

Background Information and Talking Points: The Global Child Thrive Law

LEADING THE WAY ON MIGRATION & HUNGER

Overview

CRS believes that our work together in the U.S. 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.

We have campaigns to *lead the way* on the global issues of hunger and forced displacement and migration. Our Lead the Way on Migration campaign is focused on ensuring our brothers and sisters on the move can exercise their right to lead dignified lives, and ultimately thrive. 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.

Your advocacy as 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 communication and congressional meetings will focus on thanking Congress for the passage into law of the Global Child Thrive Act and briefing them on what its enactment will entail. This law directs the administration over the next year to integrate Early Childhood Development activities into current international programs supporting vulnerable children and their families and to report to Congress annually on its progress. The background information and talking points below can serve as a guide for how to structure your meeting with the offices of your members of Congress so that you can highlight this issue in your conversation. The most important part of your preparation 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.

Background on Migration and Hunger

The unprecedented global challenge of COVID-19 requires a comprehensive and extraordinary international response to save lives, care for those affected and ensure human dignity. COVID-19 is particularly dire for communities that are already vulnerable, including refugees, migrants, and those suffering from food insecurity. According to the UN, there are almost 80 million people forcibly displaced around the world, 26 million of whom are refugees, and 135 million people requiring emergency food assistance. The international community already faced daunting challenges in 2020, and COVID-19 exacerbates these existing hardships. As COVID-19 continues

to spread around the world, CRS and our partners are adapting programs to address the needs of older adults and vulnerable children, refugees and migrants, people with compromised immune systems and their caregivers, as well as other high-risk populations.

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.” Serving more than 159 million people in 114 countries in 2019, CRS can attest first-hand to the significant challenges poor and vulnerable communities encounter, especially those who are hungry or have been displaced, and to the impact of poverty-reducing foreign assistance. To end poverty, hunger, and disease, and to support migrants and the forcibly displaced, CRS provides shelter to refugees, helps farmers to grow better crops in the face of climate change or drought, promotes peace in communities divided by differences, creates opportunities for parents and caregivers to learn about nutrition and how to support their children’s development, and provides immediate response in emergencies. CRS is proud to partner with the U.S. government to bring hope and safety to communities—from refugees fleeing Syria to farmers seeking opportunity in El Salvador.

Background on Global Child Thrive Law and Current State of Play

Early Childhood Development

According to a report published in *The Lancet*, “a staggering 43 percent of children under five years of age—an estimated 250 million—living in low- and middle-income countries are at risk of suboptimal development caused by poverty, nutritional deficiencies, and inadequate learning opportunities.”

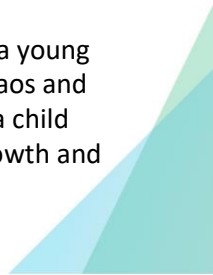
Early childhood is the period of life that begins prenatally and extends to eight years of age. Poor health and nutrition, inadequate learning opportunities, and exposure to conflict and displacement impair children’s ability to reach optimal developmental milestones and can have profound and long-lasting impact on their brains and bodies. The good news is that high-quality interventions can mitigate the impact of these factors. Early Childhood Development (ECD) endeavors to support children’s holistic well-being in these early years when critical brain architecture is built. Integrated Early Childhood Development programming includes age-appropriate mental stimulation and nurturing care such as singing and reading, playing with colorful objects and shapes, and interactive caregiving.

A 20-year study of children in Jamaica by James Heckman, Paul Gertler, and others showed that Early Childhood Development interventions for children zero to three years of age increased their future earnings by 25 percent. Conversely, the failure to invest in ECD has significant repercussions on a country’s economic growth, peace, and prosperity. Adults who experienced suboptimal care during their early childhood years will earn significantly less than the average adult in their country and are more likely to drop out of school. This lost income and potential traps families in poverty, lowers their country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and reduces tax revenues, leaving families and countries with less to spend on health and education.

COVID-19 has exacerbated the challenges faced by vulnerable children worldwide. Experts warn that the impacts of the pandemic, such as increased food insecurity, malnutrition and violence will fall hardest on them. Early Childhood Development can support stressed families to better nurture and protect their little ones from these negative consequences and build their resilience against future shocks.

What is the connection between the realities of forced displacement and children?

We know more today about the effects of toxic stress on a young brain. Being uprooted from home as a young child can have significant negative repercussions on a child’s overall development. For example, the chaos and fear associated with life on the move can directly disrupt a child’s brain development given that when a child feels unsafe, his or her brain will spend more time focusing on survival, rather than on new areas of growth and



exploration. Children experiencing toxic stress will grow smaller brains with fewer neural connections than children who are not traumatized; they may experience speech or reading delays, and later suffer from depression, anxiety, and behavioral issues. In addition, migrants often have a lack of adequate nutrient intake and limited access to health care. This can be particularly devastating if children experience these deprivations during key developmental windows, such as the first years of life. Studies have found that forced migration during early childhood was significantly associated with poor cognitive well-being later in life.

What is the connection between hunger, malnutrition and children?

