

Report in Brief

Date: February 2022

Report No. A-04-20-02025

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES
OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL



Why OIG Did This Audit

The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), a program office of the Administration for Children and Families within HHS, manages the Unaccompanied Children (UC) Program, which serves children who have no lawful immigration status in the United States. Because of emergency events in 2017, 2018, and 2019, such as hurricanes and wildfires, we conducted several audits of HHS agencies to identify risks in preparing for and responding to emergency events. This audit continues those efforts.

This is the second of two reports addressing emergency preparedness at ORR-funded facilities that provide care to children in the UC Program. The first report addresses communicable disease preparedness, and this report addresses emergency events. This report does not address emergency intake sites that were opened in response to the surge of unaccompanied children that occurred in 2021.

Our objective was to determine whether ORR ensured that selected facilities followed Federal requirements in preparing for and responding to emergency events.

How OIG Did This Audit

We initially surveyed 171 facilities to identify a population that had experienced an emergency event between January 2017 and September 2019. Of the 116 facilities that responded, 37 had experienced an event. We selected 10 of those facilities and reviewed their preparedness for future emergency events.

Office of Refugee Resettlement Generally Ensured That Selected Care Provider Facilities for Its Unaccompanied Children Program Complied With Federal Emergency Preparedness Requirements

What OIG Found

ORR ensured that the 10 selected facilities generally complied with Federal requirements in preparing for and responding to emergency events. Each of the 10 facilities complied with most Federal emergency preparedness requirements, such as having written safety plans that addressed evacuations during emergency events. However, none of the selected facilities complied with the Federal requirement to maintain a complete list of emergency contacts to notify when a child's location changes due to an emergency evacuation.

Without a complete emergency contact list, and because ORR's monitoring did not identify this noncompliance with a Federal requirement, facilities were at risk of failing to fully protect children's interests in the event of a future emergency.

What OIG Recommends and ACF Comments

We recommend that the Office of Refugee Resettlement issue guidance to care provider facilities regarding the requirement to include all relevant ORR and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) contacts in their emergency contact lists.

ACF neither agreed nor disagreed with our recommendation. However, ACF explained the actions that it has taken and is in the process of taking to respond to our recommendation. ACF provided documentation to support those actions. For example, ACF provided a copy of the November 2021 update to a checklist it uses for onsite monitoring. This checklist requires the monitoring team to verify that an emergency contact list, including ORR and DHS contacts, is posted in care provider office areas. ACF also stated that it was in the process of developing an emergency preparedness guide for care provider facilities that will provide details for a range of emergencies and disasters, including templates for contact lists. ACF anticipates that it will implement this new guide in 2022.