

Why the United States Should Increase Funding for the United Nations Population Fund

APRIL 2023

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) supports critical family planning and reproductive health programs in low- and middle-income countries and humanitarian settings.

UNFPA acts as the world's largest provider of contraceptives, including service to the 48 countries with the highest unmet need for family planning services.

U.S. Congress must increase funding for UNFPA programs.

Founded in 1969, UNFPA is the only multilateral agency with an explicit mandate to address global sexual and reproductive health (SRH) needs. UNFPA's core programs expand access to contraception and reproductive health care for low-income and at-risk communities, including refugees and displaced persons. In total, UNFPA provides assistance to over 150 countries.¹

Support for Family Planning

An estimated 218 million women in low- and middle-income countries want to prevent or delay pregnancy but face significant barriers to using modern contraceptives.² UNFPA seeks to increase reproductive autonomy, stating that "all couples and individuals have the basic right to decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing of their children and to have the information, education and means to do so."³ The agency ensures individuals can exercise their sexual and reproductive rights by working with health care and policy systems, governments and advocates to train midwives, strengthen reproductive and maternal health systems, supply contraceptives as well as provide access to comprehensive sexuality education.⁴

Response to Humanitarian Crises

UNFPA is a global leader in providing SRH and gender-based violence (GBV) services in humanitarian settings devastated by the effects of conflict and natural disaster. In 2021 alone, UNFPA's humanitarian operations reached 29 million people with SRH services, assisted 1.5 million safe newborn deliveries and supported 2.4 million people with GBV services in crisis-affected countries.⁵ UNFPA quickly responded to the emerging humanitarian needs of women and girls, LGBTQI+ individuals and pregnant people during recent crises in Afghanistan, Ukraine and Yemen.

UNFPA is often present in a country before, during and after a crisis, making it a critical and reliable partner in humanitarian contexts, especially when a crisis happens suddenly. During conflict, natural disasters and other emergencies, displaced women and girls experience heightened vulnerability to unwanted pregnancies, rape, sexual exploitation as well as early and forced marriage. In response, UNFPA creates safe spaces for crisis-affected communities, trains personnel to provide care and equips service delivery sites with emergency reproductive health kits. These kits are comprised of contraceptives, supplies for safe childbirth (including personal clean delivery kits for pregnant people), post-rape care and prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted infections (including HIV).⁶ UNFPA also provides displaced people with dignity kits that include a number of supplies to support basic hygiene and menstrual health management.

Under the United Nations cluster system, UNFPA leads the Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility (GBV AoR). In this role, the agency ensures accountability, effective coordination and collaboration across GBV prevention and response in humanitarian settings.⁷

Provision of Lifesaving Supplies Around the World

UNFPA works to improve the delivery of SRH commodities through UNFPA Supplies, a flagship program established in 2007, which focuses on widening access to modern contraception and lifesaving medicines for maternal health. This program, which is the world's largest provider of contraceptive commodities, seeks to improve contraceptive choice by

increasing the availability of a mix of modern methods for individuals, ranging from long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARCs) to condoms, in 48 low-income countries.⁸ In 2021, commodities provided by UNFPA Supplies averted an estimated 5.4 million unintended pregnancies and 1.5 million unsafe abortions.⁹

UNFPA Supplies also helped prevent thousands of maternal deaths by supplying women in low-income countries with lifesaving maternal health medicines, including carbetocin to prevent and treat bleeding and postpartum hemorrhage as well as magnesium sulfate to treat preeclampsia and eclampsia.¹⁰

Global Leader for Women and Girls

UNFPA organized the landmark International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in 1994, which sought to address SRH, human rights, gender equality and sustainable development. Today, UNFPA serves as an important advocate for improving the status of women and girls and monitors ongoing implementation of ICPD’s Program of Action. UNFPA plays an active role in efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development — specifically Goals 3 and 5, which call for good health and well-being as well as gender equality and women’s empowerment, respectively. UNFPA is a leader in organizing awareness campaigns critical to the health and well-being of women and girls, including to improve maternal health through treating and preventing obstetric fistula and to end GBV and harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriage.^{11,12}