It is not enough for children to simply have access to food, they need *the right kind of nutritious food with sufficient vitamins, minerals and protein* to properly grow and develop. Hundreds of millions of children worldwide lack access to proper nutritional intake. Malnutrition stunts children's growth and impairs their cognitive and physical development. It is the underlying cause of 45 percent of all preventable deaths worldwide of children under five. Incorporating Early Childhood Development activities (such as helping caregivers to use mealtime as a place to bond with children) into U.S. government-funded food security and nutrition programs multiplies positive outcomes for children. Nutrition programs are more effective and impactful when they are combined with Early Childhood Development (ECD).

Moving from Surviving to Thriving: The United States has been a world leader in saving children's and mothers' lives for the past 30 years. Since 1990, an estimated 100 million children have been saved, due in large part to the United States' investment in child survival programs funded through the annual appropriations process. In addition, maternal mortality rates have dropped 44 percent with the help of U.S. funding. With simple, cost-effective interventions like monitoring children's growth, immunizations, treatment for diarrhea, pneumonia, and malaria, and clean water and sanitation, millions of children and mothers are alive today who otherwise would not be.

While the global community has made great strides in ending the preventable deaths of mothers and children, there is more to be done to multiply the impact of this funding. Millions of children who live through bouts of pneumonia or diarrheal disease because of child survival efforts still bear the burden of poor developmental outcomes. Thanks to new scientific research, we know better how to support human brain growth.

Experts now recommend targeting caregivers and vulnerable children with Early Childhood Development interventions during the first years of life to ensure children living in adversity do not fall below their potential. **With the passage into law of the Global Child Thrive Act, the U.S. government will now prioritize the integration of ECD into international programs that serve children.**

The solution: The Global Child Thrive law mandates where relevant that Early Child Development be integrated into current U.S. foreign aid programs, including CRS programs, that support vulnerable children and their families. The law does not provide for additional funding, just requires the modification of integrating ECD into current U.S. foreign aid programs that serve vulnerable children and their families to ensure the greatest impact. We want to thank Congress for this achievement and to work with Congress to oversee its effective implementation over the next five years ensuring that vulnerable children reach their God-given potential.

What is the State of Play with the law?

With the support and advocacy of many CRS chapter members and campaign supporters, the Global Child Thrive Act was made a priority in the 116th Congress and passed into law on January 1, 2021 as a part of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Therefore, the Global Child Thrive Law now moves into the implementation stage of the policy cycle. Over the next year, the administration will be tasked with integrating ECD into foreign assistance programming that supports vulnerable children and their families and coming up with strategic

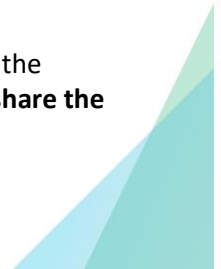
priorities, indicators, outcomes and targets to ensure that progress can be measured and tracked over time. Further, the administration will need to encourage other donor and partner countries to do the same and to coordinate with international bodies such as the World Bank, that are currently investing in ECD. Finally, the administration will be required to report to Congress annually on its progress implementing the law.

The Global Child Thrive Law, authorizes or specifies how appropriated funds are to be used without requiring additional funding. Annually, USCCB and CRS advocate for a broad list of programs that support the poorest and most marginalized populations worldwide through collective appropriations work. These foreign assistance programs that CRS advocates for will now begin to integrate ECD where applicable. CRS will continue to support the protection and in some cases expansion of these programs holistically, which will in turn provide funding for ECD. Further, CRS will be working over the long-term to expand the Vulnerable Children account, as this account funds the Children in Adversity Office, the small office tasked with annually reporting on the Global Child Thrive Law.

Talking Points for Communicating with Congress

Framing

- 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.
 - **Consider the following points** for expressing gratitude for any specific leadership role your member of Congress may have held in getting the Global Child Thrive Act passed into law:
 - *Keep in mind, we are not thanking for the passage of the NDAA holistically given CRS' purview within the Church. Therefore, lead with gratitude to Congress for passing the Global Child Thrive Act into law and then get specific to the leadership role your member of Congress held.*
 - **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 your member of Congress 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 your member of Congress 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 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 and families living in poverty around the world. **I am grateful for bipartisan Congressional leadership in this area and 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 ensuring children and families not only survive preventable diseases but thrive.** This law will multiply the impact of our nation's poverty-focused international development and humanitarian assistance without calling for additional funding by incorporating Early Childhood Development activities into U.S. international programs focused on vulnerable children and their families.
 - 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 children can grow up to thrive and reach their God-given potential.
 - Share about how the Global Child Thrive Law is more important than ever during the pandemic as it works to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on vulnerable families and children, who we know will be hit hardest.
 - **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.

Questions/Comments to Raise

- If your Member of Congress travels abroad, please ask that they let you know if they would like to visit CRS programming. CRS operates in 114 countries around the world and integrates ECD into programs in 20 countries serving 1.36 million children and their families and would welcome an opportunity to show the Member of Congress the impact U.S. dollars have on the ground, when it is safe.
- Ask that they please see you and CRS as resources both in the state/district and in Washington, DC and ask if you can circle back with them to keep them updated on the implementation of the Global Child Thrive law.
- Please express an interest in continuing to dialogue with the Senator/Representative, or his/her staff, on these and other issues of mutual interest and that you hope they will be interested in overseeing the successful implementation of the GCT law to ensure that vulnerable children can reach their God-given potential.

