
2020	3,311,540	54.2%	45.8%	3.8%	3.2%

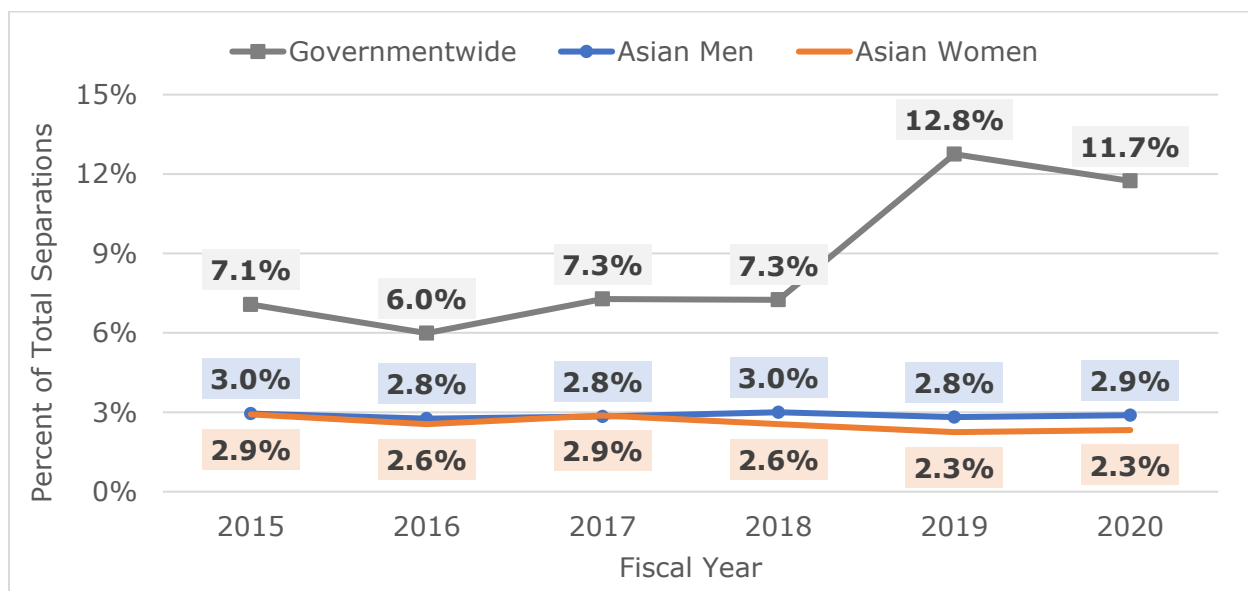
Source: U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, FY 2020 Management Directive 715 (MD-715), Workforce Table A1.

Voluntary and Involuntary Separations

Individuals can separate from an agency, leaving either voluntarily or involuntarily. Overall, the separation rate for the Federal workforce was 11.7 percent in FY 2020, with men and women separating at a rate proportionate to their respective representations in the Federal workforce (51.0 percent for men and 49.0 percent for women).

Figure 3 shows that Asian American men and women separated at lower rates than the governmentwide rate. This suggests that Asian Americans have higher retention in the Federal workforce than other Federal employees. In addition, Asian American men and women separated at rates below the average separations rate of 6.9%. Asian American men separated at a rate of 2.9 percent in FY 2020 while Asian American women separated at a rate of 2.3 percent. Since FY 2015, Asian American men tended to separate at higher rates than their female counterparts.

Figure 3. Total Separations Among Asian Americans in the Federal Sector, FY 2015-20

