



**Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development**  
Office of Domestic Social Development

**COVID-19 Relief that Meets the Needs of the Poor & Vulnerable**  
January 2021

*“The pandemic has highlighted how vulnerable and interconnected everyone is. If we do not take care of one another, starting with the least, with those who are most impacted, including creation, we cannot heal the world.”*

*– Pope Francis, Catechesis “Healing the World”: Faith and Human Dignity, August 12, 2020*

**BACKGROUND:**

The COVID-19 pandemic’s historic health and economic crises have created great needs in our communities. We are called to respond in a way that prioritizes those who are poor and vulnerable. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has consistently advocated for Congress to address peoples’ need for food, housing, health care, employment and income support, and safety in prisons and detention facilities. Relief legislation passed by Congress in 2020 has been a lifeline for families and individuals struggling to make ends meet. Still, more is needed to reach all sectors of society and ensure that help lasts for the duration of the economic crisis.

**Hunger and Nutrition**

An increasing number of households do not have enough to eat. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a proven way to combat this food insecurity, delivering resources directly to low-income households and quickly responding to surges in demand for assistance. Recent increases in SNAP benefit amounts will be a great help and should be maintained until the economy recovers. The same is true for flexibilities provided to SNAP and other nutrition programs, so they can best respond to local needs while respecting health guidelines. Continued investments in vital nutrition programs such as the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) will also help respond to food insecurity that has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

**Housing Assistance**

Over half a million Americans experienced homelessness on a given night before the coronavirus pandemic. Millions more are at risk of losing their homes due to the resulting economic crisis. Ensuring stable housing is essential, especially during a public health crisis. Those experiencing homelessness are particularly vulnerable to contracting the coronavirus, are more likely to need acute care if they become infected, and have less opportunity to socially distance in order to keep themselves and others safe. Robust investments in Emergency Solutions Grants, emergency rental assistance, housing counseling services, and mortgage payment assistance as well as greater eviction and foreclosure preventions will help address the health and housing needs of America’s lowest-income renters and people experiencing homelessness.

**Health Care**

Millions of people have lost their health insurance coverage during the pandemic. Individuals who do not have access to employer sponsored insurance, do not qualify for Medicaid, and cannot afford private insurance for their families have a need for affordable healthcare coverage. Necessary efforts to provide such coverage should ensure no federal funding goes to health care plans that cover abortion. Expanding Medicaid resources for states and tribes is an important tool to respond to public health needs while avoiding cuts to healthcare or other vital services. There is a need to address racial inequities in healthcare, which existed in many forms before the COVID-19 crisis and have manifested in disturbingly disproportionate rates of coronavirus infection and death in patients of color. This reality demands a strong federal response to provide more healthcare resources and outreach in communities of color. Additional resources to Community Health Centers and other methods of care for low-income and historically marginalized communities are examples of the

type of investments needed. As is even more clear in a pandemic, the exclusion of some from health care threatens the health of all.

### **Employment and Income Support**

Millions of people are unemployed or suffering lost wages as a result of the pandemic. Continued resources should be available to keep people employed safely, and to assist the unemployed and those struggling to pay bills. Essential workers who are providing critical services to society, often for low pay and at risk to their health, should have access to sufficient resources, particularly personal protective equipment (PPE), to safeguard their health and wellbeing. Additional funding for the Paycheck Protection Program will help people keep their jobs and incentivize employers to hire back workers who have been laid off. Unemployment compensation must remain robust while job opportunities in some sectors suffer longer term reductions. Additional stimulus payments while employment opportunities are reduced would counter deepening economic insecurity for many families. Both the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit are powerful anti-poverty tools, but they exclude too many people in need. These programs can be strengthened and improved by expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit to include childless workers and making the Child Tax Credit fully refundable, making them better able to reduce and overcome poverty.

### **Safety in Prisons, Jails and Detention Centers**

COVID-19 poses a serious threat to those in prisons, jails, and detention centers, which were not designed for social distancing. Congress must act to protect those in these facilities, where the virus is spreading much faster than among the general population. In light of the pandemic, there should be greater consideration for appropriate compassionate release for vulnerable people who are incarcerated and certain fees related to the criminal justice system should be waived, such as fees for phone and video calls. Facilities must be given sufficient healthcare resources to offer good care to those who become ill. States will need additional resources and incentives to implement these policies.

