

Action Sheet

DECEMBER 2020

During Advent, we reflect on the Holy Family. We pray to Our Lady of Guadalupe, seeing the expectant mother of God mirrored in the millions of displaced women, men and children around the world.

SKILL-BUILDING ACTION

The Global Child Thrive Act has been included as an amendment to the final version of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that came out of the House/Senate Conference Committee! The Global Child Thrive Act will help millions of the world's most vulnerable children, many of whom, like the Holy Family, have had to flee their homes for safety. Our Action Sheet action this month will be to write a letter to the editor expressing gratitude that Congress included the Global Child Thrive Act amendment into the final version of the Fiscal Year 2021 NDAA and sharing the good news with the newspaper's audience because of the impact the amendment will have on children around the world. Please see specifics outlined below.

LASER TALK

More than half of the world's estimated 26 million refugees are children. Globally, the number of children who face a lifetime of developmental challenges caused by malnutrition exceeds 149 million—more than twice the total number of children in the United States. According to the World Food Program, COVID-19 may push an additional 10 million children into acute malnutrition.

The good news is that since 1990, U.S. international aid has saved nearly 100 million children. But children need to do more than survive; they need to thrive. That's why investing in Early Childhood Development, or ECD, is so important. Singing, reading and playing with colorful objects stimulates young minds, but the U.S. government doesn't integrate ECD activities into international programs for children. Our faith compels us to care for all life which means giving each child a strong foundation from which to reach their God-given potential.

The Castro-Fitzpatrick Global Child Thrive Act amendment was included in the final version of the NDAA, which is expected to pass this congressional session, directing the administration to integrate ECD activities into international child-focused programs. The Global Child Thrive Act amendment will continue to greatly mitigate the impact of future pandemics and disasters on vulnerable children and their families.

BACKGROUND

COVID-19 continues to devastate families and communities everywhere. More than one million deaths have been recorded worldwide since February 2020 due to COVID-19. While needs continue to increase in the United States, we must also be deeply concerned about the impact globally. With your support, and that of the U.S. Catholic community, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and its partners are working tirelessly to respond to COVID-19 through adapted programming to address immediate and long-term needs, with a focus on supporting high risk populations like vulnerable children.

Migrant and Refugee Children and the Global Child Thrive Act: Worldwide it's estimated that 31 million children have been forcibly displaced from their homes. More than half of the world's estimated 26 million refugees are children, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. These children will have their development disrupted and may grow

smaller brains than children who have not experienced the trauma of fleeing violence. That's why early intervention during emergencies is incredibly important. By integrating Early Childhood Development (ECD) interventions into programs for young children and their families, CRS has been able to multiply positive outcomes for children in adversity—like migrants and refugees, and those suffering from malnutrition and living in poverty. During the time of COVID-19, ECD is more important than ever. The death or illness of a caregiver, the loss of income and rising tensions within a household combined with social isolation—all can reduce supervision, family protection and responsive caregiving in affected families. During the pandemic and in its wake, vulnerable children may experience heightened levels of neglect, mental or psychological distress, stalled educational progress, child labor, separation from loved ones and social exclusion.

One key way to address the negative impacts of forced displacement, hunger and malnutrition on children's development is to incorporate ECD activities into programs that support vulnerable children. With non-U.S. government funding, CRS and other international development and humanitarian agencies have been able to multiply positive outcomes for children in adversity by integrating ECD activities into programs for young children and their families. The Global Child Thrive Act amendment, included by Congress as an amendment to the final Fiscal Year 2021 National Defense Authorization Act, directs the U.S. Administration to integrate ECD activities into the current U.S. government's international development and humanitarian programs serving vulnerable children and their families around the world. The Global Child Thrive Act does not require additional federal funding. The integration of ECD activities into humanitarian programming will help children reach their developmental milestones despite disruptions caused by displacement or COVID-19 and build their resilience to future emergencies and trauma.

Reflect more on the Holy Family as a Refugee Family this Advent, by exploring this [Digital Retreat](#). Learn more about how CRS provides interventions prioritizing the dignity of children facing displacement, by checking out [Annet's story](#).

TAKE ACTION: Write a letter to the editor focused on your members of Congress

- 1. Find the local newspaper you will target:** To learn what is required for letters to the editor, Google the following: "(Name of the paper) letters to the editor guidelines." Identify the word limit and submission method (i.e., via the website or email).
- 2. Think about the placement of the piece:** If you are writing to a daily newspaper, find an article or editorial that provides an entry point to discuss the need to care for vulnerable children amidst this pandemic. If you are writing to a smaller weekly paper, write in a way that would be of interest to local readers.
- 3. Research:** Read a few letters to the editor in the newspaper you are targeting to see how they begin and the general tone.
- 4. Write your letter to the editor:** Using the newspaper's guidelines and this Action Sheet's information, share what values or experiences move you to work to support the world's most vulnerable children and have another chapter member provide some edits for your letter. For additional support, check out this training: [October 2019 \(38:13-57:35\)](#).
- 5. Include your specific message:** Express gratitude that Congress included the Global Child Thrive Act amendment in the final Fiscal Year 2021 NDAA that came out of the House/Senate Conference Committee. Share the good news with the newspaper's audience using information from this Action Sheet to describe the impact of the Global Child Thrive Act.
 - Check to see if your [U.S. Senators cosponsored S.2715](#) or if your [U.S. Representative cosponsored H.R.4864](#). Specifically name and thank your member(s) of Congress for cosponsoring the legislation, if applicable.
 - If *none cosponsored the legislation*, still address your members of Congress in your letter to the editor to educate them and thank Congress more generally for their inclusion of the Global Child Thrive Act in the final NDAA.
 - Specifically thank and acknowledge your member(s) of Congress for their leadership if they hold one of the following key leadership roles in the process: lead sponsor of the Global Child Thrive Act or chair or ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, House Foreign Affairs Committee, House or Senate Armed Services Committees.
- 6. Report back and celebrate:** If your letter is published, contact your CRS representative, share it on social media tagging your members of Congress, send it to your members of Congress by email and have your chapter's liaison call the key aide to make sure they saw it! If it's not published, consider sending it to another newspaper.