Inconsistent U.S. Support

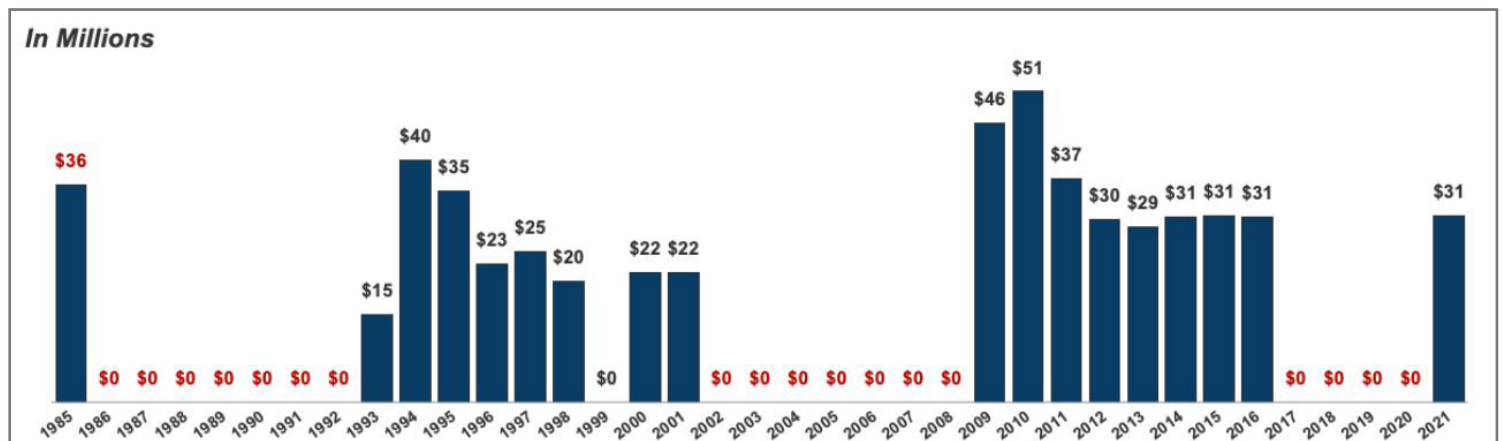
The United States helped establish UNFPA and was the agency’s largest donor until 1985, providing nearly one-third of its total annual funding.¹⁵ However, the U.S. contribution to UNFPA is a frequent target of Republican administrations and members of Congress who oppose family planning, women’s rights or the United Nations more broadly. For example, from fiscal years (FY) 2010 to 2019, a Republican-controlled House Appropriations Committee repeatedly approved prohibitions on any U.S. contribution to UNFPA.¹⁶ Fortunately, these prohibitions were not enacted into law due to strong bipartisan support among the committee’s counterparts in the Senate, and funds for the agency continued to be appropriated.¹⁷

WHAT IS THE KEMP-KASTEN AMENDMENT?

Enacted in 1985, the Kemp-Kasten amendment is a legislative restriction that prohibits the provision of U.S. foreign aid to any organization “that supports or participates in the management of a program of coercive abortion or involuntary sterilization,” as determined by the president. Since its passage, various Republican administrations have used the amendment as a pretext to defund UNFPA, based on repeatedly disproven claims about UNFPA’s work in China and alleged support for the country’s coercive population control policies. Additional legislative restrictions in annual appropriations bills include a requirement that UNFPA maintain a segregated account for U.S. funds, none of which may be used in China, and that there be a dollar-for-dollar reduction in the U.S. contribution to offset any UNFPA funds used in China.

