

Background Information and Talking Points: COVID-19 and U.S. International Response

LEADING THE WAY ON MIGRATION AND HUNGER

Loving Creator, help and heal all impacted by the coronavirus: patients, healthcare and aid workers, vulnerable families and communities in all the world.

Overview

CRS believes that our work together in the United States is the outward expression of missionary discipleship. Together, we are called to encounter Christ in the members of our human family most in need, and to share the Good News with others, becoming prophetic advocates for justice and the common good. CRS' campaigns to lead the way on the global issues of hunger and forced displacement and migration that allow you to do just this.

Your advocacy, expressed through actions like congressional meetings, letters, letters to the editor, phone calls and other forms of communication with offices, will be an opportunity to take part in these campaigns to support our human family suffering from poverty, hunger, forced migration and displacement and continue building your relationship with your member of Congress and their staff.

As an opportunity to stand with migrants, refugees and those experiencing hunger and malnutrition, your communications and congressional meetings will focus on the global needs resulting from COVID-19 and the ongoing U.S international response to COVID-19 through supporting longstanding development and humanitarian aid. The background information and talking points below can serve as a guide for how to structure your communications and meetings with the offices of your members of Congress so that you can highlight this issue in your conversation. The most important part is to reflect on how you will express why you, and your community, care about these issues—as well as the stories you can share with the offices you meet with about how you and your community are engaged on these issues of importance and support those most vulnerable around the world.

COVID-19 Around the World

COVID-19 continues to devastate families and communities across the United States and world. In the United States, the immediate health crisis, disparate health and economic outcomes for communities of color, increased unemployment and increased food insecurity that have resulted from or been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic must be addressed. Our response as a nation must also be global. In the developing world,

where families and communities face daunting barriers to access needs and services, the impacts on livelihoods and hunger are catastrophic.

The World Bank estimates COVID-19 will cause global extreme poverty to rise for the first time in 20 years and estimates there could be 110 to 150 million people falling back into extreme poverty in 2021.¹ In addition, the World Food Program anticipates serving 138 million people this year, more than ever before, and continues to warn that famine is looming in several countries in crisis.² CRS has also found that 72% of mothers surveyed in Kenya reported that COVID-19 negatively affected their ability to care for their own child or other children in their family. Moreover, CRS programming in Uganda has reported significant increases in child neglect and physical abuse. With the support of the Catholic community in the United States, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and its partners are working tirelessly to respond to COVID-19, knowing that we cannot ultimately protect the vulnerable here if we do not protect the vulnerable everywhere.

CRS' Global Response

Across the world, in partnership with the local Church, governments and organizations, CRS' global response to the COVID-19 pandemic includes:

1) Addressing the immediate health crisis by working with health systems to provide essential services and support in preventing the spread of COVID-19:

- Working to ensure awareness of accurate health information.
- Providing critical hygiene supplies for prevention.
- Training health care staff and providing support—including supplies and protective equipment—for local health institutions.
- Strengthening capacity for local partners to address needs.

2) Helping to mitigate humanitarian, social and economic impacts:

- Strengthening food security, or consistent access to nutritious food, and meeting basic needs.
- Minimizing the impact of job loss.
- Strengthening overall psychological well-being and relationships and cohesion among different community groups.

CRS aims for a locally led COVID-19 response that helps ensure people survive with dignity, rebuild their lives and communities, and strengthen their long-term stability and resilience to future crises.

Lead the Way on Hunger

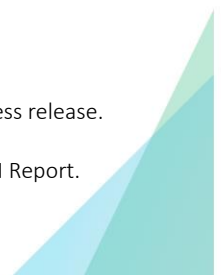
Our Lead the Way on Hunger campaign calls forth a vision where all people have the conditions they need to access regular, healthy food, ensuring optimal nutrition to ultimately thrive.³ For the 1 in 9 people worldwide who already did not have enough to eat before the pandemic and those who are now food insecure with the pandemic, we must support resiliency and sustainable livelihoods when people can return to work safely, improve nutrition and provide lifesaving emergency and development assistance.⁴

¹ [COVID-19 to Add as Many as 150 Million Extreme Poor by 2021](#). World Bank, 7 October 2020. Press release.

