

GLOBAL EMERGENCY UPDATE

This update provides the latest reports from Catholic Relief Services teams and partners carrying out vital emergency relief and recovery efforts around the world. Our work is possible thanks to the generous support of private and public donors, the dedication of local partners, and the unwavering presence of Caritas and the local Catholic Church.



Women in Ethiopia's Oromia state, where the worst drought in 50 years has left rivers and lakes completely dried out, collect what little water they can find. Read more on page 5. Photo by Petterik Wiggers for CRS

AFRICA

ETHIOPIA The country is facing its worst drought in half a century. Failed rainy seasons have led to severely reduced harvests and a shortage of food. CRS is responding with food, agricultural and livelihoods support for more than 2.8 million people.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC The inauguration of a new president on March 30 has brought hope to a country besieged by violence. CRS is helping devastated communities recover their farms, shelters, livelihoods and peaceful relationships.

SOUTH SUDAN A record 5.8 million people in the country—half the population—are facing a severe hunger crisis due to poor rains and ongoing conflict. CRS is providing emergency food and water systems, and supporting agriculture and income recovery.

NIGERIA Nigerians are fleeing the violence of militant group Boko Haram, which has carried out attacks in the northeast and killed more than 13,000 people since 2009—including 10,000 in 2014. CRS is providing emergency food assistance, health care, and access to water and sanitation.

ASIA

NEPAL This month marks 1 year since the country's devastating earthquake, which claimed 8,669 lives and destroyed more than 500,000 homes.

CRS and Caritas Nepal are well into recovery activities in the most affected communities across the Gorkha district.

EUROPE + THE MIDDLE EAST

EUROPE The refugee crisis continues to escalate. In March, all Balkan states closed their borders to refugees and migrants, and a new deal between the European Union and Turkey has led to the start of deportations from Greece back to Turkey. CRS is supporting the most vulnerable refugees in Greece and the Balkans with a range of critical relief and support.

SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS The humanitarian needs facing Syrians across the Middle East are increasing as the situation inside the country deteriorates. CRS is working in neighboring countries to provide food, shelter, counseling, and medical and educational support.

IRAQ At least 3.3 million people in Iraq have fled their homes and towns due to the increasing presence and violence of the militant group ISIS. CRS is working closely with Caritas Iraq to provide shelter, food, living supplies and basic education to more than 100,000 children and adults.

EUROPE

REFUGEE + MIGRANT CRISIS



CONTEXT

The refugee crisis continues to evolve. In March, all Balkan states closed their borders to refugees and migrants. These countries had been a major pathway for those attempting to reach Germany, Sweden and other countries. According to the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, the new laws and border closures have left an estimated 50,000 refugees and migrants stranded in Greece.

The Greek government has provided three options for refugees and migrants: 1) apply for asylum in Greece; 2) apply for relocation to another European country; or 3) return to their country of origin voluntarily. This process is expected to be lengthy, as Greek



Mahadi, an Afghan refugee, eats at a soup kitchen in Greece run by CRS partner Caritas Athens. Photo by Andrew McConnell for CRS

authorities are struggling to scale up sufficient services while also building the capacity to process cases for asylum, relocation, and returns or deportations.

Also in March, the European Union and Turkey agreed that any refugees or migrants arriving irregularly in Greece from Turkey after March 20 may be sent back to Turkey if they fail to apply for asylum or if their claim is rejected. For each Syrian returned to Turkey from the Greek islands, another Syrian who has made a legitimate request will be resettled in Europe. The agreement met with strenuous objections from humanitarian groups, who warned that it violated international law on the treatment of refugees.

Greece is bearing some of the greatest burdens in Europe, as it received 70 percent of the more than 1 million people who arrived in Europe last year. Already this year, at least 152,981 refugees and migrants have arrived in the country, 37 percent of them children. This year, 366 people have died on the route from Turkey to Greece. With their options in flux and conditions increasingly perilous, refugee families need food, supplies, shelter and clear information about their legal options for seeking asylum and international protection.

Pope Francis visited the Greek island of Lesbos on April 16.