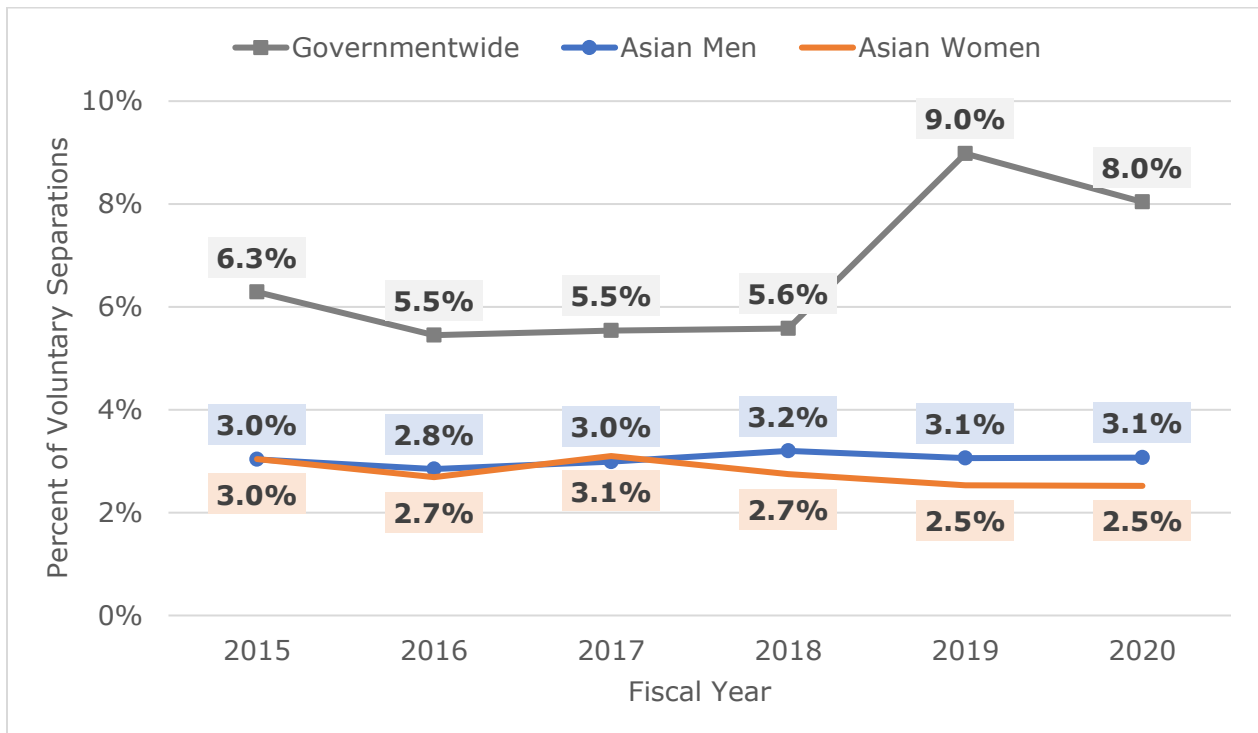


FY	Total Separations	% Governmentwide	% Men	% Women	% Asian Men	% Asian Women
2015	196,634	7.1	52.3	47.7	3.0	2.9
2016	170,440	6.0	52.1	47.9	2.8	2.6
2017	207,211	7.3	50.9	49.1	2.8	2.9
2018	203,867	7.3	52.7	47.3	3.0	2.6
2019	370,298	12.8	52.5	47.4	2.8	2.3
2020	389,074	11.7	51.0	49.0	2.9	2.3

Source: U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, FY 2020 Management Directive 715 (MD-715), Workforce Table A1.

Voluntary separations include individuals that leave a Federal agency due to either retirement or resignation. Overall, the governmentwide rate of voluntary separations was 8.0 percent in FY 2020. Figure 4 shows that Asian American men and women voluntarily separated at lower rates—3.1 percent and 2.5 percent, respectively. These rates were also lower than the representation of Asian American men and women in the Federal sector. Since FY 2015, Asian American men tended to separate voluntarily at higher rates than their female counterparts.

Figure 4. Voluntary Separations Among Asian Americans in the Federal Sector, FY 2015-20

