



CWS: A BRIEF HISTORY



Church World Service was born in the wake of the devastation of World War II. Seventeen Christian denominations came together “to do in partnership what none of us could hope to do as well alone.”

In our early days, the CWS family mobilized more than 11 million pounds of food, clothing and medical supplies for war-torn Europe and Asia. In the United States, we began to welcome refugees who were looking to start new lives in safety, resettling more than 100,000 refugees in our first 10 years.

Over the decades, the specifics of our programs have shifted and evolved. The CWS family has grown. And our foundation of collaboration and welcome has remained unshakable. We proudly serve as the toolbox that our neighbors near and far use to build healthy, dignified and safe lives. Here are a few examples:

- **We have responded to deadly emergencies in dozens of countries around the globe.** In the late 1950s, serious floods hit Cuba in the midst of a political crisis. CWS provided financial support and worked with the U.S. military to airlift food, multivitamins and clothing to the island. As a severe famine swept through Ethiopia and the rest of the Horn of Africa in the 1980s, the CWS family mobilized a relief effort of over \$17 million. In 2010, the world watched in horror as Haiti suffered one of the most deadly disasters in recent history. We responded to help people rebuild homes and livelihoods...and to make sure that they were better equipped to face the next disaster.



Photo: Paul Jeffrey / ACT Alliance

- **We have walked with families all over the world as they put food on the table, connect to clean water and build the businesses they need to thrive.** CWS began to focus more and more on long-term development in the 1960s. By the late 1970s we were also building long-term programs into our disaster response work to make sure that families would not just recover but thrive. Today our food security, water, sanitation, hygiene, health and livelihood programs focus on everything from crop diversification in Honduras to renewable energy in Bosnia to water access at health posts in Myanmar.
- **We stand for welcome today, just like we did nearly eight decades ago.** When the Refugee Act of 1980 passed, we had already resettled 350,000 refugees in communities across the United States. Today that number is over 865,000.
- **We have worked alongside partners ranging from small community organizations to the United Nations to welcome, protect and support people on the move worldwide.** In 1964, our emergency feeding program in what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo reached 21,000 newly-arrived Angolans. We also distributed seeds and agricultural tools for longer-term food security. In the 1980s we recruited medical teams to work in refugee camps in Somalia. We have partnered with a refugee- and women-led organization in Cairo since 2013 that reaches tens of thousands of refugees annually through legal, medical, food, educational and mental health programs. In 2018, we added new partnerships in central Mexico to provide shelter, legal support and other assistance to migrants, asylum seekers and deportees.
- **We know that racism and prejudice have no part in the just world that we want to live in.** In 1996, we responded to an epidemic of burned and desecrated Black churches in the United States. Alongside our partners, we mobilized thousands of volunteers to help rebuild more than 80 churches. In 2020, we launched our Platform for Racial Justice.

Here at CWS, the principles of welcome, collaboration and dignity have spanned the decades and wrapped around the globe. We have seen over and over again that we are stronger when we stand together. Every single person has gifts and skills to help. Welcome to the movement--we're glad you're here.

