News



Migrants are seen outside a repatriation center in Guatemala City, Guatemala, after arriving on a deportation flight from the U.S. that landed at La Aurora Air Base Jan. 27, 2025. (OSV/Josue Decavele, Reuters)

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Washington, D.C. — February 10, 2025
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The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops issued layoff notices to about a third of the staff in its Migration and Refugee Services Office on Feb. 7 after it stopped receiving reimbursements from the federal government for its work with refugees who qualify for federal assistance, per an internal memo.

The move comes as the Trump administration suspended a federal refugee resettlement program as part of its broader effort to enforce its hardline immigration policies.

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First reported by The Pillar, USCCB general secretary Father Michael Fuller wrote in a Feb. 7 memo to members of the conference that executive orders recently signed by Trump "are causing confusion both within various agencies and with those who interact with them."

"This is true for the USCCB regarding cooperative agreements for both Refugee Resettlement Programs and our Children Services, which help care for unaccompanied children," the memo, which was also obtained by OSV News, said. It added the cuts would impact Catholic Relief Services, the overseas relief and development arm of the Catholic Church in the U.S., "even more harshly."

The layoffs impact 50 individuals, the memo said.

The USCCB website states that its Migration and Refugee Services “is the largest refugee resettlement agency in the world,” and that in partnership with its affiliates, it resettles approximately 18% of the refugees that arrive in the U.S. each year.

Fuller wrote in the memo that the USCCB provides the staff to organize and administer its federal agreements to assist refugee populations that qualify for federal assistance "with local Catholic Charities and other agencies who care for the

refugees directly."

They expect these agreements to fluctuate with each administration, the memo said, and therefore so will the number of staff. But while "we expected we might have a reduction in force with the new administration, actions this significant and this immediate were not anticipated," it said.

Reimbursements from the federal government for its work stopped on Jan. 15 for services completed in November, the memo said, meaning they are "awaiting reimbursement for services completed in December, an amount close to $20 million."

"Like all other agencies, this has placed the Conference in a difficult situation. The Conference does not have the funds to continue operations in USCCB Refugee Services at the current levels," it said. "As such, we must inform our local Catholic Charities and other subcontracting agencies that there will be a delay in payments until further notice. This will be a burden on them and the people they serve and will result in staff layoffs."

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Asked for comment on the layoffs, Chieko Noguchi, a spokesperson for the USCCB, said in a statement provided to OSV News, "As a result of the continuing uncertainty regarding refugee resettlement and the overall future of those programs, staff of the USCCB's Migration and Refugee Services Office were notified of a series of layoffs earlier today."

"Please pray for these dedicated men and women who have given so much of themselves in service to their sisters and brothers in need," Noguchi said. "As this is a personnel matter, we will not be issuing a further statement out of respect for the impacted staff. In making these difficult decisions, we continue to work as best we can to lessen the impact on those families currently in the refugee resettlement program."

The memo added that even "if/when the Federal Government reimburses the Conference, and after the 90-day review set by the Executive Orders, the landscape of both USCCB Refugee Services and Catholic Relief Services will have to dramatically change and the Conference will face some difficult questions that will

need to be addressed" about "how we can best serve refugees."

Trump administration officials, including Vice President JD Vance and White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt, both Catholic, have recently made statements questioning the church's work with refugees and migrants, with Vance suggesting pushback from the U.S. bishops on some of Trump's immigration policies had more to do with their "bottom line," a claim the conference disputed.

William Canny, the U.S. bishops' migration director, previously told OSV News that the refugees the conference serves are "highly vetted" by the U.S. government, and the conference does not profit from the arrangement.

This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** feature series. View the full series.