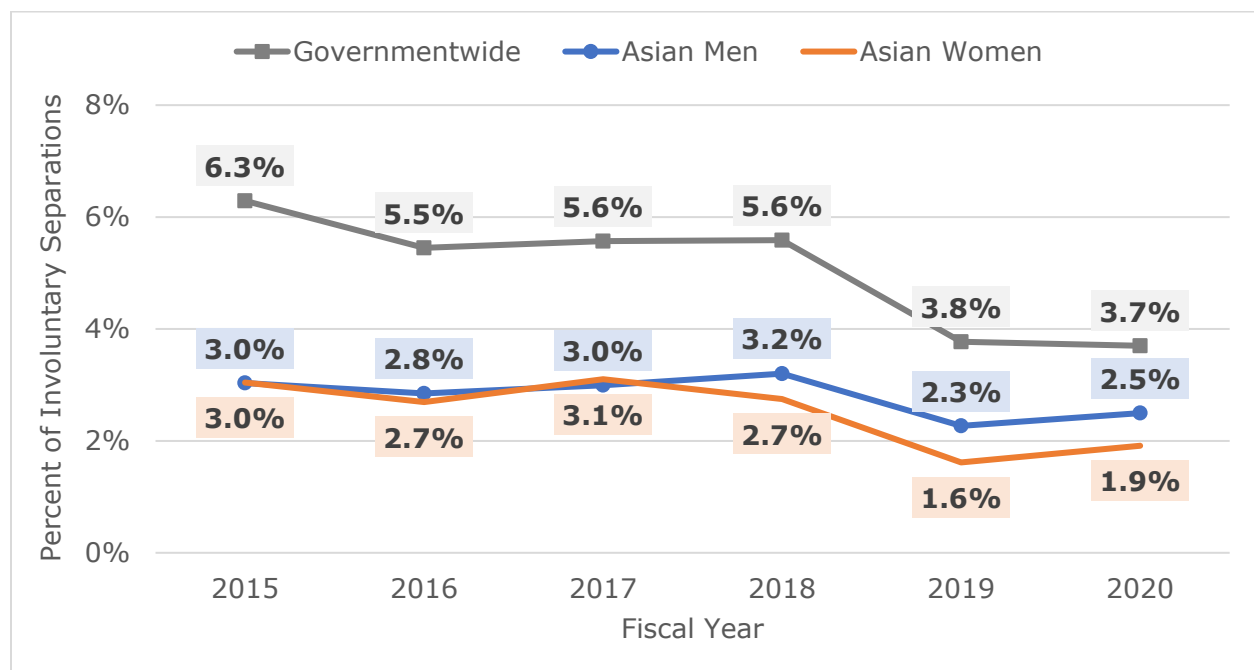


FY	Voluntary Separations	% Governmentwide	% Men	% Women	% Asian Men	% Asian Women
2015	174,808	6.3	51.8	48.2	3.0	3.0
2016	155,169	5.5	51.5	48.5	2.8	2.7
2017	157,862	5.5	50.5	49.5	3.0	3.1
2018	157,035	5.6	52.4	47.6	3.2	2.7
2019	260,843	9.0	50.5	49.5	3.1	2.5
2020	266,538	8.0	49.8	50.2	3.1	2.5

Source: U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, FY 2020 Management Directive 715 (MD-715), Workforce Table A1.

Federal agencies may involuntarily separate employees from service, due to either downsizing or removal from service. Overall, 3.7 percent of Federal employees were involuntarily separated in FY 2020. Figure 5 shows that, by comparison, the involuntary separation rate among Asian American men was lower—2.5 percent—than among Asian American women—1.9 percent. Both Asian American men and women were removed from Federal service at lower rates than their representation in the workforce, with Asian American men usually removed at a higher rate than their female counterparts. This suggests greater retention of Asian American employees in the Federal sector compared to other Federal employees.

Figure 5. Involuntary Separations Among Asian Americans in the Federal Sector, FY 2015-20



FY	Involuntary Separations	% Governmentwide	% Men	% Women	% Asian Men	% Asian Women
2015	174,808	6.3	51.8	48.2	3.0	3.0
2016	155,169	5.5	51.5	48.5	2.8	2.7
2017	158,464	5.6	50.5	49.6	3.0	3.1
2018	157,035	5.6	52.4	47.6	3.2	2.7
2019	109,459	3.8	57.3	42.7	2.3	1.6
2020	122,543	3.7	53.6	46.4	2.5	1.9