UNFPA opposes coercion in any form and does not fund abortion services, although it recognizes unsafe abortion as a leading cause of maternal mortality.¹³ It seeks to reduce unsafe abortions and related deaths by improving access to voluntary family planning and contraception and treating the complications of unsafe abortion.¹⁴

U.S. Funding for UNFPA (FY 1985-FY 2021)¹⁸



NOTES: Red indicates the U.S. withheld some or all funding due to Kemp-Kasten. Reflects U.S. contributions to UNFPA core resources. Amounts are rounded. FY13 includes the effects of sequestration. Due to policy conditions put in place by Congress and the impact of presidential determinations under the Kemp-Kasten amendment, actual annual contributions are frequently lower than enacted levels (e.g., the U.S. did not provide any funding to UNFPA between 2002 and 2008 due to Kemp-Kasten). In years where UNFPA funding was not withheld due to Kemp-Kasten but funding was appropriated, some funding may have been withheld due to other provisions of U.S. law regarding UNFPA funding.

SOURCE: KFF analysis of data from the Office of Management and Budget, Agency Congressional Budget Justifications, Congressional Appropriations Bills, and the U.S. Foreign Assistance Dashboard [website], available at: www.foreignassistance.gov; CRS, The U.N. Population Fund: Background and the U.S. Funding Debate, RL32703, July 2010; State Department, U.S. Participation in the United Nations: Report to Congress for 1993, 1994; State Department, U.S. Contributions to International Organizations: Report to Congress for FY 2016, 2016; USG Kemp-Kasten Determinations; KFF personal communication with UNFPA.



In March 2017, the Trump-Pence administration announced its erroneous determination to cut off all funding to UNFPA, despite a \$32.5 million appropriation in the FY 2017 omnibus approved by Congress.¹⁹ Identical appropriations and determinations were made in each subsequent year of the administration.^{20,21} Immediately upon assuming office in 2020, President Biden restored the U.S. contribution to UNFPA, however, future anti-abortion administrations are likely to continue citing Kemp-Kasten to justify defunding UNFPA.²² Cutting U.S. support for UNFPA would put sexual and reproductive health and rights out of reach for millions of individuals and undermine global health investments.

The U.S. contribution to UNFPA complements and strengthens the country's bilateral international family planning program. Most Americans from across the political spectrum agree that the United States has a role and moral obligation to support the health of women and girls around the world.²³ Inconsistent U.S. funding undermines UNFPA's efforts to reduce unintended pregnancies and maternal mortality and end GBV, particularly in urgent humanitarian settings. The uncertainty surrounding the annual U.S. contribution makes long-term planning difficult for UNFPA and the programs it assists. Cutting off these lifelines of support puts effective programs — and the lives of women and girls — at risk.

Policy Recommendations

Congress should:

- **Increase funding for the United States' voluntary contribution to UNFPA:** Congress should appropriate funding at the country's fair share level for its voluntary contribution based on the ICPD Programme of Action, currently estimated at \$116 million.²⁴
- **Address legislative restrictions targeting UNFPA:** Congress should eliminate the requirement that U.S. funds be held in a segregated account and the dollar-for-dollar reduction. Furthermore, Congress should replace the Kemp-Kasten amendment with a broader prohibition to prevent U.S. foreign assistance funds from supporting any form of reproductive coercion consistent with the 1994 ICPD Programme of Action. This should include but is not limited to: use of incentives or disincentives to lower or raise fertility; use of incentives or targets for uptake of specific contraceptive methods; withholding of information on reproductive health options; forced sterilization; forced abortion; and forced pregnancy.
- **Pass the Support for UNFPA Funding Act to reaffirm the U.S. partnership with UNFPA:** This will make a strong statement to future administrations that Congress supports the work of UNFPA, which is essential to furthering

