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MOST MIGRANTS MAKE THEIR COURT DATE

By Miriam Jordan
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The vast majority of migrants who recently entered the U.S. illegally are showing up for their scheduled deportation hearings, even as the government said most adults who arrived with children have skipped separate required check-ins with immigration offices.

Between July 18 and Sept. 30, about 85 percent of unaccompanied minors showed up for a scheduled first hearing, and about two-thirds of adults with children appeared, according to data obtained from the Executive Office for Immigration Review, the agency that oversees the nation's immigration courts. The agency said on July 18 that it would expedite deportation hearings for the two groups, following the Obama administration's decision to prioritize their cases to discourage further illegal immigration.

About 30,000 unchaperoned children and 40,000 people entering in family units flocked to the U.S. during a surge of such immigrants between May and August this year, the latest month available. That surge has since subsided.

The majority of cases involving recent border crossers are still working their way through immigration court, noted Lauren Alder Reid, the court agency's counsel for legislative and public affairs.

Last week, Immigration and Customs Enforcement reported that 70 percent of adults with children apprehended at the border and then released by U.S. authorities had subsequently failed to report to immigration offices as required. But that required visit is separate from scheduled dates with immigration courts.

Between July 18 and Sept. 30, the immigration courts received 10,041 cases of unaccompanied children, the court agency said. Out of the 7131 migrants whose cases were scheduled for a first hearing, known as the "master calendar," judges ordered 1035 of them deported in absentia for not showing up.

During that period, the immigration courts received 11,516 cases of adults who arrived with children. Judges issued a removal order in absentia to about one-third of the adults, or 2435 of the 7244, who had a first hearing, according to the agency.

The rise in illegal entries of unaccompanied children and families fueled both a political and border crisis over the summer. Many of the migrants say they are fleeing violence and request asylum in the U.S., which is granted by an immigration judge.

Immigrants who have strong asylum cases are much more likely to show up in court to fight their deportation than those who are unlikely to win the right to stay legally in the U.S. Those who have legal representation also are more likely to appear and win their case.

Many migrant families remain in detention near the border after they are caught. But because of a shortage of detention space, most of them have been allowed to join relatives in the U.S. as they await deportation proceedings. The adults are instructed to report to an ICE office within a few weeks of reaching their destination, where they may be fitted with an

electronic ankle bracelet to monitor their movement. The goal is to ensure that a migrant facing removal from the country can be tracked by U.S. authorities.

Children who arrive alone typically are processed by federal authorities and released to relatives across the U.S. with whom they stay while their legal proceedings unfold.

The number of adults with children entering the U.S. fell from a peak of 16,329 in June to 3296 in August. The number of unaccompanied children plummeted to 3141 in August from 10,622 two months earlier.

The Obama administration last week announced a program to offer refugee status to about 4000 minors from Central America who already have family members living in the U.S., suggesting the president wishes to open the way for children to enter legally.