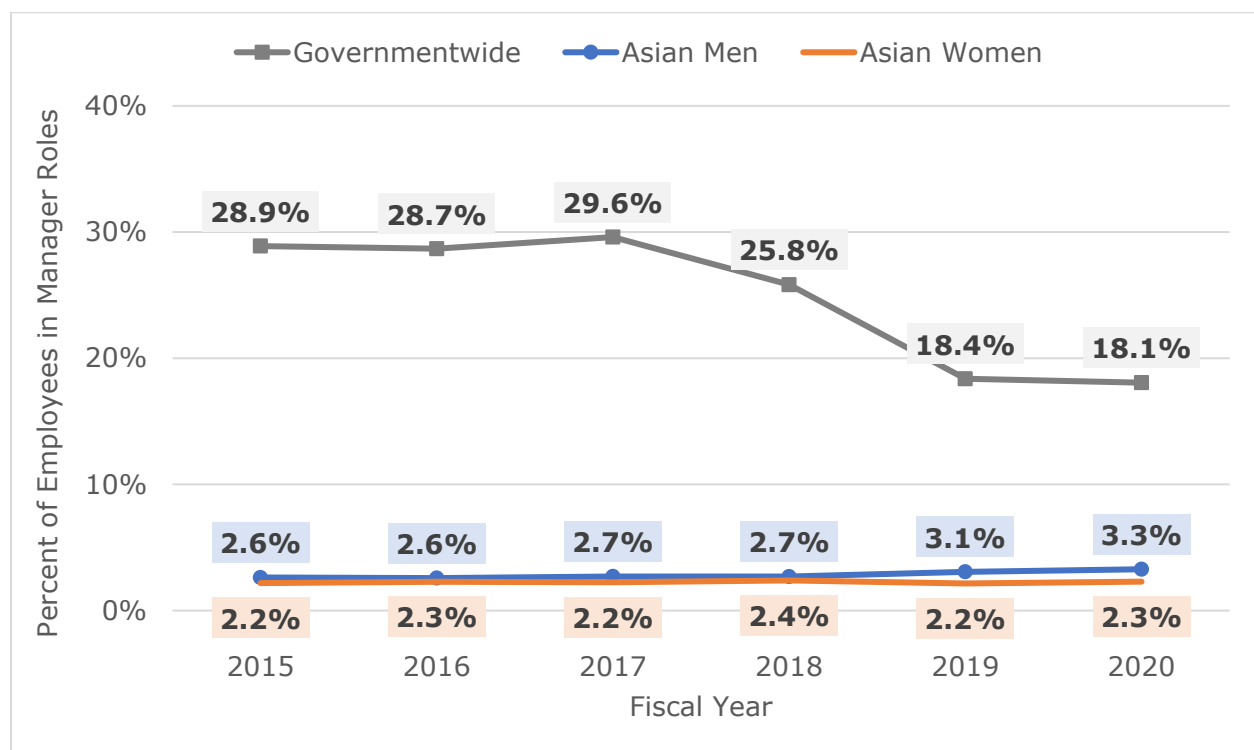
Source: U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, FY 2020 Management Directive 715 (MD-715), Workforce Table A1.

Management and Leadership

Governmentwide, 18.1 percent of Federal employees were supervisors, managers, or executives in FY 2020. Men accounted for the majority (60.1 percent) of these leadership roles.

Figure 6 shows that Asian American men and women were underrepresented in leadership roles compared to their representation in the Federal workforce. Asian American men accounted for 3.8 percent of the Federal workforce, but 3.3 percent of Federal leaders. And Asian American women accounted for 3.2 percent of the workforce, but 2.3 percent of leaders. Since FY 2015, Asian American men have had higher leadership representation than their female counterparts.

