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## MIGRANT WAVE DIVERTS RESOURCES FROM REFUGEE PROGRAM

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The influx of Central American children across the southern U.S. border in recent months is having an impact on another immigrant community: refugees from Asia, the Middle East and Africa.

Government funds that would ordinarily go to resettlement programs for refugees have been diverted to help pay for the costs of coping with the recent wave of unaccompanied minors, and it isn't clear if the money will be entirely restored.

Some of the programs in jeopardy are designed to meet the congressional goal that refugees achieve economic self-sufficiency as soon as possible after settling in the U.S., experts say.

"Unfortunately, you are taking from one vulnerable population to provide to another vulnerable population," said Jacinda Paschoal, regional operations manager for Lutheran Community Services Northwest, which resettles refugees in Oregon and Washington.

She said that tuberculosis testing, follow-up and treatment as well as services for school-aged children and elderly refugees are among those impacted by cuts. More than a dozen staff positions are slated to be eliminated in Portland, she said, because of the reallocation of resources.

During this fiscal year, which ends Sept. 30, the U.S. is expected to receive an estimated 70,000 refugees, who are individuals fleeing persecution and war.

At least 60,000 unaccompanied minors, many of them trying to escape gang violence in Central America, are expected to arrive over that same period. That compares with about 24,700 minors in fiscal 2013.

The cost of the minors' care, which includes temporary housing and medical screening, created a budget crunch for the Office of Refugee Resettlement, part of the Department of Health and Human Services.

The government pays for the children's care until they are placed with family members in the U.S. while awaiting deportation hearings.

Emergency border spending that was debated in Congress this summer had earmarked funds for the refugee-resettlement office, but lawmakers didn't reach agreement before their August recess.

For fiscal 2014, \$868 million was allocated to the Unaccompanied Alien Children program, and earlier this year an additional \$44 million was added, compared with the \$376 million allocated the previous year. As the flow of children surged, the resettlement agency in June notified Congress that it had to divert \$94 million from refugee programs to the minors' program.

Health and Human Services spokesman Kenneth Wolfe said a recent slowdown in the influx of unaccompanied children will enable the agency "to release some funding that was held back and not released to our refugee programs on its regular schedule."

The agency has informed organizations that it plans to return \$22.5 million to some programs, such as case management and a program for learning English.

But the timetable is unclear.

The government hasn't decided if it will release money for other programs, such as one focused on preventive health and another designed to support schools absorbing refugee children, which were to be funded starting Friday. Mr. Wolfe of HHS said "final decisions" rest on whether the trend toward fewer unaccompanied children persists.

In Kentucky, which expects 3,000 refugees this year, state refugee coordinator Becky Jordan said, "Even if they do restore some funding, there will be a gap."

Like the Central American unaccompanied minors, refugee children often are psychologically scarred by crime they endured or witnessed in their home countries.

Many refugees from countries like Somalia, Iraq and Bhutan were parked for years in camps before being resettled in the U.S.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services and other organizations that serve refugees have taken their concerns to congressional representatives. Among others, the organizations, using federal and self-generated funding, help refugees find housing and work as well as enroll in English classes and get vaccinated.

Some of the programs in jeopardy aim to equip refugees to transition to life in the U.S. and not rely on public assistance.

John Koehlinger, executive director of Kentucky Refugee Ministries, said he is likely to eliminate job-development staff.

"A little bit of federal funding for one program can go a long way; it's a shame to lose it," he said.