

The United States' Fickle Support for UNFPA

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is a critical partner in the effort to expand and improve family planning and other sexual and reproductive health services around the world. The donations of more than 180 countries — many of them in amounts small enough to be purely symbolic — allow UNFPA to work in some 150 aid-recipient nations, where more than 80 percent of the world's population lives.

United States History with UNFPA

The United States was integral to the beginning of UNFPA operations in 1969, and was the largest donor to the agency until President Reagan zeroed out funding for Fiscal Year 1986. Since then, U.S. funding for UNFPA has been a political football: During the Clinton and Obama administrations, U.S. funding for UNFPA was among the highest amounts contributed by any country. Under the Trump administration, as in previous Republican administrations, the United States is refusing to contribute a single dollar to UNFPA operations.

These politically-driven funding cuts are a threat to the health and lives of the world's most vulnerable people. They are also an embarrassment to Americans who believe in the importance of humanitarian aid and the responsibility of wealthy nations to invest in the health and development of poor nations.

Justification for Withholding Funding

The reason the Trump administration gave for the funding cut is the same reason that was given during previous Republican presidential administrations: that UNFPA allegedly supports or participates in coercive abortion or involuntary sterilization in China. UNFPA calls this claim "erroneous," and an investigative team sent by the U.S. State Department in 2002, during the Bush administration, confirmed that UNFPA does not engage in coercion in China.

The law that allows presidents to withhold funding on the basis of suspected coercion is called the Kemp-Kasten amendment. It was first introduced by Congress in 1985, and it states that no funds "may be made available to any organization or program which, as determined by the President of the United States, supports or participates in the management of a program of coercive abortion or involuntary sterilization."

Therefore, although the Kemp-Kasten amendment is a law passed each year by Congress, it is the sitting president who makes the decision each year about whether UNFPA qualifies for funding under the law.

Impact of Withholding Funding

The U.S. Congress appropriated \$32.5 million in core support for UNFPA in Fiscal Year 2018, but funding was cut completely due to Kemp-Kasten. Looking at how far the U.S. investment went in the last year the U.S. funded the agency (2016), we can estimate the huge impact the withdrawal of U.S. funding had in 2017 and has had in 2018.

According to UNFPA, donor support from the United States in 2016 allowed the agency to:

- Save 2,340 maternal lives;
- Prevent 947,000 unintended pregnancies;
- Ensure 1,251 fistula surgeries; and
- Prevent 295,000 unsafe abortions.

In addition to "core support," the United States often contributes tens of millions in additional funding for "specific project activities," such as when a large scale natural or humanitarian disaster requires additional donor assistance. The United States turning its back on people fleeing armed conflicts, epidemics, and natural disasters such as monsoons, volcanic eruptions, and earthquakes is shameful and undiplomatic.

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Potential Policy Responses

There are several ways the U.S. Congress could prevent a president from cutting UNFPA funding:

1. Congress could omit Kemp-Kasten in its annual appropriations bill;
2. Congress could broaden the anti-coercion language in Kemp-Kasten to capture the reality of reproductive coercion today, which is largely on the side of denial of wanted care; and
3. Congress could overrule the president's decision to withhold funding via amendments passed by simple majority.

Population Connection works to urge Congress to restore funding for UNFPA that's cut by hostile presi-

dents. We motivate American constituents to contact their members of Congress when amendments regarding UNFPA are introduced and are being decided by legislative vote. And we send hundreds of activists to Capitol Hill each spring to discuss UNFPA funding, and international family planning funding in general, with their senators and representatives.

If the United States government wants to fight reproductive coercion, it should look to the 74 million unintended pregnancies women in the developing world experienced in 2017 due to unmet need for family planning. Coercion to become pregnant and then to carry unwanted pregnancies to term — due to unavailability of contraceptives and safe abortion — is a much more pressing issue than coercion to end pregnancies or to undergo permanent sterilization.

The chart below shows United States funding for UNFPA during Democratic vs. Republican administrations. Funding was cut completely during the Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and George W. Bush administrations, and it is currently withheld under Donald Trump. During the administrations of Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, core funding was among the highest amounts contributed by any country.