Figure 6. Asian Americans in Federal Sector Leadership Roles, FY 2015-20



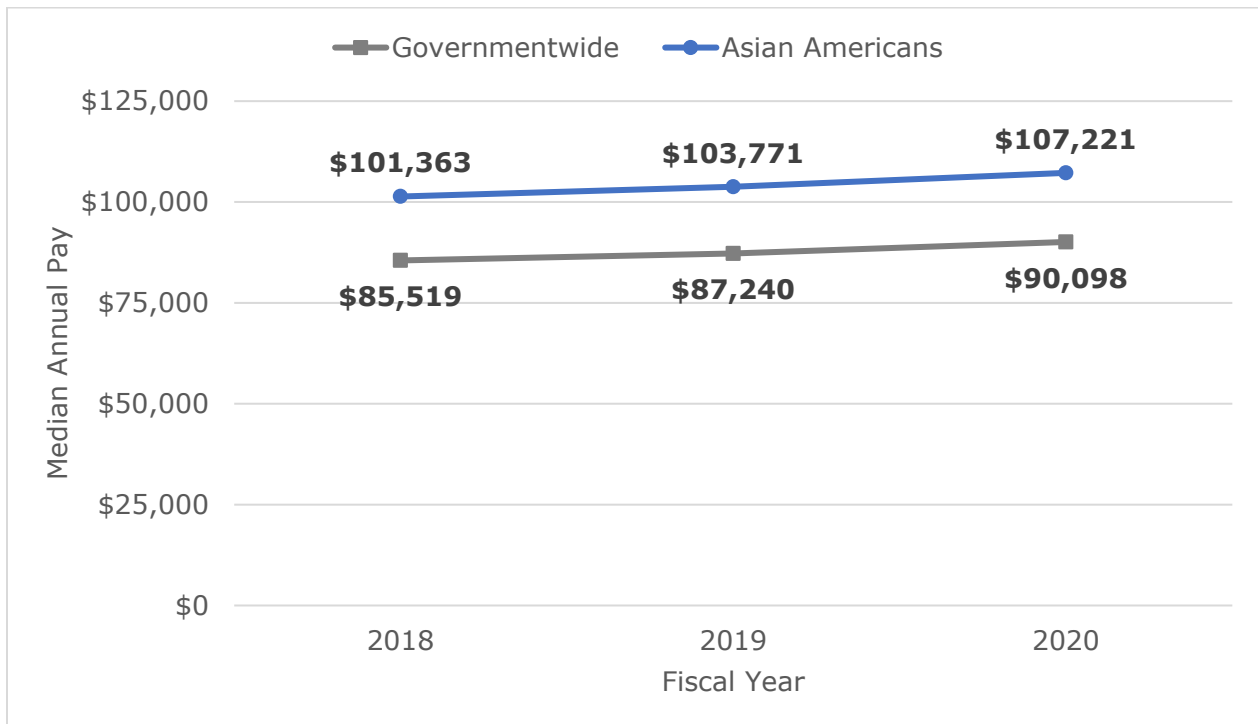
FY	Total Managers	% Governmentwide	% Men	% Women	% Asian Men	% Asian Women
2015	802,815	28.9	55.3	44.0	2.6	2.2
2016	815,889	28.7	54.5	45.5	2.6	2.3
2017	842,174	29.6	55.8	44.2	2.7	2.2
2018	726,015	25.8	54.2	45.8	2.7	2.4
2019	533,151	18.4	59.3	40.7	3.1	2.2
2020	598,187	18.1	60.1	39.9	3.3	2.3

Source: U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, FY 2020 Management Directive 715 (MD-715), Workforce Table A1.

Pay

Figure 7 shows that, in FY 2020, the median annual salary governmentwide was \$90,097. By comparison, Asian Americans earned a median salary of \$107,221 in FY 2020—over \$17,000 more than the median pay governmentwide. A similar pattern has held since FY 2018, with Asian Americans earning more than the average Federal employee. Governmentwide data also shows that Asian Americans are more likely to serve in higher graded positions.

Figure 7. Median Annual Salary for Asian Americans in the Federal Sector, FY 2018-20



FY	Governmentwide Median Pay	Asian American Median Pay
2018	\$85,519.36	\$101,363.05
2019	\$87,240.16	\$103,771.28
2020	\$90,097.56	\$107,221.43

