

# The Global Gag Rule

## The Policy, Explained

The Global Gag Rule is one of the most harmful policies ever levied on United States foreign assistance funding. It penalizes foreign NGOs that provide a full range of health information and services that are legal within their own countries. Deceptively named “Protecting Life in Global Health Assistance,” the policy under Donald Trump is the worst version it’s ever been, since it was first introduced by Ronald Reagan in 1984.

The Global Gag Rule requires foreign NGOs to pledge that they will not “perform or actively promote abortion as a method of family planning” as a condition of receiving United States global health aid. NGOs must not provide abortion counseling, referrals, or services even if they use their own non-U.S. funds. They must also refrain from advocating to expand access to safe abortion in their own countries.

## Wide-Reaching Impacts

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, “[M]ore than half (37) of the 64 countries that received U.S. bilateral global health assistance in FY 2016 allow for legal abortion in at least one case not permitted by the policy, and that had the expanded Mexico City Policy been in effect during the FY 2013 – FY 2015 period, at least 1,275 foreign NGOs would have been subject to the policy.” A longer term study of the impacts of the Global Gag Rule is underway at Columbia University in New York City.

Experts estimate that about \$8.8 billion in U.S. global health aid is affected by the requirements of the Global Gag Rule, including billions in PEPFAR funding for HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment.

## Unsafe Abortion

It is impossible to have a serious discussion about women’s health and maternal mortality without

Global Gag Rule Timeline	
<b>Ronald Reagan (R)</b>	<b>1985-1989</b>
<b>George H.W. Bush (R)</b>	<b>1989-1993</b>
<b>Bill Clinton (D)</b>	<b>1993-2001</b>
<b>George W. Bush (R)</b>	<b>2001-2009</b>
<b>Barack Obama (D)</b>	<b>2009-2017</b>
<b>Donald Trump (R)</b>	<b>2017-present</b>
Red= Global Gag Rule was in place Blue= Global Gag Rule was not in place	

discussing the role of illegal, unsafe abortion. Every year, up to 31,000 women lose their lives to unsafe abortion. Another 8 million are treated in hospitals for complications from unsafe abortions. Countless more are injured but receive no treatment.

The Global Gag Rule is counterproductive to the stated goal of its supporters, who say that they want to reduce the incidence of abortion. In 2011, independent researchers at Stanford University in California found that the Global Gag Rule caused abortion rates in the African countries most affected by the funding cuts to double between 2001 and 2008, during the George W. Bush administration.

A law called the Helms Amendment, introduced in 1973, prohibits the use of United States aid to pay for abortion as a method of family planning. Therefore, the sole purpose of the Global Gag Rule is to dictate what foreign NGOs can do with their own non-U.S. funding in their own clinical settings in-country. It is a paternalistic, undemocratic policy and it must end.

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*See our fact sheet on the Global HER Act to learn how we can end the Global Gag Rule once and for all!*