

## Report in Brief

Date: May 2023

Report No. A-06-20-07002



### Why OIG Did This Audit

The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), a program office of the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) within HHS, manages the Unaccompanied Children (UC) Program, which serves children with no lawful immigration status in the United States. This report builds on OIG's previous oversight of ORR's efforts to protect children.

Our objective was to determine whether ORR followed its policies, procedures, and guidance both when making initial placements of unaccompanied children in care provider facilities and when transferring children between those facilities. As part of this audit, we determined whether ORR conducted adequate oversight of transfers of unaccompanied children.

### How OIG Did This Audit

ORR officials provided us with data on 55,359 initial placements and 3,757 transfers that occurred during our audit period of January 1 through September 30, 2019. From these initial placements and transfers, we selected and reviewed the documentation for a statistical sample of 70 initial placements and 50 transfers. We also reviewed judgmental samples of (1) 9 placements and transfers for facility types not included in our statistical sample, (2) 30 transfers that occurred 0 to 7 days after placement, and (3) 11 children with multiple transfer denials.

## The Office of Refugee Resettlement Needs To Improve Its Oversight Related to the Placement and Transfer of Unaccompanied Children

### What OIG Found

We found that ORR faced challenges when making initial placements during an influx period. ORR did not consistently make initial placements within 24 hours during influx periods because of capacity issues and lack of intake specialist staff. Additionally, ORR did not adequately document placement decisions or placement designations for children with special concerns or needs. Furthermore, we determined that: (1) for the statistical sample of transfers, some were missing supporting documentation; (2) for the judgmental sample of transfers of children into restrictive placements, some of the required documentation was not completed or missing; (3) ORR did not maintain documentation for the reason(s) each child was denied a transfer; and (4) ORR faced challenges transferring children with both behavioral and mental health needs. These errors occurred because ORR had limited quality control procedures, lacked oversight to ensure documentation was retained by care providers, and did not have a process in place to track denied transfers.

### What OIG Recommends and Administration for Children and Families Comments

We recommend that ORR: (1) strengthen oversight of initial placements by addressing challenges with bed space capacity and intake specialist staffing during influx periods to ensure that a placement is made within 24 hours of each referral and Intakes Placement Checklists are completed for children with special needs or concerns, (2) strengthen oversight of transfers between ORR care provider facilities by requiring that all transfer documentation be maintained in the UC Portal and by developing procedures for tracking and reviewing that documentation, (3) review restrictive setting placement denials and take action as needed to ensure an appropriate placement for each child, and (4) assess the need to expand its network capacity to serve the needs of children with mental health and behavioral issues.