CRS RESPONSE

CRS and our Church and local partners have helped 341,046 people in Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Albania and Bulgaria. Support has included food, winter clothing, cash grants for basic needs, sanitation supplies, temporary shelter, legal aid and translation assistance. We continue to adapt our priorities to the evolving situation.

Shelter and infrastructure support:

CRS and its Caritas partners are increasing support for dignified shelter in vacant hotels, apartments and office buildings with access to services. This is a much-welcomed alternative to the many camps that are often isolated and poorly equipped. In Macedonia, CRS paved a key road to the Serbian border, improved sewage systems and leveled the terrain around the main camp. We also provided several large structures where refugees can have a hot meal, access basic toilet and shower facilities, and receive counseling and medical assistance.

Food and living supplies: CRS manages service hubs providing hot meals, clothing, sleeping mats, hygiene kits, food rations and clean water. Where conditions allow, CRS and partners use a market-based approach—for example, the use of vouchers or cash grants redeemed in pre-identified stores.

Medical assistance: Doctors treat a variety of conditions daily—including flu-like symptoms, and blisters and injuries from days of walking—and offer care for newborns and children.

Information, translation and legal resources: Families learn which services and options for asylum or resettlement are available, and can make informed decisions. At service hubs, social workers offer one-on-one sessions and make referrals to appropriate services for vulnerable cases. CRS and partners use multiple communications tools like social media, megaphones, fliers, notice

boards at transit sites and mobile texting. Interpreters facilitate communications among refugees and migrants, aid agencies and the government.

Support for children and people with disabilities:

Baby carriers, wheelchairs and appropriate clothing are available at emergency relief shops and day centers. Also available are private spaces for showers and referrals to government and medical services.

SPOTLIGHT

Watch [the latest video](#) about CRS efforts in Greece.



SYRIA

REFUGEE CRISIS



Rama attends a CRS-supported school in Jordan that helps refugee children catch up to their grade level after missing class. *Photo by Oscar Durand for CRS*

CONTEXT

Over the past 5 years, the Syrian conflict has claimed at least 250,000 lives. More than 11 million people have had to flee their homes. Countries like Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon bear a heavy burden as their economies, social services and infrastructures struggle to absorb an estimated 4.1 million refugees. Half of all Syrian refugees are children.

CRS RESPONSE

Since the crisis began in 2011, CRS has helped more than 1 million Syrians. Across the affected countries—including Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt—CRS works with the Catholic Church and other local partners with deep roots in the region. This network allows CRS to help people quickly and efficiently, with the trust of local communities. Our priorities include:

Shelter and rent assistance: Monthly rent stipends support the majority of refugees, who live in urban areas. With few opportunities to earn an income, the stipends help prevent homelessness, squatting and destitution.

Children’s education, support and trauma counseling: CRS is supporting education, tutoring, recreational activities and trauma counseling for children.

Living supplies: Prepackaged relief kits equip new arrivals with bedding, stoves, buckets and other items.

Food: CRS supports cash and voucher programs so people can buy the food they need. Giving families choices respects their dignity and helps support the local economy.

Medical assistance: This includes immediate care for life-threatening wounds, care for chronic conditions like diabetes, and maternal and child care.

Hygiene and sanitation: CRS and our partners are providing vouchers for soap, laundry detergent, diapers and other sanitary supplies to keep families healthy.

“In 5 years, these children have witnessed a lot: violence, war, displacement and the tough conditions they’re living in right now. We’re talking about traumatized children. When Caritas provides educational services, we say it’s an act of love. We all wish for these children that our support will help them keep the flame of hope burning for a better future.”

Samar Bandak, Caritas Jordan



1 million

**SINCE THE CRISIS BEGAN IN 2011,
CRS HAS HELPED MORE THAN
1 MILLION SYRIANS**

CRS is supporting the education of 7,750 refugee children in Jordan, including kindergarten classes for 250 in the capital, Amman. *Photo by Oscar Durand for CRS*

IRAQ

CONFLICT



Local volunteers, most from displaced communities in northern Iraq, are trained by CRS engineers to install doors and windows in the unfinished buildings where families have sought temporary shelter. *Photo by Kim Pozniak/CRS*

CONTEXT

Escalating violence in northern and central Iraq has caused devastation and mass displacement since January 2014. Last year, more than 7,500 people were killed and nearly 15,000 injured in acts of terrorism, violence and armed conflict. ISIS has taken control of large parts of the country and continues to single out and threaten religious minorities—including Christians, Shia Muslims, Yazidis and Turkmen—although civilians of all ethnic and religious backgrounds have been uprooted, including Sunni Muslims. In March, the U.S. government declared that ISIS is committing genocide and crimes against humanity against religious minorities and other groups.

