

Foreign Aid Backgrounder

On January 20, the new administration issued an executive order pausing foreign aid programs for 90 days while they reviewed and aligned them with the foreign policy goals of making the U.S. safer, stronger and more prosperous. On January 24, they released a memo halting all ongoing foreign assistance, except military support to Israel and Egypt and emergency food aid. Almost all humanitarian and development programs received stop work orders, essentially shutting down these programs, including food aid. On January 28, a waiver was issued exempting lifesaving humanitarian assistance from the freeze, but confusion about qualifying programs hindered operations. A limited number of lifesaving programs received direct official approval, but organizations could not access funding to implement programming. By February 27, the administration completed their review of foreign aid programs and initiated communications terminating thousands of programs globally, including programs that had previously received waivers under the lifesaving humanitarian assistance exemption. Despite the suspension or waiver status, organizations still cannot access necessary funds, leaving food to perish in warehouses and critical services left in limbo.

During the annual budget and appropriations process, Congress negotiates how to spend U.S. taxpayer dollars. Foreign assistance is an investment in our inter-connected world to protect life, uphold human dignity, and pursue sustainable solutions to the world's toughest challenges. Making up less than 1% of the annual federal budget, foreign assistance is a small yet smart investment to support the world's most vulnerable families and communities and to advance U.S. interests: to foster economic opportunity, promote peace and security, and project our core values abroad. Just half of that 1% is directed toward poverty-reducing humanitarian and development aid through programs implemented by organizations like Catholic Relief Services. CRS and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops advocate on [priority accounts](#) to ensure the U.S. government provides robust assistance to alleviate suffering and eliminate hunger and poverty around the world.

Through the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Agency for International Development and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, organizations such as CRS partner with the U.S. government to implement programming funded by the U.S. Congress. CRS is proud to continue our partnership alongside Congress and the administration to enact timely legislation to address global poverty and hunger and support the implementation of U.S.-funded emergency and development programming around the world.

Protecting funding for these international poverty-reducing accounts is not possible without the diligent work of constituents who call on Congress to prioritize this funding.

HOW THE STOP WORK ORDERS THREATEN HUMAN LIVES AND NATIONAL INTEREST

CRS recognizes the prerogative of the new administration to align foreign assistance with its foreign policy agenda, and we look forward to working with them and Congress to thoughtfully review and demonstrate the impact of our work. But foreign aid is not about charity; it's about building sustainable systems and putting people on a path to self-reliance—precipitous change, as we have seen over the last several weeks, damages U.S. relationships and puts millions of lives at risk. While the U.S. steps in to provide immediate help when people are hungry or sick—because America is built on generosity and values—the true goal is to foster long-term solutions in areas like agriculture, education, and health care towards the betterment of us all. Empowering societies to become self-sufficient strengthens global stability and, in turn, bolsters U.S. security and prosperity. This is how we all thrive.

The swift U.S. pull out of foreign aid—10,000 terminated projects over a week—will have immediate repercussions, damaging America’s credibility that it has built over decades. It threatens the immediate safety and security of organizations like CRS and partners that remain in country. It halts projects that provide basic education for children, lifesaving medications to people with HIV, and projects that provide farmers with seeds and tools to plant their crops. Families are fleeing war with uncertain prospects for how to find shelter, and entire communities don’t have access to clean water. As these programs stop, we are not only putting vulnerable lives at risk but also weakening our global influence and threatening U.S. security. Millions of people will be impacted, including communities across the U.S.

For example, a now terminated food security program in Haiti supported more than 65,000 Haitians with food—including U.S.-grown commodities, like grain and oil, as well as fresh local foods. This assistance has been critical in ensuring that people who could not feed themselves were not forced to migrate in search of opportunities or pulled into gang activity. Alongside the impact on Haitians, U.S. farmers and shippers have benefited by supplying food aid programs with their goods and services. Aid like this is a win-win that stimulates both the U.S. economy and global markets.

CRS’ APPROACH TO FOREIGN AID

Since 1943, CRS has worked in more than 100 countries, responding to immediate humanitarian needs and implementing long-term development programs that provide opportunities for people to build a pathway to prosperity for themselves and their families.

U.S. international assistance supports communities to build their skills for the long-term: growing food, eating nutritiously, saving money, supporting school meal programs, restoring degraded lands, and improving access to clean drinking water. These activities and investments make the U.S. and the world safer, stronger, and more prosperous for all people.

ADDITIONAL LEARNING

For more information on appropriations or about the accounts that CRS and the USCCB prioritize, view:

- [CRS/USCCB Chart of Accounts](#)

For examples of the importance CRS’ programs funded by U.S. international assistance, read these stories, or find more at crs.org/act:

- [The Impact of U.S. International Assistance: Nery’s Story](#)
- [Improving Nutrition and Resilience in Rwanda](#)
- [Improving Nutrition in Laos](#)
- [Feeding Those Most in Need in Ethiopia](#)