

FEMA Successfully Assisted HHS in Providing Shelter and Supplies to Unaccompanied Children from the Southwest Border





OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Department of Homeland Security

Washington, DC 20528 / www.oig.dhs.gov

March 31, 2022

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Honorable Deanne Criswell
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency

FROM: Joseph V. Cuffari, Ph.D. **JOSEPH V CUFFARI** Digitally signed by
Inspector General JOSEPH V CUFFARI
Date: 2022.03.31
11:13:56 -04'00'

SUBJECT: *FEMA Successfully Assisted HHS in Providing Shelter and Supplies to Unaccompanied Children from the Southwest Border*

For your information is our final report, *FEMA Successfully Assisted HHS in Providing Shelter and Supplies to Unaccompanied Children from the Southwest Border*. Your office chose not to submit management comments to the draft report. The report contains no recommendations.

Consistent with our responsibility under the *Inspector General Act*, we will provide copies of our report to congressional committees with oversight and appropriation responsibility over the Department of Homeland Security. We will post the report on our website for public dissemination.

Please call me with any questions, or your staff may contact Bruce Miller, Deputy Inspector General for Audits, at (202) 981-6000.



DHS OIG HIGHLIGHTS

FEMA Successfully Assisted HHS in Providing Shelter and Supplies to Unaccompanied Children from the Southwest Border

March 31, 2022

Why We Did This Audit

In March of 2021, the Secretary of Homeland Security directed FEMA to support the government-wide operation to safely receive, shelter, and transfer unaccompanied children from the U.S. southwest border for a period of 90 days. We conducted this audit to determine the extent to which FEMA coordinated shelter and supplies to unaccompanied minors along the southwest border.

What We Recommend

This report does not contain any recommendations.

For Further Information:
Contact our Office of Public Affairs at (202) 981-6000, or email us at DHS-OIG.OfficePublicAffairs@oig.dhs.gov

What We Found

From March 13, 2021 through June 11, 2021, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) accomplished its operational goals to help the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) provide shelter and supplies to unaccompanied children from the U.S. southwest border. Specifically, FEMA worked closely with HHS to establish 14 emergency intake sites in high priority locations in Texas, California, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. FEMA also assisted HHS to build out 23,253 beds and provide other critical supplies, such as food, water, beds, blankets, and medical supplies at emergency intake sites. As a result, during this time period, HHS, with FEMA's help, provided shelter to about 27,000 unaccompanied children.

FEMA Response

FEMA chose not to submit management comments to the draft report.



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Background

Between April 2020 and March 2021, the Federal government experienced a large influx of unaccompanied children¹ at the southwest border. On March 13, 2021, the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security directed the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to support the government-wide operation to safely shelter and transfer unaccompanied children received along the U.S. southwest border for a period of 90 days. The government-wide operation involved agencies from the Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), among others.

HHS Administration for Children and Families Office of Refugee Resettlement had primary responsibility for the care and placement of the unaccompanied children throughout the operation. As the lead department, HHS was responsible for contracting resources to expand shelter capacity and overseeing the care of unaccompanied children within the shelter.

To help drive cohesion during the government-wide operation, FEMA supported HHS with the development of Operation Apollo. FEMA's role in Operation Apollo was to provide technical assistance to help HHS determine where and how to increase shelter capacity. FEMA's goals for Operation Apollo were to: 1) rapidly expand shelter capacity to reduce holding time at U.S. Border Patrol facilities; and 2) integrate interagency communication and data from Department of Homeland Security and HHS data sources to anticipate and drive operational decisions. FEMA also provided supplies and food to unaccompanied children during the operation. Between March and June 2021, FEMA deployed 174 personnel² to emergency intake sites and at headquarters in Washington D.C.

We conducted this audit to determine the extent of FEMA's support to provide shelter and supplies to unaccompanied children.

¹ An unaccompanied child has no lawful immigration status in the United States. An unaccompanied child is defined as under the age of 18, and has either no parent or legal guardian in the United States or no parent or legal guardian in the United States available to provide care and physical custody.

² FEMA's deployment roster contained 176 names of personnel who participated in Operation Apollo. However, two personnel had deployment dates in July 2021, which was outside the scope of Operation Apollo.



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Results of Audit

FEMA Successfully Assisted HHS in Providing Shelter and Supplies to Unaccompanied Children from the Southwest Border

FEMA accomplished its operational goals to assist HHS in providing shelter and supplies to unaccompanied children from the southwest border.

Specifically, FEMA worked closely with HHS to successfully establish 14 emergency intake sites in Texas, California, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. See Figure 1 for an example of an emergency intake site. FEMA used its Incident Management Assistance Teams³ to help HHS decide the high priority locations by providing technical assistance with site selection, logistics, and contract expertise.