² [COVID-19 will double number of people facing food crises unless swift action is taken](#). World Food Program, 21 April 2020. Press release.

³ [Lead the Way on Hunger website](#). Catholic Relief Services.

⁴ [World hunger is still not going down after three years and obesity is still growing](#). World Health Organization. 15 July 2019. UN Report.



CRS focuses on mitigating the risks of the COVID-19 pandemic that affect the highest-risk populations, like vulnerable children, families and communities with limited access to regular, healthy foods. Where possible, CRS is adapting existing programs to continue to meet people's food and nutrition needs during and beyond this crisis, while not contributing to the spread of the virus during the delivery of critical assistance. The response of local governments and partnering organizations is critical to continue supporting programs that meet basic food and nutrition needs and provide long-term sustainable solutions, such as minimizing interruptions to food chains and supporting landscape restoration efforts to make agriculture land more productive. Flexible COVID-19 supplemental funding will allow for the continuation of this holistic response by local governments and partnering organizations, like CRS.

Lead the Way on Migration

Our Lead the Way on Migration campaign is focused on ensuring our sisters and brothers on the move can exercise their right to lead dignified lives, and ultimately thrive.⁵ 79.5 million people are displaced from their homes.⁶ As COVID-19 threatens livelihoods, food systems, and social protections for those on the move, we must ensure they can exercise their right to lead dignified lives and ultimately thrive by addressing root causes for displacement and seeking holistic and long-lasting solutions.

CRS focuses on mitigating the risks facing the highest-risk populations, like refugees and other people uprooted from their communities who are often in densely congested areas, confined living spaces or multi-generational households with limited access to water, health services and infrastructure. Where possible, CRS is adapting existing programs to continue to meet people's needs beyond this crisis, while not contributing to the spread of the virus during the delivery of critical assistance. The response of local governments and partnering organizations is critical to continue supporting programs that meet basic health needs and provide long-term sustainable solutions, such as strengthening existing health systems and global health security by empowering local Ministries of Health and supporting a focus on primary care and universal health coverage. Flexible COVID-19 supplemental funding will allow for the continuation of this holistic response by local governments and partnering organizations, like CRS.

COVID-19 and Congress

Since COVID-19 emerged, Congress has passed multiple bills to provide much-needed emergency aid for communities in need, particularly for U.S. workers and businesses and sick and vulnerable low-income persons. The first and third emergency packages, passed in the spring of 2020, included initial funding, roughly \$1.6 billion, to support preparedness and humanitarian efforts abroad. A bill passed in December 2020 included \$4 billion for GAVI, the global vaccine alliance, to help procure and distribute vaccines around the world. The most recent package, passed in March 2021, included \$10.8B for the overseas response. The funds included in the most recent bill will support bilateral and multilateral health, humanitarian, and economic programming, including projects to support families that are food insecure and on the move. While the amount is not the at least \$20 billion we urged Congress to provide, it is a significant contribution to protect the poor and vulnerable and accelerate an end to the pandemic.

As we look ahead, the international NGO community will pause in requesting an exact amount for COVID-19 supplemental assistance and evaluate future opportunities to support the COVID-19 international response. First, we will thank Congress for passing a bill that included \$10.8B to respond to COVID-19 overseas. Second, we will urge Congress to work with the administration to ensure they expeditiously expend the appropriated funds to support poor and vulnerable communities. Third, we will review global needs and the gaps in services

⁵ [Lead the Way on Migration website](#). Catholic Relief Services.

⁶ [Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2019](#). United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 18 June 2020. Annual Report.

that cannot or will not be met with available resources. Fourth, we will assess the political landscape to determine what is possible to support a more robust U.S. response to international needs.

