



Silencing Aid: What is the Global Gag Rule?

The Mexico City Policy, commonly referred to as the “global gag rule,” is an anti-abortion policy that restricts safe and legal abortions worldwide. This policy, first implemented through a presidential executive order in 1984, restricts global family planning assistance for non-U.S. nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that promote, provide, or refer patients to abortion services as a means of family planning, even with their own funds. The policy is not in effect under the current Biden Administration, but it could be reinstated. Congress must permanently repeal the global gag rule to prevent further harm.

FAST FACTS

What is it?

An anti-abortion policy that restricts U.S. global health assistance for non-U.S. NGOs that promote, provide, or refer patients to abortion services.

Why is it Important?

This policy imposes directives over sovereign nations to promote an anti-abortion agenda, forcing organizations to either reject needed U.S. development assistance or undermine their patients’ sexual and reproductive health and rights by denying abortion services.

What Needs to Happen?

Congress must pass the *Global Health, Empowerment, and Rights Act (Global HER Act)* to permanently repeal the global gag rule and allow non-U.S. organizations to use their own funds to provide safe and legal abortions, in countries where abortion is legal.

Global Gag Rule Restricts Crucial Funding for International NGOs

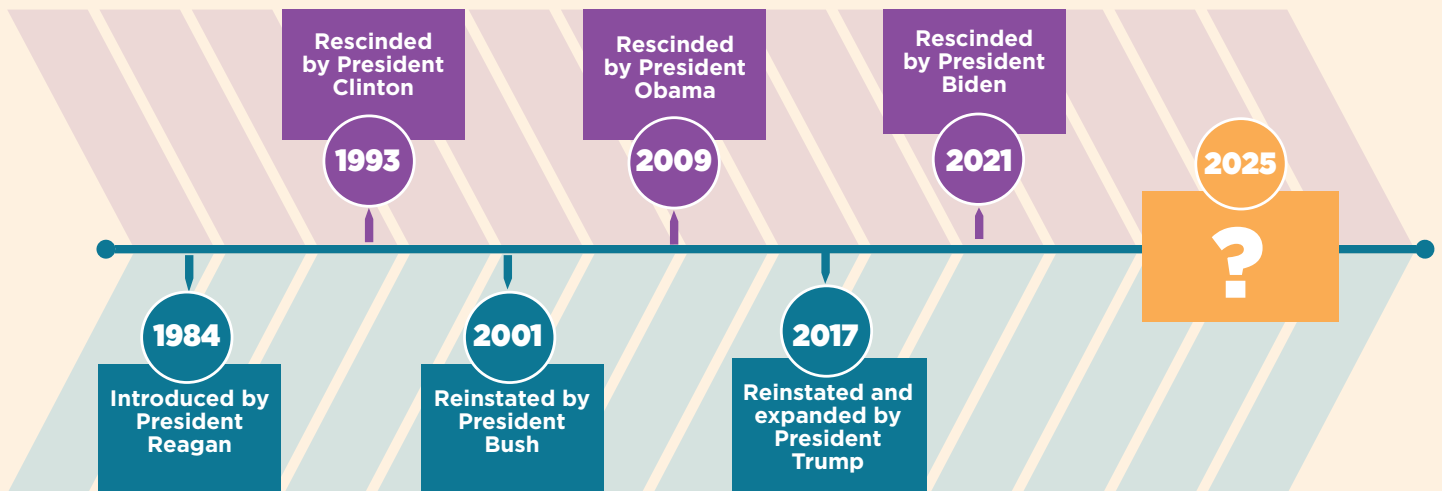
In 2021, President Joe Biden rescinded the global gag rule, marking an end to the most expansive version of the policy set by the Trump Administration.¹ The Trump administration’s expansion—referred to as Protecting Life in Global Health Assistance (PLGHA)—extended restrictions on U.S. bilateral global health assistance beyond family planning, including the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, maternal and child health, malaria, nutrition, and other U.S. programs.² This expansion affected nearly \$12 billion in aid, further depriving global communities of life-saving health programs and procedures.³ The International Planned Parenthood Federation estimates that \$100 million of assistance for life-saving support lost under the Trump Administration could have prevented 4.8 million unintended pregnancies, 1.7 million unsafe abortions, and 20,000 maternal deaths, and would have provided 70 million condoms, 725,000 HIV tests, treatment to 275,000 pregnant women living with HIV, and care for 525,000 sexually transmitted infections.⁴

Historically a polarizing issue, the global gag rule has been rescinded and reinstated multiple times along party lines. The Reagan Administration first instituted the policy in 1984, announcing that the United States did not “consider abortion an acceptable element of family planning programs and will no longer contribute to those of which it is a part.”⁵



TIMELINE

The global gag rule has been used as a political tool across party lines since its conception, rescinded by Democratic administrations and reinstated by Republican administrations.



