

Christian aid group cuts staff members in wake of Trump's executive order on refugees

by [Emily McFarlan Miller](#) in the [March 15, 2017](#) issue

World Relief has announced it will lay off more than 140 staff members and close five local offices as a “direct result” of President Trump’s order to more than halve the number of refugees resettled this year in the United States.

The Christian nonprofit is one of nine private agencies that contracts with the U.S. government to resettle refugees.

“Our staff at each of these locations have served diligently and sacrificially—some of them for many years—and we are deeply saddened to have to make this difficult decision,” wrote Scott Arbeiter, World Relief president, in a statement released February 15.

The layoffs are a loss of “decades of organizational expertise and invaluable capacity to serve the world’s most vulnerable people,” Arbeiter said.

The cuts affect most of the organization’s local offices, as well as its home office, according to Matthew Soerens, U.S. director of church mobilization at World Relief.

Some staff were laid off before the announcement was made, Soerens said. The rest of the layoffs and closures will happen gradually as World Relief is able to fulfill responsibilities to its recently resettled refugees and church partners.

The five local offices that will be closed are in Boise, Idaho; Columbus, Ohio; Miami; Nashville, Tennessee; and Glen Burnie, Maryland. These offices had resettled more than 25,000 refugees, according to the statement. They were chosen in part because other refugee resettlement agencies are working nearby, to which people can be referred, Soerens said.

World Relief had brought together hundreds of prominent evangelicals from all 50 states to sign a letter to the president and vice president expressing their support for refugees.

Judges have blocked the administration from enforcing parts of Trump's January 27 executive order, including the 120-day suspension of the refugee resettlement program. Also blocked was the temporary halt on anyone—including refugees—entering the country from seven predominantly Muslim countries and the indefinite ban on anyone entering the country from Syria.

But the order still effectively caps the number of refugees the United States will accept in 2017 at 50,000.

That number had varied between 70,000 and 85,000 under the Obama administration, and President Obama had put the refugee ceiling for 2017 at 110,000.

The new cap puts World Relief “over capacity” to serve the number of refugees who will be allowed into the country over the next year, Soerens said. It previously had anticipated it would resettle about 11,000 refugees this year. That number likely will be closer to 5,000, most of whom it already has resettled, he said.

The organization's most significant source of funding comes in the form of onetime \$2,025 grants it receives from the U.S. State Department for each refugee it resettles, he said.

While World Relief anticipates an increase in donations from churches and individuals, he said, it also needs to cut expenses.

Trump has said the White House has options to get around judges' partial block of his executive order, including “just filing a brand new order.”

Soerens hasn't seen any indication the president would raise the number of refugees accepted into the country in a new order, and “the longer we hold off on it, the harsher the cuts would have to be.”

Other faith-based agencies that work to resettle refugees in the United States include Church World Service, Episcopal Migration Ministries, HIAS (formerly known as the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Migration and Refugee Services.

Miji Bell, director of communications for LIRS, wrote in an e-mail that the organization “will continue to assess the impact of the reduction in refugee arrivals and evaluate that against our staffing needs.”

CWS launched an emergency appeal earlier this month to raise \$1 million, saying the order “effectively defunds the entire domestic resettlement network, as CWS local offices and affiliates are paid per capita on a reimbursement basis.”

World Relief was established by the National Association of Evangelicals in 1944 in response to the humanitarian crisis in Europe after World War II, according to its website. —Religion News Service