More than 3.3 million Iraqis have fled to other parts of the country. At least 1.5 million of them are living in Iraqi Kurdistan, a region in the northernmost part of the country. Despite recent military gains by the Kurdish and Iraqi forces fighting ISIS, very few civilians have returned to their homes. Compounding this crisis, Iraqi Kurdistan is hosting an estimated 280,000 Syrian refugees. Faced with the cost of war and revenues affected by lower oil prices, the Kurdish and central governments are providing less humanitarian aid than in 2015, although the number of displaced families continues to grow.

The influx of displaced families to Iraqi Kurdistan has put a significant strain on local communities. More than 80 percent of displaced people are living outside of organized camps, with host families or in makeshift or unfinished dwellings. All in all, nearly 10 million people in Iraq require humanitarian assistance.

CRS RESPONSE

CRS and its local Catholic partner, Caritas Iraq, have helped more than 116,900 displaced Iraqis. We established offices in Dohuk and Erbil shortly after the displacements began in summer 2014. In 2015, CRS expanded its reach to Kirkuk governorate and now has 50 Iraqi staff in total. We are currently preparing a humanitarian response to the most recent displacement of people in Baghdad and areas of Anbar province.

Shelter improvements and water and sanitation facilities:

CRS is repairing and improving empty, unfinished buildings that have become homes for families displaced by violence. This includes provision of windows and doors for protection from the elements; internal partitions and sealed-off gaps to improve privacy; and installation of showers, toilets, sinks and water tanks. To date, CRS has improved 1,500 buildings serving 35,252 people, and provided water and sanitation to 19,454 people.

Winter living supply kits: CRS provided critical winter supply kits—with blankets, carpets, heaters and kerosene—to 25,377 people. Where possible, families received cash to buy the supplies, which ensured the local economy was not undermined by aid efforts. Cash grants have helped 35,137 people buy additional critical living supplies.

Education and counseling for children:

CRS has established 9 child support centers to provide counseling and educational services to 3,845 children aged 6 to 12 years. In addition, CRS is working with the Iraqi Department of Education to transform these centers into formal schools. CRS has identified and trained 50 teachers and classroom assistants, and will supplement the government curriculum to support the needs of traumatized children.

Food assistance: CRS is providing monthly food assistance through vouchers and cash grants that have served 30,072 people.

Emergency preparedness: CRS and Caritas Iraq are building local capacities by establishing a network of Church and non-Church volunteers, and relationships with different stakeholders in anticipation of continued large-scale displacement.

“When we heard the threat from ISIS, I ran, leaving everything behind. But we are in a better position than other people. We are fortunate for where we are staying. When we arrived, the priest here said: ‘Welcome, welcome. You have no worries here.’”

Salah Adel Avob, father whose displaced family is receiving CRS support in Sarsung

ETHIOPIA

DROUGHT CRISIS



Teshome Tesfaye sits next to his wife, Biftu, hours after she gave birth to their son. Crops will not grow, food is running out and Teshome cannot find work. The family receives emergency food rations from CRS, which is providing monthly food baskets to 2.8 million people. *Photo by Petterik Wiggers for CRS*

CONTEXT

Ethiopia is facing its worst drought in half a century. Two failed rainy seasons last year and poor rains early this year, have led to severely reduced harvests and a shortage of food. Where the landscape should be green at this time of year, it is cracked, dusty and brown. Bridges cross deep river beds filled with only rocks and dirt, empty of water. Ethiopia is completely dependent on rainfed agriculture: 85 percent of the population are farmers. Without rain, their lives are altered.

The impacts of the drought are diverse and far-reaching. First, without rain, families cannot grow food to eat. Second, without crops to sell, farmers cannot earn incomes. And third, many people without land earn a living as day laborers, harvesting crops. Without productive land to cultivate, laborers are also unable to earn incomes.