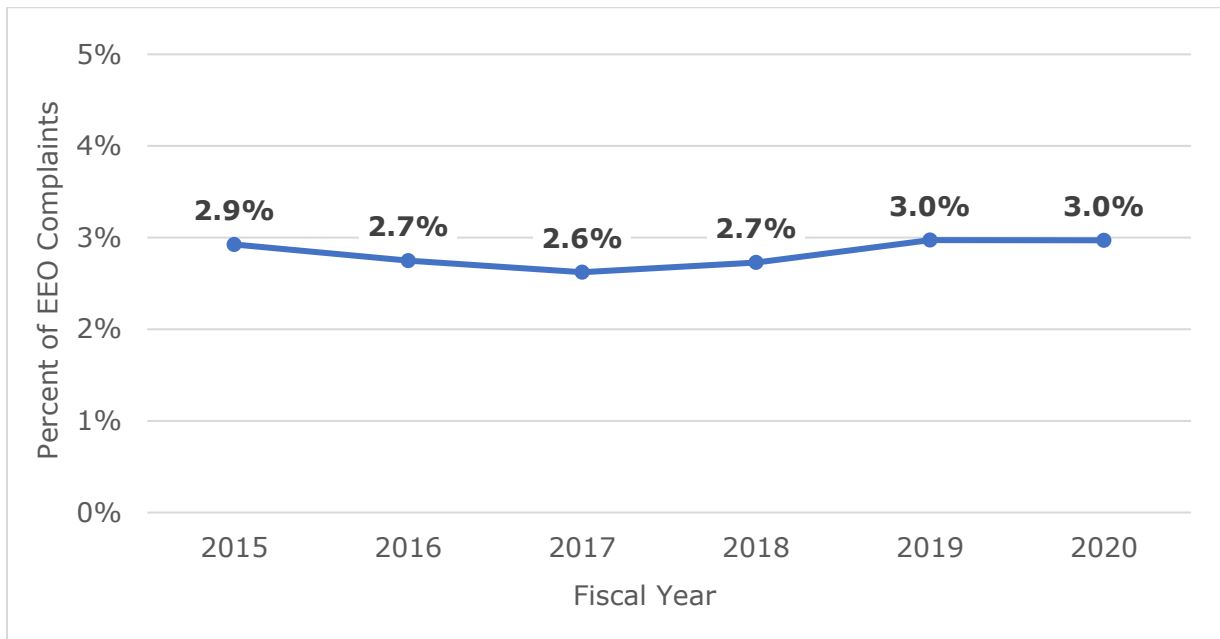
Notes: The median is the middle number in a list of numbers sorted in ascending or descending order. In FY 2018, OPM began tracking pay data for Asian Americans separate from pay for Pacific Islanders.

Source: U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission using data from the U.S. Office and Personnel's Management's FY 2015-20 Enterprise Human Resources Integration Data.

Federal Sector EEO Complaints

Governmentwide, the rate of complaints was about 0.9 percent of all Federal employees in FY 2020. Of the 14,812 complaints filed that year, 3.0 percent (440 complaints) alleged Asian as the basis for racial discrimination. A basis is the reason that the alleged discrimination occurred. The rate of EEO complaints alleging Asian as the basis has remained relatively consistent since FY 2015.

