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Little Overlap Exists Between ORR-Funded Foster Care and the US Domestic Foster Care System

Why **OIG** Did This Review

- Hundreds of thousands of children need safe and stable out-of-home placements each year. Many States have faced shortages of foster families to care for these children.
- [ORR](#) places unaccompanied alien children in a variety of settings, including ORR-funded foster care, to help ensure their safety and wellbeing. ORR foster care and domestic foster care are administered and funded separately by different bureaus within [ACF](#).
- Policymakers have raised concerns that ORR's use of foster care for unaccompanied alien children could increase pressure on the US domestic foster care system by recruiting from an already limited number of foster homes.

What **OIG** Found



Approximately **8 percent** of all unaccompanied alien children in ORR's custody each month were placed in ORR-funded foster care in fiscal year 2024.

- Nearly all of these **15,553 unaccompanied alien children** were placed in short-term placements, with a median length of stay of **15 days**.
- For comparison, the **domestic foster care** program served nearly **570,000 children**, who averaged **over a year** in care.



ORR, States, and child placing agencies (CPAs) reported that ORR-funded foster care **did not impact the availability of foster families** for children in domestic foster care, and offered insights to support their views.

- States and CPAs **did not attribute** the foster family shortages experienced in domestic foster care to ORR, but rather attributed them to the increasingly complex needs of children entering domestic foster care.
- CPAs that work with families involved in both ORR and domestic foster care reported that **payment rates did not influence families' decisions** to foster with one program over the other. ORR has worked to align its payment rates to foster families with each State's payment rates to domestic foster families.
- According to ORR, States, and CPAs, families have different reasons for fostering children and these often align with **either** the ORR **or** the domestic foster care mission.

What **OIG** Concludes

These findings suggest that ORR's use of foster care did not negatively impact the availability of foster families in the US domestic foster care system. First, only a small percentage (8 percent) of unaccompanied alien children were placed with foster families, typically for brief periods. Second, officials from selected States and CPAs did not attribute domestic foster family shortages to ORR's use of foster care for unaccompanied alien children. The officials reported that families' reasons for fostering children often aligned with the mission and needs of either ORR or domestic foster care, but rarely of both. Thus, the pool of families each program recruits from is largely different.