As we take this pause, we can immediately look toward Fiscal Year 2022 discussions, which will begin in earnest. We expect the administration to provide a budget request sometime in April. Congressional offices have already begun to discuss spending priorities in the annual appropriations bill. While Fiscal Year 2022 does not begin until October and we do not expect a bill to pass before the end of the calendar year, the annual appropriations process is a good place to continue to highlight how the U.S. can prioritize spending on the poor and vulnerable and ensure resources are made available to accelerate an end to the pandemic and support a sustainable recovery.

Now is the time to thank our Members of Congress for their commitment to supporting the overseas response, to lift up ongoing global COVID-19 needs, and to urge them to consider future opportunities to support the longstanding development and humanitarian aid, including in the annual budget and appropriations process.

Talking Points/Ask for Congress

- **Thank you:**
 - **Thank you for giving your time to discuss international development and humanitarian issues.**
 - **Check their website** and thank your member for something they have done in the past. If you cannot find something that relates to the topic or another issue you care about, thank them for their service in Congress.
 - **Want to thank your member of Congress for supporting the recent success of passing the Global Child Thrive Act, a bill CRS helped create, into law?** Consider the following points for expressing gratitude for any specific leadership role they may have held in getting the Global Child Thrive Act passed into law and remind them that this law will maximize our foreign aid investments by integrating early childhood development into existing programs without requiring extra funding and ensuring children and families not only survive but thrive.
 - **Was your member of Congress a co-sponsor?** Check to see if your [U.S. Senator cosponsored S.2715](#) or if your [U.S. Representative cosponsored H.R.4864](#), and thank them for cosponsoring the legislation, if applicable.
 - **Did your member of Congress hold a leadership role to help pass the Global Child Thrive Act into law?** Thank and acknowledge them for their leadership during the 116th Congress if they were a 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.
- **Introduction: Who You Are and Why You Care**
 - Share about the unprecedented level of hunger and forced migration around the world and the need to promote just policies that allow people on the move, especially children, to exercise their right to lead safe and dignified lives, and ultimately thrive.
 - Share about yourself, your work in the state/district and your connection to CRS as you set the stage for the issues.
- **Moving to the issue: Set the Stage for the Conversation**
 - **The U.S. government has long supported children, families and communities living in poverty around the world. I am grateful for bipartisan Congressional leadership in this area. (If you haven't yet shared) I want to share the good news that the Global Child Thrive Act became law in January 2021. This law will maximize our foreign aid investments by integrating early childhood**

development into existing programs without requiring extra funding and ensuring children and families not only survive but thrive.

- Share a story about the benefits of poverty-focused international programs around the world and why it is critically important that the United States build on these successes by ensuring vulnerable individuals and communities can reach their God-given potential.
 - *Pope Francis reminds us, “this is not a time for indifference, because the whole world is suffering and needs to be united in facing the pandemic.”⁷ This crisis has reminded us all how interconnected we are and how important US leadership is.*
 - Share about how the U.S.’ international response to global poverty is more important than ever during the pandemic as it works to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable individuals and communities, who we know are hit hardest now and will continue to be hit the hardest in the future.
 - **Most importantly**, share a personal story about how you and others in your community have worked to mobilize to end the worst aspects of global poverty—particularly around issues of forced migration and hunger.
- **Expression of Support:** We are grateful Congress prioritized and provided **\$10.8 billion** in the most recent COVID-19 supplemental package that was signed into law on March 11, 2021. The funds will support bilateral and multilateral health, humanitarian, and economic programming, including projects to support families that are food insecure and on the move. While the amount is not the at least \$20 billion we urged Congress to provide, it is a significant contribution to protect the poor and vulnerable and accelerate an end to the pandemic.
 - **Make the ask:** We urge Congress to work with the administration to ensure they quickly spend the appropriated supplemental funds to support poor and vulnerable communities. As CRS and the international community continue to review global needs and the gaps in services that cannot or will not be met with available resources, we urge Congress consider future opportunities to support the longstanding development and humanitarian aid, including in the annual budget and appropriations process.

⁷ [Pope Francis’ Easter 2020 Message](#). 12 April 2020. The Vatican Online.

