

# Action Sheet

February 2020

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*As missionary disciples, we are called to urgently respond to the needs of migrants and refugees. Today, a staggering 70 million people are currently displaced, many as a result of conflict and violence. Families are forced to flee in search of safety. Children suffer especially from this experience and may have long-term emotional, physical and cognitive setbacks.*

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## ACTION

Our action this month will be to write a letter to the editor that focuses on expressing appreciation for the House Foreign Affairs Committee's support of the Global Child Thrive Act and asking your Senators to support and co-sponsor the Senate version of the bill, **S. 2715**, introduced by Senators Roy Blunt (R-MO) and Chris Coons (D-DE). This bill will mandate that Early Childhood Development interventions be integrated into the U.S. government's international programs focused on young children and their families; doing this will ensure our foreign aid programs will be as effective as possible in helping young children thrive, without calling for additional funding.

## LASER TALK

Since 1990, U.S. international aid has saved nearly 100 million children. But children need to do more than survive; they need to thrive. Worldwide it's estimated that 31 million children have been forcibly displaced from their homes. More than half of the world's estimated 22 million refugees are children. These children could have their development disrupted and grow smaller brains than children who have not experienced the trauma of fleeing violence. Early Childhood Development or ECD is a way to help migrant and refugee children, and all children, thrive despite challenges brought on by forced migration and poverty. Currently, the U.S. government doesn't integrate ECD activities into international programs for children and families. Our Catholic faith compels us to care for life from conception to natural death. That means giving each child a strong foundation from which to reach his or her God-given potential.

Will you join lead sponsors Reps. Castro (D-TX) and Fitzpatrick (R-PA) of H.R. 4864 or Sens. Coons (D-DE) and Blunt (R-MO), lead sponsors of S. 2715, in cosponsoring and passing the Global Child Thrive Act directing the administration to integrate Early Childhood Development activities into international child-focused programs, thereby improving the lives of vulnerable children?

## BACKGROUND

Children who are refugees or who have been forcibly displaced from their homes are among the world's most vulnerable citizens. With over 75 years of experience working with and supporting refugees overseas, CRS knows that while every family has its own story, there are common threads among people on the move. Family, health, safety, stability and hope are the foundation of a life they left behind and are also the building blocks of a life they yearn for in the future. In addition to addressing the root causes of forced displacement and immediate needs of migrants and refugees, over the past eight years, CRS has become a leader in child-focused programming. By integrating Early Childhood Development (ECD) interventions into our programming for young children and their families, CRS has been able to multiply positive outcomes for children in adversity—like migrants and refugees, and children living in poverty. Based on new research and our first-hand experience, we are now calling on the U.S. government to follow suit and become a global leader. As the biggest donor of foreign assistance worldwide, the United States has a critical role to play in improving the lives of the world's most vulnerable children.

**How do humanitarian emergencies impact children?** Catholic Relief Services' humanitarian staff respond to emergency sites across the globe during times of need. In the context of humanitarian emergencies related to forced displacement, CRS and

our partners provide refugees and displaced people with shelter, food and the clean water and sanitation they need. Not only working to meet these basic needs, CRS seeks to create sustainable solutions for the harder to address issues of trauma and grief that migrants and refugees experience. For young children, this early intervention is incredibly important because their brains are growing rapidly, and the toxic stress caused by poverty and forced migration can negatively impact that growth. In fact, studies have found that forced migration during early childhood was significantly associated with poor cognitive well-being later in life. CRS utilizes Early Childhood Development (ECD) interventions in child-friendly spaces for migrant children to mitigate the impact of their trauma and build their resilience. Child-friendly spaces provide room for a child to run or dance, to play and sing, and to make friends with other children. In addition to healthy snacks and age-appropriate games, child-friendly spaces offer education, tutoring and grief counseling to children, who perhaps are unable to verbalize their emotions. Further, because healthy child development also requires a nurturing family environment, CRS supports parents with parent training, job opportunities and psychosocial support.

According to CRS humanitarian staff, *“ECD changes the trajectory of children’s lives. The longer children are out of school, the more likely they will never go back. ECD addresses issues of grief, toxic stress and trauma so that these wounds do not permanently harm the adults they will grow up to become. We use a range of established exercises to help children to heal from loss. We also provide parental support so that they know how to address new behavior of children in response to trauma.”* Studies by Nobel Prize-winning economist, James Heckman, show that ECD has a 13 percent return on investment per year. **Integrating ECD into current U.S. international programs serving young children and their families would expand the positive impact of these already successful programs and provide children the opportunity to achieve their God-given potential.**

## TAKE ACTION: Write a Letter to the Editor

**1. Find the local newspaper you will write to:** To learn what is required for letters to the editor, Google the following: “(Name of the paper) letters to the editor guidelines.” Note the number of words they allow and how a letter is submitted.

- Do you submit it on the newspaper’s website, or do they provide an email address to use?

**2. Think about the placement of the piece:**

If you are writing a letter to a larger newspaper, find an article or editorial that provides a good angle for discussing the bill (e.g. children, Early Childhood Development, coverage on refugee camps, global poverty).

- *Example of approach for larger publication:* “I read with interest the article on last evening’s presidential debates. One subject that was missing from the discussion was needed action on ending global poverty ...”

If you are writing a smaller local paper, you don’t have to reference an article, just write in a way that makes it clear why local readers would care about this issue.

- *Example of approach for smaller publication:* “We know how important it is to make sure children get the attention and stimulation they need in their first 1,000 days of life: reading, singing, and playing with colorful objects. But did you know the difference these same Early Childhood Development activities can make in the lives of the world’s most vulnerable children?”

**3. Research:** Read a few letters to the editor in the newspaper you are targeting to see how they are started and the general tone.

**4. Write your letter:** Use the guidelines the newspaper has provided, and the information included in this Action Sheet. Share what values or experiences move you to work to support the world’s most vulnerable children and have a member of your chapter provide some edits for your letter.

**5. Make sure to include the ask:** Thank the House Foreign Affairs Committee for passing the legislation out of their committee and urge readers to turn their attention to the Senate to contact their U.S. Senators to ask them to co-sponsor and champion the Global Child Thrive Act, **S. 2715**, introduced by Sens. Blunt (R-MO) and Coons (D-DE). If your Senators are already co-sponsors, thank them and urge them to speak to Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman, Jim Risch (R-ID), to urge its consideration. [Check here](#) for Senate co-sponsors or on congress.gov by searching for the name of the bill.

**6. Report back:** If your letter is published, let us know by contacting your CRS Community Engagement Manager. If it’s not published, consider sending it to another newspaper.

**7. Celebrate:** Share it on social media. Send it to your members of Congress!