### **USCCB POSITION:**

The U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops strongly supports continued bipartisan efforts to help the millions who have lost health insurance; ensure the safety of persons in prisons, jails, and detention centers; provide additional state and local funding; and prevent relief from expiring or funding from running out while it is still needed. New COVID-19 relief legislation is necessary and must serve the common good and support the wellbeing of those on the margins of our society.

### **RESOURCES:**

The following represent additional USCCB advocacy for COVID-19 Relief:

[Statement Encouraging Lawmakers to Provide Aid to Those Affected by Coronavirus](#) (March 12, 2020)

[Statement Praising Lawmakers for Historic Emergency Legislation on Coronavirus Relief](#) (March 28, 2020)

[Letter to Senate and House Committees on Appropriations](#) (April 9, 2020)

[Letter to Senate and House Committees on the Judiciary](#) (April 9, 2020)

[Letter to Senate Comm. on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions; House Comm. on Education & Labor](#) (April 9, 2020)

[Letter to Senate Committee on Finance; House Committees on Ways & Means; Energy & Commerce](#) (April 9, 2020)

[Statement Urging Leaders to Examine Impact of COVID-19 on African American Communities](#) (May 4, 2020)

[Letter to All Members of Congress on Moral Framework for Health Care](#) (May 7, 2020)

[Statement Expressing Solidarity with Native and Indigenous Communities](#) (May 13, 2020)

[Statement Urging Care for the Poor and Vulnerable in Consideration of COVID-19 Relief](#) (May 22, 2020)

[Letter to All Members of Congress Summarizing All COVID-Related Needs](#) (July 30, 2020)

[Letter to Senate and House leadership on Catholic Education](#) (August 5, 2020)

[Statement on Need for Lawmakers to Reach a Deal and Respond to the Cry of the Poor](#) (September 8, 2020)

[Letter to President and Congressional Leadership on Additional Relief](#) (September 25, 2020)

[Statement Calling for Reconsideration of End of COVID-Relief Discussions](#) (October 7, 2020)

[Statement Commending Urgently Needed Bipartisan COVID Relief Package](#) (December 28, 2020)

Contact: Michael O'Rourke, Office of Domestic Social Development, [morourke@usccb.org](mailto:morourke@usccb.org)

Julie Bodnar, Office of Domestic Social Development, [jbodnar@usccb.org](mailto:jbodnar@usccb.org)

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**Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development  
Office of International Justice and Peace**

**Background on International Assistance and Diplomacy  
February 2021**

*“The overriding consideration, never to be forgotten, is that we are all members of the one human family. The moral obligation to care for one another flows from this fact, as does the correlative principle of placing the human person, rather than the mere pursuit of power or profit, at the very center of public policy.”- Pope Francis, World Economic Forum, 2020*

**BACKGROUND:**

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) strongly support international poverty-reducing humanitarian and development assistance. In the recently passed Fiscal Year 2021 appropriations, this aid amounts to \$25 billion, just over one-half percent of all federal spending. The programs supported by this funding serve the poorest and most vulnerable communities in the developing world to save lives, reduce violent conflict, and defend people’s dignity. The programs provide agricultural assistance to help poor farmers feed their families; medicines to extend the lives of people with HIV and AIDS; cost-effective vaccines to prevent diseases; and mosquito nets to avert malaria. Furthermore, aid assists orphans and vulnerable children; early childhood development; people facing famine in Africa; refugees and nations devastated by conflicts such as in Syria and Yemen; and peacekeepers to protect innocent civilians in places like South Sudan and Mali.

International poverty-reducing humanitarian and development assistance has helped more than one billion people lift themselves from extreme poverty since 1990. The President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) has saved 20 million lives while the President’s Malaria Initiative has saved over 7.6 million lives. And on average, the U.S. government responds to 75 humanitarian crises in more than 70 countries each year, providing life-saving food, water, shelter, and other critical aid.