As a result, people are turning to increasingly desperate coping

mechanisms. Many are selling their livestock—often a family’s most valuable asset—at very low prices, to buy food and basic supplies like clothing for their children. Some are migrating or sending their older children to urban areas to find any kind of work available. Many families tell CRS about eating fewer meals, only one or two per day, and about lacking nutrition.

More than 10 million people are facing hunger and malnutrition, and depend on emergency food aid—a number that is expected to grow as rains that were anticipated in March were poor. The government has called for international assistance.

The upcoming summer season will be critical: If rains come, people will be able to begin recovering. Without rains or immediate aid, the number of people who need emergency food assistance could rise above 15 million.

CRS RESPONSE

CRS is boosting assistance to provide emergency food aid to 2.8 million people. We are also investing heavily in seeds for this year’s planting season. CRS continues to collaborate with the government of Ethiopia at all stages, working in the Oromia, Amhara and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples’ regions. Activities include:

- Providing emergency food—like wheat, barley, yellow split peas and fortified vegetable oil—to 2.8 million people through the Joint Emergency Operation Program, supported with funds from the U.S. Agency for International Development.
- Holding seed and voucher fairs that rely on commercial seed firms as well as local seed producers and traders.
- Distributing seeds from local and regional suppliers where functioning markets and seeds are not available.
- Planting hundreds of acres with distributed seed and monitoring crop performance.
- Strengthening community resilience through income opportunities; soil and water conservation; restoration of crops; and improvements in water and sanitation systems and local infrastructure.
- Supporting Savings and Internal Lending Communities to boost financial stability.

IMPACT OF DEVELOPMENT IN THE FACE OF CRISIS

In the past 13 years, Ethiopia has achieved sustained economic growth that has nearly doubled its economy, thanks to investment in development, agriculture and water programs. Improved infrastructure and market stability have reduced malnutrition and food shortages over the past decade and allowed for humanitarian organizations, the government and communities to be in a much better position to withstand emergencies. Despite these important gains, Ethiopia remains highly vulnerable, particularly to climate change. The combination of a burgeoning population—which has grown 40 percent since 2003 to approximately 100 million people—and dependence on rainfed agriculture leaves the economy and its people at risk of drought.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

VIOLENCE + INSECURITY



In devastated areas of the Central African Republic, land is seeded and cultivated again thanks to a CRS program. *Photo by Michael Stulman/CRS*

CONTEXT

President Faustin-Archange Touadéra was inaugurated on March 30 with the support of the international community, following a second round of legislative elections that took place in relative calm, despite fears of violence. This brings hope to people who have experienced 3 years of near-constant civil strife that has killed more than 5,000 people and displaced 1 million.

CRS RESPONSE

CRS works with partners to provide humanitarian assistance integrated with social cohesion and trauma-healing activities. Savings and Internal Lending Communities and agricultural interventions are helping people rebuild their lives and earn an income. CRS uses a comprehensive, market-based shelter response that provides both labor and building materials.

CRS also helps community leaders and local authorities share critical information and educational messages via radio, covering topics like social cohesion, security and gender-based violence. CRS teams conducted 10 days of research for a Cameroon-Central African Republic cross-border conflict analysis that will be used to plan ongoing social cohesion efforts.

IMPACT TO DATE

Food, agriculture and livelihoods

- Launched an awareness campaign in March to alert 50 farmer groups to upcoming seed distributions, explaining how best to prepare their fields for the planting season.
- Supported 21,881 families with seeds and farming tools for the planting season.
- Provided post-harvest kits—storage sacks, water jugs and tarpaulins—to 2,940 families.
- Repaired 15 grain mills for farmer groups.
- Taught agricultural techniques to 55 farmer groups and trained staff to support them and the seed distribution process.
- Trained 250 families to prepare their land for rebuilding and placing latrines.
- Provided vaccinations for 1,300 animals, supporting 400 herders.
- Bought 1,300 fuel-efficient stoves for extremely vulnerable families, reducing the safety risks associated with searching for firewood.
- Launched a SILC in the town of Bouar. Trained 28 new SILC groups that launched their activities in March. There are now 216 such groups with more than 3,940 members.