FEMA helped HHS determine the bed space required to meet unaccompanied children demand from Border Patrol facilities. FEMA used a forecasting system to drive bed space decisions and the Operation Apollo Digital Briefing Book to provide senior leadership with a daily overview of the number of children encountered and housed at each facility, total discharged, quantity of beds, as well as staffing, facility, safety, and health issues.



Figure 1. Emergency Intake Site
Source. FEMA Photograph

FEMA also assisted HHS with decisions to build out a maximum bed capacity of 23,253 across the emergency intake sites as of May 28, 2021. Although the demand fluctuated each day, HHS had enough bed space to successfully shelter 26,896 unaccompanied children⁴ at emergency intake sites between March 13, 2021 and June 11, 2021. Not all unaccompanied children listed as being sheltered were at an emergency intake site simultaneously. Rather, unaccompanied children spent an average of 31.5 days at emergency intake sites during that period. See Table 1 for a comparison of the number of beds

³ Incident Management Assistance Teams are rapidly deployable assets that provide the Federal government's initial coordination and response capability prior to and in the immediate hours following a serious incident.

⁴ 24,876 unaccompanied children were sheltered at a single emergency intake site, and some unaccompanied children were sheltered at more than one emergency intake site. Two unaccompanied children were sheltered at three different sites, and 1,007 unaccompanied children were sheltered at two different sites, totaling 26,896.



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Department of Homeland Security

available to the number of children sheltered at emergency intake site locations.

Table 1. Number of Beds Established and Unaccompanied Children Sheltered at Emergency Intake Sites

Emergency Intake Site Location	Number of Beds	Number Sheltered
El Paso, Texas	10,000	7,572
San Diego, California	1,450	3,130
Pecos, Texas	1,997	2,986
Dallas, Texas	1,990	2,851
San Antonio, Texas	2,010	2,181
Midland, Texas	700	1,921
Donna, Texas	1,500	1,800
Pomona, California	1,100	1,233
Long Beach, California	820	931
Carrizo Springs, Texas	440	812
Houston, Texas	500	481
Lackland, Texas	372	455
Albion, Michigan	224	397
Erie, Pennsylvania	150	146
Total	23,253	26,896

Source: HHS and FEMA data between March 13, 2021 and June 11, 2021

In addition to providing technical assistance, FEMA also provided HHS with critical supplies for the operation. FEMA provided HHS with food, water, beds, blankets, and medical supplies from its national stockpile to emergency intake sites through an intragovernmental reimbursable agreement. The agreement allowed HHS to reimburse FEMA for expenses relating to the requested work. FEMA also helped coordinate the transportation of those supplies. FEMA's expenses relating to the requested work were about \$200,000 to transport and replenish national stockpile goods, and an additional \$3.9 million in direct labor and travel costs.

FEMA employees who participated in the operation agreed that FEMA successfully carried out its role in the government-wide effort to safely shelter and transfer unaccompanied children received along the U.S. southwest border. We administered a survey and received responses from 103 FEMA employees who shared their opinions on the success of Operation Apollo. According to the survey results, 76 percent responded that FEMA successfully assisted HHS in expediting shelter during the operation. Additionally, 67 percent believed FEMA effectively communicated operational goals to personnel



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Department of Homeland Security

assigned to the operation. See Appendix A for the FEMA Operation Apollo personnel survey questions and results.

We also interviewed officials from FEMA and HHS to gather their thoughts about Operation Apollo. Officials from both agencies agreed that FEMA effectively communicated goals and important information throughout Operation Apollo. These activities included daily briefings with HHS and operation staff at each emergency intake site to discuss specific site needs, issues, and operational status.

Although FEMA successfully assisted HHS throughout the operation, FEMA identified several best practices and areas for improvement in an after-action report. Specifically, the recommendations included:

- taking proactive steps with partner agencies to rapidly scale up capacities to meet future unaccompanied children demand;
- co-locating involved agencies at the onset to improve communication and coordination efforts;
- preparing personnel during steady-state to ensure they are adequately trained for future operations; and
- continuing to clarify roles and responsibilities for future operations.

We are not making any recommendations as a result of this audit.

Management Comments and OIG Analysis

FEMA chose not to submit management comments to the draft report. However, DHS submitted technical comments to the draft report that we incorporated as appropriate.



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Objective, Scope, and Methodology

The Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General (OIG) was established by the *Homeland Security Act of 2002* (Public Law 107-296) by amendment to the *Inspector General Act of 1978*.