With the global gag rule in place, non-U.S. NGOs receiving U.S. government health assistance funds are required to certify that they do not perform or actively promote abortion as a method of family planning or otherwise forfeit needed funding.⁶ These strict requirements force NGOs to choose between losing funding or compromising patient care. **The best solution to permanently stop any future president from unilaterally imposing the global gag rule is for the U.S. Congress to permanently repeal it and pass the *Global Health, Empowerment, and Rights Act (Global HER Act)*.**

Global Gag Rule Has Lasting Impacts, Even When not in Effect

Even when not in effect, the global gag rule causes delays in funding and fosters stigma against sexual and reproductive health and rights. Contrary to the intended purpose, imposing restrictions on abortion does not reduce demand for services, but rather makes the procedure less safe.⁷ While the global gag rule is in place, the number of abortions in a country increases as accessing modern contraception and family planning methods becomes more difficult.⁸ The global gag rule

exacerbates existing health inequities when funding cuts lead to clinic closures and healthcare personnel layoffs, which then leads to an overall decrease in access to family planning services.⁹ Distrust of the healthcare system can grow when healthcare workers are forced to withhold abortion-related information and resources.

Global Gag Rule Represents Undue Influence Over International NGOs

The global gag rule undermines reproductive health and rights globally, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities such as people of color, low-income individuals, and the LGBTQi+ community. The policy represents a racist and colonialist imposition of U.S. political views on other countries and hinders advocacy efforts to bolster abortion legalization globally.⁸ For example, Uganda, which relies on the U.S. Agency for International Development to provide reproductive health services, experienced major stagnation of progress in modern contraceptive use under the last reinstatement of the global gag rule with negative impacts on citizens' health and economic prosperity.⁹

What Can We Expect in the Future?

PROJECT 2025

As the election for the next U.S. President looms near, reproductive health organizations must prepare for a possible reinstatement, or even expansion, of the global gag rule. Project 2025—also known as the Presidential Transition Project—is a broad vision led by the Heritage Foundation that calls for a reinstatement of PLGHA, Trump’s expansion of the global gag rule.¹⁰ The vision outlines a need for an executive order that would reinstate and further expand PLGHA to *all* foreign aid—not just global health assistance for foreign NGOs—and blocks funding to the United Nations Population Fund. Preventing any international assistance from going towards abortion and related policies is a key goal of Project 2025.

Reinstating the global gag rule would significantly impact global health. The policy’s restrictions on abortion-related services and advocacy would lead to reduced access to critical health services, increased rates of unsafe abortions, and adverse maternal health outcomes.

The United States must ensure full realization of global sexual and reproductive health by permanently repealing the global gag rule and passing the *Global HER Act*. Non-U.S. NGOs will then be able to use their own funds for any legal medical services—including safe abortion care—and exercise freedom of speech through their activities

and advocacy.¹¹ U.S. Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH) and U.S. Representative Nita Lowey (D-NY) introduced the *Global HER Act* in 2019.¹² The Act currently has 50 co-sponsors in the Senate and 169 co-sponsors in the House of Representatives and has been referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations in both chambers.¹³

Endnotes

- 1 Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF). 2021. *The Mexico City Policy: An explainer*. <https://www.kff.org/global-health-policy/fact-sheet/mexico-city-policy-explainer/>.
- 2 Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF). *The Mexico City Policy: An explainer*.
- 3 Center for Reproductive Rights. 2017. *Fact sheet: The global gag rule and human rights*. https://reproductiverights.org/sites/default/files/documents/GLP-GGR-FS-0118-Web_2.pdf.
- 4 International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF). 2019. *Policy briefing: The impact of the global gag rule*. <https://www.ippf.org/sites/default/files/2019-01/IPPF%20GGR%20Policy%20Briefing%20-%20January%202019.pdf>.
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- 6 Center for Reproductive Rights. *Fact sheet: The global gag rule and human rights*.
- 7 Center for Reproductive Rights. *Fact sheet: The global gag rule and human rights*.
- 8 Advocates for Youth. 2021. *Dismantling racist laws and policies that deny people access to essential abortion services*. <https://www.advocatesforyouth.org/media/dismantling-racist-laws-and-policies-that-deny-people-access-to-essential-abortion-services/>.
- 9 Giorgio. An investigation of the impact of the Global Gag Rule on women’s sexual and reproductive health outcomes in Uganda: a difference-in-differences analysis.
- 10 The Heritage Foundation. 2023. *Project 2025*. Washington D.C.: The Heritage Foundation.
- 11 118th Congress. 2023-2024. Global Health, Empowerment and Rights Act. Bill. H.R.556.
- 12 Ahmed, Z. 2020. The unprecedented expansion of the global Gag rule: trampling rights, health and free speech. *Guttmacher Policy Review*, 23. <https://www.guttmacher.org/gpr/2020/04/unprecedented-expansion-global-gag-rule-trampling-rights-health-and-free-speech#:~:text=The%20gag%20rule%20infringes%20on,gag%20rule%20or%20shutting%20down>.
- 13 118th Congress. 2023-2024. Global Health, Empowerment and Rights Act. Bill. S.1098; 118th Congress. 2023-2024. Global Health, Empowerment and Rights Act. Bill. H.R.556.



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