Shelter and cash-for-work

- Supported 1,400 families in March alone with shelter materials and labor support.

- Supported cash-for-work opportunities that restored 6 fish farms and 6,000 feet of drainage channels, and repaired 6 bridges.
- Provided cash grants to 3,085 people to buy straw for roofing.
- Provided shelter kits to 5,200 families and living supplies to 12,221 families.
- Provided cash-for-work opportunities to 377 people to repair a cement bridge, restore vegetable stalls and improve 656 feet of road.
- Engaged 450 families in cash-for-work activities that repaired 15 miles of road.

Social cohesion

- Led a workshop to help 25 pastoral agents learn how to manage individual and community trauma.
- Will quadruple the number of trained trauma-healing facilitators due to increased demand for community-based trauma healing. Workshops include survivors, community leaders and representatives of local organizations and are part of CRS' Secure Empowered and Connected Communities project.
- Attended a workshop with members of youth civil society organizations. CRS' social cohesion team was invited to the workshop by the U.S. Embassy.
- Brought community members together on local projects, such as repairing schools and rehabilitating playing fields.
- Trained field workers on early warning systems.
- Hosted 800 interfaith and local leaders for peacebuilding, trauma-healing workshops.

faith. action. results.



Uprooted families in Jonglei, South Sudan, wait to be called for their monthly CRS emergency food rations. *Photo by Ric Francis for CRS*

SOUTH SUDAN

CONFLICT + DISPLACEMENT



CONTEXT

A record 5.8 million people in South Sudan—half its population—are facing a severe hunger crisis due to poor rains and ongoing conflict. Since 2013, the country has been embroiled in internal conflict, largely recognized as a struggle between its two largest ethnic groups: the Dinka and the Nuer. President Salva Kiir Mayardit is from the Dinka tribe and former Vice President Riek Machar is from the Nuer. Tens of thousands of people have been killed in ethnic clashes.

The Jonglei, Unity and Upper Nile states are directly affected by the fighting, while other states are dealing with the influx of 1.6 million displaced people. Due to insecurity in the area, it is difficult to reach and deliver assistance to those in need. These areas are already underdeveloped because of decades of war between Sudan and South Sudan. The population largely consists of subsistence farmers and pastoralists, with minimal coping strategies for disasters.

Early this month, the United Nations reported that the proportion of people who are “moderately or severely food insecure”—those who do not have enough to eat or cannot afford the food that is available—had risen to a high of 49 percent.

CRS RESPONSE

Since January 2015, CRS and Caritas teams have:

- Distributed food and nutritional supplements to 506,321 people.
- Repaired 80 boreholes; formed and trained 65 water-user committees.
- Trained 195 community hygiene promoters, who passed on hygiene messages to 148,407 people.
- Distributed hygiene and shelter kits to 13,458 families.
- Trained 4,000 farmers on post-harvest storage and provided 4,000 bags of grain.
- Formed 86 Saving and Internal Lending Communities and provided training to 50 groups.
- Continued collaboration with the Church and other organizations to support peacebuilding and reconciliation.
- Ensured income for 36,235 people through cash-for-work activities.

506,321

PEOPLE HAVE RECEIVED FOOD AND NUTRITIONAL SUPPLEMENTS FROM CRS AND CARITAS

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN SOUTH SUDAN

CRS is providing comprehensive support to vulnerable families in the states of Lakes and Jonglei. The Church is one of the few institutions in South Sudan that has the credibility, capacity and presence to effectively address concerns affecting society at large. It was a source of humanitarian and spiritual support during the civil war between Sudan and South Sudan.

NIGERIA

CONFLICT + FOOD INSECURITY



CONTEXT

Nigerians are fleeing the violence of militant group Boko Haram, which has carried out attacks in the northeast and killed more than 13,000 people since 2009—including 10,000 in 2014. The group has planted bombs in public places, abducted women and girls, forcefully conscripted young men and boys, and destroyed villages and towns. As recently as February 11, an attack killed 58 people at Dikwa refugee camp.