While we have witnessed success, incredible challenges remain. Covid-19 has begun to undermine development progress. Research by the United Nations indicates that Covid-19 has the potential to reverse 30 years of reducing global poverty; the economic fallout could push half a billion people into poverty. In addition, the number of forcibly displaced persons, 79.5 million, is at an all-time high. Increased conflict and fragility, as well as climate disruptions have also disrupted progress, altering people’s ability to grow food, pursue viable livelihoods and fundamentally survive. Moreover, inequality continues to grow, further exacerbating conflict and endangering social cohesion.

**USCCB and CRS POSITION:**

USCCB and CRS support international assistance because it is effective in upholding the sacredness and dignity of all human life from conception to natural death, and nurturing peaceful and just societies. In Fratelli Tutti, Pope Francis reminds us all that, “What we need in fact are states and civil institutions that are present and active, that look beyond the free and efficient working of certain economic, political or ideological systems, and are primarily concerned with individuals and the common good.” The Church views international aid as an essential tool for promoting human life and dignity, reducing poverty, advancing global solidarity, and enhancing peace and security throughout the world. International assistance is a moral responsibility to assist “the least of these” (Matthew 25). Therefore, assistance must

3211 Fourth St., NE. Washington, DC 20017. Tel: (202)541-3160 Fax: (202)541-3339

be an expression of our solidarity with all people living in poverty, not an exercise in short-term self-interest, or self-promotion.

USCCB and CRS will work with the new Administration and the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress to renew and increase our commitments to meet humanitarian and development needs. More broadly, we will urge the United States government to rededicate itself to eliminate poverty and alleviate human suffering. A revitalized commitment is even more crucially important at a time when the world faces Covid-19, the worst pandemic to strike in a hundred years. The United States must rise to this challenge and show the world that they will protect all of God's children from this menace.

Since 2019 the USCCB has urged Congress and the Administration to address another important challenge of our time: make conflict prevention a top priority. The United States must increase investments in building peace, human rights and accountable, transparent governance to eliminate the root causes of violent conflict. This calls for a more balanced approach to violent conflict requiring new investment in diplomacy and development rather than defense. It also calls for targeting these resources on the poorest and most fragile states and where the impacts of climate change are the greatest.

Shortly after the 9/11 attacks the U.S. Bishops' Conference warned, "Our nation must join with others in addressing policies and problems that provide fertile ground in which terrorism can thrive." Our political leaders need to look beyond a limited focus on counter-terrorism to address the poverty and powerlessness that leave people vulnerable to violence and terror. The U.S. Institute of Peace issued a report called "Beyond the Homeland – Protecting America from Extremism in Fragile States". Their conclusion is *Going forward, the priority for U.S. policy should be to strengthen fragile states—to help them build resilience against the alarming growth of violent extremism within their own societies.*

Furthermore, the Brookings Institute estimates that by 2030, 31 countries will be home to 80% of people living in extreme poverty. Africa now accounts for two-thirds of the world's extreme poor and will reach nine-tenths by 2030. If Africa is the center of poverty in the world, it is also ground zero when it comes to fragility and conflict. Of the 25 most fragile countries in the 2018 Fragile State Index created by the Fund for Peace, 19 are in Africa. If the United States wants to create a more prosperous and peaceful world and one that will align with our national interests, we must prioritize those countries where poverty and fragility are the greatest threat to international stability.

In 2021, CRS and the USCCB will work to ensure that Congress and the Administration prioritize global solidarity, the common good, and efforts to promote peace and prosperity in the poorest and most fragile countries of the world.

#### **ACTION REQUESTED:**

Urge Congress **(1) to provide at least \$20 billion in emergency spending to respond to COVID-19 overseas and (2) to increase funding for international poverty-reducing development and humanitarian programs in Fiscal Year 2022 appropriations** to save lives, address the root causes of conflicts, and reduce crushing poverty. (See chart for programs supported by USCCB and CRS.)

**RESOURCES:** Visit: [www.usccb.org/about/international-justice-and-peace/](http://www.usccb.org/about/international-justice-and-peace/). Contact: Steve Hilbert, USCCB Office of International Justice and Peace, [shilbert@usccb.org](mailto:shilbert@usccb.org), 202-541-3149.



