News



The U.S. Supreme Court building is pictured in Washington Sept. 25, 2026. (OSV News/Reuters/Nathan Howard)

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The U.S. Supreme Court temporarily allowed the Trump administration to carry out third-country deportations — removals to a country where a person who had migrated to the United States has no ties — while a challenge to that policy continues.

The high court granted Sept. 29 the Justice Department's emergency request to put on hold a lower court ruling that the Department of Homeland Security's policy permitting the removal of migrants to so-called third countries is unlawful, but it also agreed to hear a challenge to the policy in December.

As part of its efforts to enforce hardline immigration policies, the Trump administration has carried out deportations of some immigrants who lack legal authorization to live and work in the U.S., known as "third-country" removals. The people subject to these orders are sent to countries not specifically identified in their removal orders or to countries with which they have no preexisting ties or citizenship.

The Migration Policy Institute estimated that about 15,000 third-country deportations occurred between Jan. 20, 2025, and Dec. 31, 2025. Some estimates say about 25,000 people have been deported in such arrangements to date.

In one such notable case, the Trump administration sought to deport Kilmar Abrego Garcia, a Salvadoran national, to African countries including Uganda and Liberia, after a judge protected him from deportation to his country of origin due to concerns about gang violence against his family.

"The decision by the Supreme Court to allow third country deportations, even temporarily, violates human dignity and places immigrants in danger. It is akin to a U.S. citizen without legal status in England being deported to North Korea," Kevin Appleby, senior fellow for policy and communications at the Center for Migration Studies of New York and the former director of migration policy for the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, told OSV News.

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James Percival, general counsel for the Department of Homeland Security, said in a post on X, "A bad day for criminal illegals and open borders activists alike."

Percival added, "It's not too late to get $3,000 and a flight home," a reference to a policy permitting what the department calls an "exit bonus" for those who voluntarily self-deport.

Appleby said that he hopes the Supreme Court "will rule differently when they hear the merits of the case, but in the interim the lives of thousands of persons will be placed in jeopardy."

Catholic social teaching on immigration balances three interrelated principles: the right of persons to migrate in order to sustain their lives and those of their families, the right of a country to regulate its borders and control immigration, but also a nation's duty to regulate its borders with justice and mercy.

Dylan Corbett, executive director of the Hope Border Institute, a group that works to apply the perspective of Catholic social teaching in policy and practice to the U.S.-Mexico border region, told OSV News, "Deporting people to countries they've never known, where they have no family, no language and no protection, isn't enforcement. It's banishment and it’s punitive."

"As Pope Leo reminds us, human dignity has no passport, and even a temporary green light for this practice puts real lives at risk," he said.

Christian migrants, particularly Catholics, are the most vulnerable demographic to mass deportation in the U.S., a joint report, "One Part of the Body," published by evangelical and Catholic groups in 2025, said. According to demographic data as of the end of 2024, the report found that 10 million Christians make up 80%, and Catholics 61%, of those vulnerable to deportation under Trump administration policies implemented in 2025.

This story appears in the **Immigration and the Church** feature series. View the full series.