Also in the northeast, at least 2.1 million Nigerians have been internally displaced, 92 percent of them living with host families and the remainder in camps. Those living with families are dispersed and much more difficult to reach than those in camps. Most of the displaced are farmers, herders and traders. Violence has had a serious impact on cultivation, harvesting and livestock herding. The economy has taken a heavy hit in the northeastern states of Yobe and Adamawa, and Boko Haram's home state of Borno, devastating local agriculture and opportunities to earn incomes.

The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimates that 7 million people in the northeast lack access to sufficient food and need immediate food assistance. Violence has disrupted people's abilities to farm, herd livestock and trade goods. The host community has been the largest responder to the crisis, and resources are increasingly stretched as the displacement crisis enters its third year.



Mwuese Jato—a widow and head of a 14-member household—notes her farming activities in a records book CRS designed for farmers in Nigeria. *Photo by Michael Stulman/CRS*

CRS RESPONSE

Emergency food assistance: CRS is providing monthly assistance through food and e-vouchers to 17,000 people in Bursari. In May, we will scale up assistance to 51,000 people throughout northern Yobe state.

Water, sanitation and hygiene: CRS is providing an initial 1,000 families with hygiene supplies and soap in a pilot project using e-vouchers through smart cards. The project will apply a market-based approach to strengthen the local economy and businesses. Each family will be required to attend an educational session on water and sanitation to qualify.

Health care: CRS is supporting 259,483 children through polio immunization and

providing general health counseling to their caregivers through the CORE Group Partners Project. We are also supporting care for malnutrition, diarrhea, pneumonia and other illnesses at health camps and temporary clinics in underserved communities.

Collaboration: CRS is coordinating a process for defining households and household size to improve equity for aid recipients. CRS and other organizations in Yobe meet regularly to share information and lessons learned, coordinate services and prevent duplication. CRS co-leads the Yobe State Food Security Group and helped start a Cash and Markets Technical Working Group to convene organizations that deliver cash assistance.

NEPAL

EARTHQUAKE



CONTEXT

This month marks 1 year since Nepal's devastating earthquake, which claimed 8,669 lives and destroyed more than 500,000 homes. CRS and our partner Caritas Nepal are well into recovery activities to support some of the most-affected communities in Gorkha district.

Our emergency efforts include technical assistance for rebuilding permanent shelters; water, sanitation and hygiene reconstruction; and cash assistance to rebuild assets and buy critical supplies. CRS' strategy for recovery programming over the next 4 years focuses on safe shelter, protecting the environment during reconstruction and ensuring resilient livelihoods.



Kumari Gurung raises chicks to supplement her income since the collapse of her family's hotel during the earthquake. CRS has provided construction materials and a cash grant to construct a temporary hotel. *Photo by Jen Hardy/CRS*

IMPACT TO DATE

CRS and Caritas Nepal have assisted 171,620 people with emergency relief and recovery support. This includes:

- Emergency and transitional shelter to 22,915 families.
- Water, sanitation and hygiene kits for 10,604 families, schools and health posts.
- Support to 404 vendors, helping them recover their livelihoods.
- Winter kits for 7,180 families.

- Grants to 16,774 families, to buy shelter supplies.
- Training for 142 masons on earthquake-resistant shelter reconstruction techniques.

Working closely with local communities and the government, we are now helping people lay a foundation for a full recovery, with an emphasis on strengthened markets and safe shelter.

SPOTLIGHT: A FOCUS ON MARKET-BASED RECOVERY

CRS is working with communities to rebuild their livelihoods and restore their economies. When our evaluations show that local markets have key items for sale, we provide coupons or cash for people to use at their local shops or fairs. Cash grants and vouchers are redeemable for goods and services like shelter materials, living supplies, tools and hygiene kits. This method has multiple benefits: It helps local vendors get back to business, injects cash into disaster-stricken economies and ensures that people are the decision-makers in their recovery.

Our experience has shown that when we identify families in most need, they spend cash and vouchers responsibly. When local markets are depleted of goods and resources, CRS buys food and supplies from markets as close to the community, country and region as possible. Flexibility to local needs, context and conditions are critical to a successful emergency relief and recovery effort.

[Click here](#) to read about Kumari Gurung's recovery.



Photo by Jake Lyell/CRS