**Department of Migration and Refugee Services  
Office of Migration Policy & Public Affairs**

**Background on Immigration Reform  
February 2021**

*“So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God’ (Eph 2:19). It is not just about migrants: it is about building the city of God and man.”  
–Pope Francis, 105th World Day of Migrants and Refugees (2019)*

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### **Why is immigration reform important?**

An estimated [10.5 million undocumented immigrants](#) live in the United States and could be deported because of their lack of legal status. These individuals and their families have lived in the United States many years, participate in the workforce, and contribute to local society. However, they are at risk of mistreatment from local and federal law enforcement – including racial profiling – and exploitation by their employers, primarily due to their undocumented status. Immigration reform would include a legalization process that would provide protections for these vulnerable individuals and their families.

While the existing immigration system is majority family-based with procedures that help reunite and keep families together, currently immediate family members of legal permanent residents often must wait ten years or longer to legally join their loved ones in the U.S. In recent years, there have been efforts to dismantle the family-based immigration system which the Catholic Church opposes. It is critical to maintain an emphasis on family unity in the immigration system and craft legislation that will protect and strengthen family-based immigration.

### **What should immigration reform legislation include?**

In the 2003 pastoral statement [Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope](#), the U.S. Catholic Bishops outlined principles for immigration reform and highlighted the need for systemic reforms. To this end, the USCCB has consistently advocated for immigration reform legislation that should include the following points:

1. *Ensure access to permanent legal status and a path to citizenship for current residents.* Given the millions of hardworking, undocumented migrants already living in the United States—some for many years—legalization provisions are needed. These should cover Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients and their parents, Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders, farmworkers, and essential workers.
2. *Reaffirm and prioritize family unity and reunification.* Any legislation should contain language that strengthens families and maintains the long-standing family unity emphasis in immigration law. Such family-focused policies include: (1) measures that establish legal pathways and waivers that enable families to maintain unity or restore it for those families already torn apart, (2) removal of the three- and ten-year bars to lawful immigration, (3) utilize prior unused family-based immigration visas, and (4) mechanisms that will clear current backlogs and ensure timely family reunification.
3. *Reform the immigration detention system.* Immigration reform legislation should eliminate the use of detention as a method of deterrence, end the use of for-profit corporations in immigration detention,



reserve detention only for individuals who are national security or public safety threats, expand community-based alternatives to detention (ATDs) which ensure immigration compliance in a humane way, and include other reforms that will protect vulnerable migrants and their families.

4. *Evaluate and revise immigration enforcement strategies, both along the U.S.-Mexico border and within the interior, to ensure the just and humane treatment of all migrants.* Border management should reflect broader U.S. economic and humanitarian interests and prioritize the wellbeing of local communities. This requires a prohibition on the use of military resources and personnel along the border, as well as the separation of local policing from interior enforcement. Additionally, reform legislation should require the identification and protection of vulnerable populations—such as children—as part of any interior enforcement strategy.

5. *Promote access to asylum and due process.* Immigration reform legislation should limit policies that place undue burdens on asylum and instead establish reasonable and achievable pathways to citizenship for refugees and asylum seekers. To facilitate this, universal access to *pro bono* legal programs must be supported.

6. *Adopt policies that address the root causes of migration.* Political and religious persecution, environmental degradation, and economic underdevelopment and exclusion have long been factors driving people to leave their homelands. It is important to consider including policies that will mitigate factors that drive irregular immigration and promote interventions that will allow people to thrive in their homeland.

### **The importance of a legislative solution**

For many years, Congress has failed to meaningfully address immigration reform through legislation. This has contributed to the tendency to have immigration policies decided by the Executive Branch, leading to inconsistent approaches as one administration transitions into another. This is untenable and must end. Immigration reform legislation would reintroduce consistency and modernize our existing immigration system.

### **ACTION REQUESTED:**

Engage your elected officials to support bipartisan immigration reform that gives a path to citizenship to the undocumented, addresses root causes, protects farmworkers, upholds the rule of law, and restores due process for asylum seekers.

**RESOURCES:** Visit [www.usccb.org/committees/migration/migrants-refugees-and-travelers](http://www.usccb.org/committees/migration/migrants-refugees-and-travelers) and contact Todd Scribner, Department of Migration and Refugee Services, [tscibner@usccb.org](mailto:tscibner@usccb.org).