



February 10, 2016

A Modest Proposal—the President’s FY 2017 Budget Request for International Family Planning

The President’s budget request for fiscal year 2017 proposes a modest—but important—increase in funding for international family planning and reproductive health programs. Advocates will be working diligently with champions on Capitol Hill to ensure that Congress approves at least that amount during the appropriations process. But in a contentious presidential election year and a truncated congressional session, the task will not be easy.

According to a well-informed executive branch source, the total bilateral and multilateral funding request for FP/RH for FY 2017 is \$620 million. This overall total would represent a \$12.5 million increase above the current appropriated level of \$607.5 million, enacted as part of the FY 2016 omnibus spending bill in mid-December. The proposed total funding level is also an improvement over the amount requested by the President last year, when he asked for just \$612.6 million.

Information on the details of the FP/RH budget request remains incomplete. A State Department budget document known as the congressional budget justification (CBJ) provides some specifics on the account breakdown within the \$620 million overall total. Within the Global Health Programs (GHP) account, \$544 million is requested for FP/RH programs—a \$20 million increase above the current enacted level and \$6 million more than last year’s budget request. In addition, a \$35 million contribution to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) is proposed, the same amount requested for FY 2016 but \$2.5 million more than Congress just appropriated.

The GHP account provides the bulk of the financial resources for bilateral FP/RH programs overseas, but it is not the only bilateral funding account. Additional bilateral funding for FP/RH activities is derived from the Economic Support Fund (ESF), provided to a select number of politically and strategically important countries. The big remaining unknown is the amount of FP/RH funding being requested in non-GHP bilateral accounts—from ESF and perhaps from the newly-reconstituted Assistance for Europe, Eurasia, and Central Asia (AEECA) account.

In recent years, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Jordan have been the three countries receiving ESF funds for FP/RH activities. The CBJ narrative describing the components of the \$544 million request for FP/RH within the GHP account includes the following statement: “The request provides increased funding for voluntary family planning programs in Pakistan which were previously requested and funded under the Economic Support Fund account.” Assuming FP/RH funding for Pakistan will come entirely from the GHP account, one might surmise that about \$41 million is being requested for FP/RH programs in Afghanistan and Jordan and for a Middle East regional program within ESF. However, until the detailed foreign assistance appendix to the CBJ and accompanying summary tables are released in the coming weeks, it may not be possible either to confirm the amount requested for FP/RH activities within ESF or to know the specific country allocations of the budget request for FP/RH programs.

(in millions of dollars)	FY 2015 President's Budget Request	FY 2015 Omnibus Enacted	FY 2016 President's Budget Request	FY 2016 Omnibus Enacted	FY 2017 President's Budget Request
Global Health Programs account	538.0	(523.95)	538.0	(523.95)	544.0
Economic Support Fund (ESF)	71.0	—	39.6	—	<i>41.0</i>
TOTAL, bilateral FP/RH	609.0	575.0	577.6	575.0	<i>585.0</i>
U.S. contribution to UNFPA (IO&P)	35.3	35.0	35.0	32.5	35.0
TOTAL, bilateral & multilateral FP/RH	644.3	610.0	612.6	607.5	620.0

NOTE: FP/RH funding levels that were earmarked in the statute are indicated in **bold**. Funding levels that were specified in report language are denoted in (parentheses). FY 2017 President's budget request levels that are estimated and to be announced later are *italicized*.

While positively acknowledging the modest funding increase proposed in the President's budget request, it is essential to remember that FP/RH funding hovering just above \$600 million annually remains woefully inadequate, particularly if you look at it in inflation-adjusted dollars. The high-water mark for FP/RH funding in FY 1995 would require an expenditure of \$898 million in today's dollars to have the same purchasing power.

Looking at it from a needs-based perspective, if the United States, the recognized world leader in the provision of FP/RH financial and technical assistance, were to provide its appropriate share of the total financial resources necessary to address the unmet need for contraception of 225 million women in the developing world, this sum would total \$1.2 billion annually, including \$65 million for a voluntary contribution to UNFPA—roughly a doubling of the President's budget request level for the coming year.

In the current budgetary and political environment, the prospects for increasing FP/RH funding to reach the U.S. "fair share" of the amount needed are daunting. The dynamics of the election year pose serious additional legislative challenges. Despite promises from the House Republican leadership of a return to "regular order"—passage of a budget resolution and floor consideration and enactment of all 12 appropriations bills—conservatives within the Republican caucus are seeking to jettison the two-year bipartisan budget deal that enabled the passage of the FY 2016 omnibus bill and was hoped to smooth the way for an orderly budget and appropriation process this year. As is always the case at the start the congressional session—but perhaps more so this year—the fate of the foreign assistance appropriations bill in general and international FP/RH funding in particular is difficult to forecast.