References

- 1 United Nations Population Fund. (2018, January). About us. <https://www.unfpa.org/about-us>
- 2 Guttmacher Institute. (2020). *Adding It Up: Investing in Sexual and Reproductive Health 2019*. https://www.guttmacher.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/adding-it-up-investing-in-sexual-reproductive-health-2019.pdf
- 3 United Nations Population Information Network. (1974). World Population Plan of Action. https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/E_CONF.60_19_Plan.pdf
- 4 United Nations Population Fund. (2018, January). About us. <https://www.unfpa.org/about-us>
- 5 United Nations Population Fund. (2021, December). *UNFPA Humanitarian Action: 2022 Overview*. https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/HAO-2022-PDF%20Report_Dec9.pdf
- 6 United Nations Population Fund. (2016, August). *Adolescent Girls in Disaster & Conflict: Interventions for Improving Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Services*. https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA-Adolescent_Girls_in_Disaster_Conflict-Web.pdf
- 7 Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility. (2019). Who We Are. <https://gbvaor.net/about-us>
- 8 United Nations Population Fund. (2022, June). *Setting the Stage for Sustainability: UNFPA Supplies Partnership Annual Report 2021*. <https://www.unfpa.org/unfpa-supplies-annual-report-2021>
- 9 United Nations Population Fund. (2022, June). *Setting the Stage for Sustainability: UNFPA Supplies Partnership Annual Report 2021*. <https://www.unfpa.org/unfpa-supplies-annual-report-2021>
- 10 United Nations Population Fund. (2022, June). *Setting the Stage for Sustainability: UNFPA Supplies Partnership Annual Report 2021*. <https://www.unfpa.org/unfpa-supplies-annual-report-2021>
- 11 Friends of UNFPA. (2018). Treating and Preventing Obstetric Fistula. <https://www.unfpa.org/publications/obstetric-fistula-other-forms-female-genital-fistula>
- 12 Friends of UNFPA. (2018). Ending Female Genital Mutilation. <https://www.usaforunfpa.org/leading-the-way-to-end-fgm>
- 13 United Nations Population Fund. (2018, January). Frequently Asked Questions: Does UNFPA promote abortion? <https://www.unfpa.org/frequently-asked-questions#abortion>
- 14 United Nations Population Fund. (2018, January). Frequently Asked Questions: Does UNFPA promote abortion? <https://www.unfpa.org/frequently-asked-questions#abortion>
- 15 Congressional Research Service. (2010, July). The U.N. Population Fund: Background and the U.S. Funding Debate, Report Number RL32703. <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RL32703.html>
- 16 PAI. (2018, September 12). Make Appropriations Great Again: Congress Poised to Pass Some Spending Bills Before Start of Fiscal Year. <https://pai.org/newsletters/make-appropriations-great-congress-poised-pass-spending-bills-start-fiscal-year>
- 17 PAI. (2018, June 21). The Song Remains the Same — But House and Senate Appropriators Sing Different Tunes on Family Planning Once Again. <https://pai.org/newsletters/song-remains-house-senate-appropriators-sing-different-tunes-family-planning>

- 18 Kaiser Family Foundation. (2018, September 30). UNFPA Funding & Kemp-Kasten: An Explainer. <https://www.kff.org/global-health-policy/fact-sheet/unfpa-funding-kemp-kasten-an-explainer>
- 19 PAI. (2018, March 15). A Bad Joke: Trump-Pence Administration Doubles Down on UNFPA Funding Cut on International Women's Day. <https://pai.org/newsletters/bad-joke-trump-pence-administration-doubles-unfpa-funding-cut-international-womens-day>
- 20 PAI. (2018, March 23). The Room Where It Happens — Congressional Champions Save International Family Planning in Spending Bill Negotiations. <https://pai.org/newsletters/room-happens-congressional-champions-save-international-family-planning-spending-bill-negotiations>
- 21 PAI. (2018, September 12). Make Appropriations Great Again: Congress Poised to Pass Some Spending Bills Before Start of Fiscal Year. <https://pai.org/newsletters/make-appropriations-great-congress-poised-pass-spending-bills-start-fiscal-year>
- 22 PAI. (2021, January 29). What a Difference a Day Makes — President Biden Revokes Trump-Pence Expanded Global Gag Rule and Begins Reversal of Other Attacks on Women's Health. <https://pai.org/resources/what-a-difference-a-day-makes-president-biden-revokes-trump-pence-expanded-global-gag-rule-and-begins-reversal-of-other-attacks-on-womens-health>
- 23 PAI and Center for Health and Gender Equity. (2018). American Attitudes on the Global Gag Rule: Results of a Bipartisan National Poll. <https://pai.org/resources/american-attitudes-on-the-global-gag-rule>
- 24 PAI. (2021, May 20). Just the Math. <https://pai.org/resources/just-the-math>