



CRS partners have provided venues where those showing COVID-19 symptoms can self-isolate, and facilities where hospital workers can rest between shifts, reducing potential exposure to their families. Photo courtesy of Caritas Ambrosiana

# Contagion of Hope

## SERVING LOMBARDY'S POOR AND VULNERABLE DURING THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK

### CONTEXT

With more than 225,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and over 32,000 deaths, Italy is one of the countries most badly hit by the pandemic.<sup>1</sup> As of May 2020, Lombardy region had accounted for over a third of these cases and over half of the fatalities. The Milan metropolitan area, and the provinces of Brescia and Bergamo, are among the most-affected areas. Despite the measures put in place by the authorities, the **outbreak has stretched Lombardy's health system to its limits**, overwhelming hospitals and clinics with severe cases while disproportionately sickening and killing health care workers.

The confinement measures have had **devastating consequences for the region's poorest and most marginalized inhabitants**, and vulnerable groups have found themselves with limited access to social services. As a result, faith-based organizations in Lombardy are seeing extraordinary spikes in the demand for their services, including for food, shelter, hygiene, counseling and economic assistance.

1. Worldometer: [Coronavirus: Italy](https://www.worldometer.info/coronavirus/italy/). Accessed May 19, 2020

### CRS AND OUR IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

**Catholic Relief Services** is a member of Caritas Internationalis (CI), a confederation of 165 Catholic relief, development and social service organizations. CRS is present in over 100 countries and is a leader in emergency response.

**Fondazione Caritas Ambrosiana** is the official charity of the Archdiocese of Milan, the world's largest diocese. It has over 10,000 employees and volunteers, and works in 16 programmatic sectors, including emergencies. Caritas Ambrosiana leads a system of 11 social cooperatives.

#### KEY INFORMATION

Project name	Contagion of Hope: Serving Lombardy's poor and vulnerable during the COVID-19 outbreak*
Donor	United States Agency for International Development (USAID)
Duration	May 29 - November 28, 2020 (6 months)
Budget	US\$4 million
Location	Lombardy, Italy
Beneficiaries	27,085 individuals
Potential partners	Fondazione Caritas Ambrosiana, Caritas Bergamo, Fondazione Caritas Brescia, Caritas Lodi, Caritas Cremona, Opera San Francesco per i Poveri, Diaconia Valdese, and Islamic Relief

\* In his Easter 2020 message, Pope Francis called for the spreading of "a contagion of hope."



## PROJECT OVERVIEW

In May 2020, with funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), CRS and Caritas Ambrosiana launched 'Contagion of Hope: Serving Lombardy's poor and vulnerable during the COVID-19 outbreak' to provide assistance to over 27,000 individuals. In alignment with the CRS [COVID-19 Response Strategy](#), the project provides essential services—such as food, nonfood items and shelter—to at-risk groups. The project also supports hospitals through the rental of emergency accommodation for recovering COVID-19 patients, and for medical staff.

### Support across the region

Across Lombardy, the extensive Caritas network—including those agencies in Milan, Bergamo, Brescia, Lodi, and Cremona—is recognized as the go-to agency for poverty alleviation and services for the most vulnerable. Along with Opera San Francesco, Diaconia Valdese and Islamic Relief, this network calls on an army of professionals and volunteers, and reaches tens of thousands of people.

### CRS and partner response

In addition to this project, our partners' response to COVID-19 has included:

- Mobilizing **over €6 million** (US\$6.5 million) to support livelihoods and economic recovery.
- Supporting **nine hospitals** with nearly **300 patients** recovering from COVID-19, and providing medical workers with places to rest between shifts.
- Providing apartments for over **200 women survivors of gender-based violence**, and opening **three additional temporary shelters** for the homeless.
- Providing food support, through takeaway meals and food parcels, to more than **28,000 people** in March alone.

## PROJECT ACTIVITIES

### REDUCING THE RISK OF COVID-19 INFECTION FOR VULNERABLE PEOPLE

**Expanding hospitals' capacity for emergency accommodation** CRS and our partners support hospitals to cope with the surge in demand by providing alternative care sites for patients recovering from COVID-19, thus freeing space within hospital facilities for new patients. Partners support recovering patients with food delivery, room cleaning, and other essential services. Additionally, CRS' partners provide dormitories or hotel rooms for health care workers to rest between shifts while reducing potential exposure to their families.

**Providing safe and adequate shelter and hygiene facilities** CRS' partners run 24-hour shelters and care facilities, enabling individuals at risk of COVID-19 exposure to live in a safe and hygienic environment while receiving three meals a day. In order to reduce the risk of infection spreading among guests, partners have set up specific COVID-19 standard operating procedures. These include making rooms available where those showing symptoms of the virus can self-isolate, regular disinfection of common spaces, provision of laundry services, and daily health checks.

### SUPPORTING INDIVIDUALS AND HOUSEHOLDS COPING WITH THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

**Providing essential living supplies** Across Lombardy, soup kitchens run by CRS partners serve takeaway meals for the homeless and others in need. Home delivery of food parcels or hot meals is available for the elderly, the chronically ill, people with physical disabilities, and other people in need who are housebound. As needed, partners also distribute soap, household cleaning detergent and other essential hygiene materials. In Bergamo and Milan, project participants access essential living supplies, redeeming vouchers at partner-operated stores.

## THE PROJECT WILL SUPPORT 27,085 INDIVIDUALS:

96

WITH ALTERNATIVE  
CARE SITES

2,896

WITH SHELTER AND  
HYGIENE FACILITIES

24,093

WITH FOOD AND  
ESSENTIAL LIVING SUPPLIES