Figure 8. Federal EEO Complaints Alleging Asian as the Basis, FY 2015-20

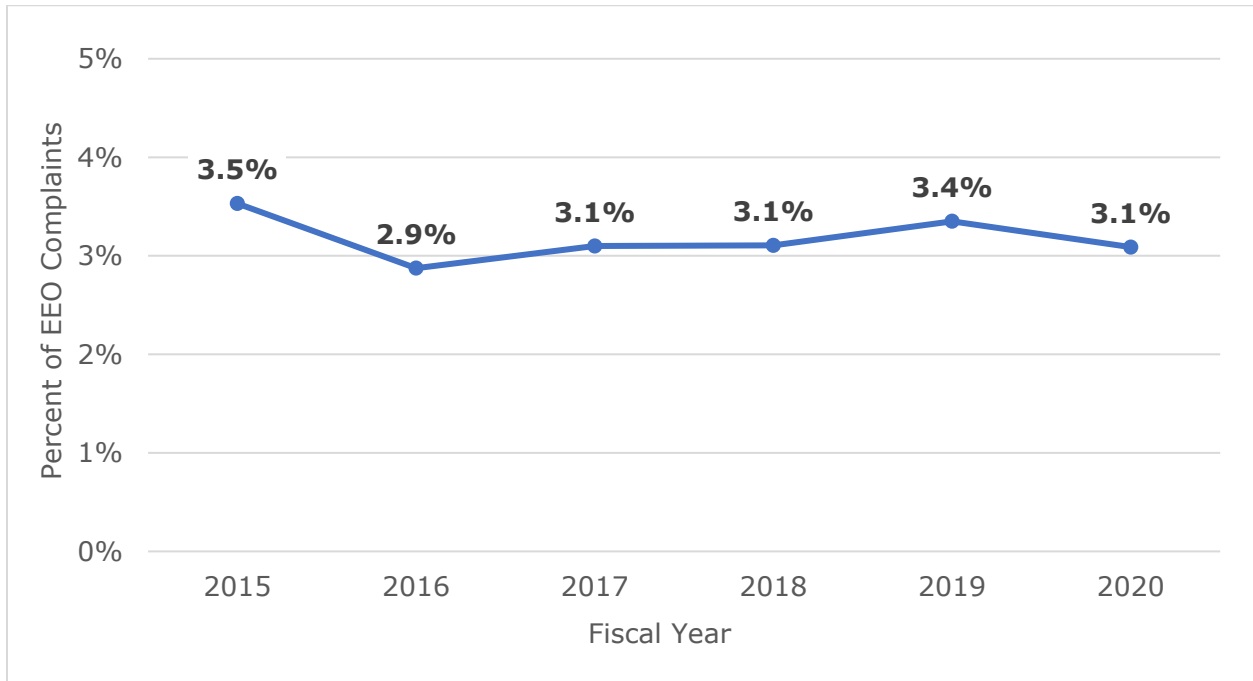


FY	Total EEO Complaints	Complaints Alleging Asian	% Alleging Asian
2015	15,490	453	2.9
2016	15,828	435	2.7
2017	15,482	406	2.6
2018	16,565	452	2.7
2019	15,070	448	3.0
2020	14,812	440	3.0

Source: U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission using data from its FY 2015-20 Annual Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Statistical Report of Discrimination Complaints (Form 462).

About half (50.3 percent) of all EEO complaints filed governmentwide in FY 2020 alleged harassment (non-sexual). Figure 9 shows that complaints alleging Asian non-sexual harassment³ accounted for 3.1 percent of all complaints in FY 2020. Since FY 2015, the rate of complaints alleging Asian non-sexual harassment has remained relatively consistent.

Figure 9. Complaints Alleging Asian Non-Sexual Harassment, FY 2015-20



FY	Total Complaints	Alleging Non-Sexual Harassment	Alleging Asian Non-Sexual Harassment	% Alleging Asian Non-Sexual Harassment
2015	15,490	4,957	175	3.5
2016	15,828	5,114	147	2.9
2017	15,482	6,969	216	3.1
2018	16,565	7,728	240	3.1
2019	15,070	7,193	241	3.4
2020	14,812	7,449	230	3.1

Source: U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission using data from its FY 2015-20 Annual Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Statistical Report of Discrimination Complaints (Form 462).

³ Non-sexual harassment refers to unwelcome conduct that is based on race, color, religion, sex (including sexual orientation, gender identity, or pregnancy), national origin, older age (beginning at age 40), disability, or genetic information (including family medical history).

Conclusion

This report's findings profile the state of the Asian American workforce in the Federal sector. Asian Americans comprised 5.7 percent of the Nation's civilian labor force (CLF), but 7.1 percent of the Federal workforce in FY 2020. Asian American men accounted for 3.8 percent of the Federal workforce, compared to 3.2 percent for Asian American women. Asian American men and women also separated from Federal service at lower rates than the governmentwide average and their representation in the Federal workforce. This pattern held for both voluntary and involuntary separations. Furthermore, Asian Americans earned about a median annual salary of \$107,221—about 19.0 percent more than to the governmentwide median of \$90,097. Lastly, the rate of EEO complaints alleging Asian as a basis was lower than Asian Americans' representation in the Federal workforce.

Some EEO measures, however, point to a single area for improvement. Asian American men and women were underrepresented in leadership roles compared to their representation in the Federal workforce. Asian American men accounted for 3.8 percent of the Federal workforce, but 3.3 percent of Federal leaders. Asian American women accounted for 3.2 percent of the workforce, but 2.3 percent of leaders. Furthermore, since FY 2015, Asian American women were behind their male counterparts on many of the EEO measures analyzed in this report.

The EEOC summarized best practices for the recruitment, hiring, and advancement of Asian American workers in a previous report ([EEOC, 2010](#)). The analyses conducted in this report were limited to the available data, which ran through FY 2020. As a result, the EEOC recommends additional research focused on potential barriers Asian Americans face in advancing to leadership roles within the Federal workforce.

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