Our objective was to determine the extent to which FEMA coordinated shelter and supplies to unaccompanied minors along the southwest border. Our audit scope was FEMA's role in Operation Apollo between March 13, 2021 and June 11, 2021. To answer our objective we:

- Interviewed FEMA leadership who planned and executed Operation Apollo and to identify the operational goals.
- Interviewed HHS leadership to determine whether FEMA accomplished its goals during Operation Apollo.
- Interviewed FEMA officials from the Office of the Chief Financial Officer to understand how FEMA accounted for reimbursable transactions.
- Sent a survey to the 176 FEMA personnel who participated in Operation Apollo. We received responses from 114 of the 176 (65 percent) personnel surveyed, with 103 personnel responding to most of the survey questions.⁵ See Appendix A for FEMA Operation Apollo personnel survey questions and results.
- Reviewed the FEMA after-action report from Operation Apollo.
- Reviewed the Operation Daily Briefing Books.
- Reviewed the FEMA deployment roster.
- Reviewed FEMA reimbursable accounting records.
- Reviewed FEMA's reimbursable agreement with HHS.
- Reviewed HHS shelter data for unaccompanied children sheltered in emergency intake sites.
- Reviewed congressional testimony.
- Reviewed FEMA and HHS planning documents for Operation Apollo.

We performed detailed testing of the FEMA deployment roster and the reimbursable accounting records to ensure data reliability. Specifically, we compared survey results to confirm employees participated in Operation Apollo. We also compared a sample of travel vouchers and payroll records with the deployment roster and found very few exceptions. We reviewed documentation for a sample of accounting transactions to determine whether the reimbursable

⁵ 103 FEMA personnel responded to all of the quantifiable questions regarding Operation Apollo. However, not all 103 personnel provided responses to our narrative-based questions relating to what worked well during Operation Apollo and what respondents would have improved in Operation Apollo.



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Department of Homeland Security

expenses were allowable and supported. Finally, we ensured the reliability of unaccompanied children data contained in the Operation Daily Briefing Books by comparing it to the HHS emergency intake shelter data. We determined the data was sufficient and reliable for the purpose of our audit.

We assessed internal controls related to FEMA's coordination of shelter and supplies to unaccompanied minors along the southwest border. We did not identify internal control deficiencies related to this audit objective. However, since our internal control assessment was limited to the audit objective, it may not disclose other internal control deficiencies that potentially existed.

We conducted this performance audit between August and November 2021 pursuant to the *Inspector General Act of 1978*, as amended, and according to generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based upon our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based upon our audit objectives.

The Office of Audits major contributors to this report are Tom Salmon, Assistant Inspector General for Audits; Brooke Bebow, Audit Director; Christopher Yablonski, Audit Manager; Alicia Lewis, Auditor in Charge; Darrel Francis, Auditor; Curtis Watkins, Program Analyst; Kiana Porter-Price, Auditor; Lindsey Koch, Communications Analyst; and Michael Thorgersen, Independent Reference Reviewer.



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Department of Homeland Security

Appendix A

FEMA Operation Apollo Personnel Survey Questions and Results

Survey Question	Yes	No						Total Responses
Did you participate in Operation Apollo (Artemis) and/or deploy to the Southwest border?	112	2	-	-	-	-	-	114
Date you deployed or were assigned to Operation Apollo?	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	104
Date you returned from deployment or assignment to Operation Apollo?	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	104
	TX	DC	CA	PA	MI	AZ	NM	
Where were you assigned throughout Operation Apollo? If assigned to more than one location – please select all that apply?	54	36	23	6	5	4	1	129
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	I Don't Know		
FEMA clearly defined your role and responsibility for Operation Apollo?	11	19	9	36	27	1	-	103
FEMA assigned work that met your skill set throughout Operation Apollo?	8	8	6	29	50	2	-	103
FEMA adequately staffed Operation Apollo to achieve your assignment?	11	17	11	32	29	3	-	103
FEMA effectively communicated the operation's goals to you throughout Operation Apollo?	9	12	11	35	34	2	-	103
FEMA successfully identified U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) capacity and gaps during Operation Apollo?	9	14	10	35	24	11	-	103
FEMA successfully assisted HHS to expedite shelter during Operation Apollo?	3	2	13	25	53	7	-	103



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Survey Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	I Don't Know		Total Response
FEMA successfully assisted HHS to transition unaccompanied children out of temporary emergency shelters during Operation Apollo?	3	3	17	30	38	12	-	103
FEMA developed a forecasting system that consistently provided unaccompanied children demand data to assist in operational decisions throughout Operation Apollo?	4	10	12	32	20	25	-	103
FEMA successfully assisted HHS to secure and activate high priority emergency intake sites during Operation Apollo?	3	6	12	23	48	11	-	103
Overall, FEMA's role in Operation Apollo was a success?	5	7	12	33	43	3	-	103



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Appendix B

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