

## Overview

U.S. foreign aid, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have been vital to global health progress for six decades, saving millions of lives, including those of the most vulnerable children and babies worldwide. Sadly, the United States' abrupt about face on all forms of foreign assistance in 2025 relinquishes its global leadership position in improving the well-being of kids. For many little ones living in low-income countries, the impact of losing U.S. support may rival a world war, meaning that it was an avoidable crisis that will take the biggest toll on the smallest, weakest, and most defenseless among us, and undoubtedly will have lasting negative consequences for the future of the world's children.

## Background

The Trump Administration, via its foreign-aid freeze, its Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 budget request, its dismantling of the world-class US Agency for International Development, its closure of the CDC global health offices and elimination of expert staff roles, have all combined to sharply reduce or eliminate global programs keeping babies alive and healthy. Affected programs previously serving pregnant women, infants and toddlers include maternal, newborn and child health; childhood vaccination; nutrition; child protection; early childhood development; HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria prevention and treatment; clean water and sanitation (WASH); and food security.

U.S. investments through USAID have helped save more than 90 million lives over the past two decades — including 30.4 million children under the age of 5. The youngest children experienced the biggest gains: more than 13 million babies under 1 year old and nearly 9 million toddlers between ages 2 and 4 were saved by U.S.-backed programs that improved nutrition, strengthened maternal and newborn health, and fought deadly diseases. HIV/AIDS programs cut deaths by 65% while programs targeting malaria and neglected tropical diseases slashed deaths by more than half.<sup>1</sup>

But recent changes in U.S. foreign assistance and the dismantling of USAID is reversing that progress. The Lancet estimates that the Administration's actions will result in an additional 4.5 million deaths of children under 5 by 2030.<sup>2</sup>

## The President's FY 2026 Budget Request

President Trump's FY 2026 foreign assistance budget proposes dismantling six decades of U.S. global leadership and expertise by cutting funding from roughly \$60 billion a year to less than \$10 billion.

The consequences of this plan for babies under 3 years old will be devastating. Funding for maternal, newborn and child health, nutrition, clean water, and sanitation — all essential for healthy pregnancies and infant survival — are erased in this budget. A dedicated funding line

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for healthy early childhood development and nurturing care, and protection of the world's most vulnerable children was also eliminated.

The President's budget ends U.S. support for childhood global vaccine programs through Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and UNICEF, which provide life-saving immunizations for babies and children living in the poorest and most dangerous places on the planet. The budget also cuts funding to the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and bilateral infectious disease programs, threatening efforts to prevent HIV and combat illnesses that disproportionately kill infants and toddlers.

Programs that provide nutritious food for the poorest babies and children, such as Food for Peace and the McGovern-Dole Food for Education school feeding initiative, also disappear in the President's budget. Accounts for international disaster assistance, refugees, and food aid are consolidated into a new, smaller fund in the budget, leaving babies and children without life-saving emergency relief.

Overall, the President's budget represents a 67.5% reduction in investments that help babies and young children survive disease, poverty, disaster, displacement and conflict.<sup>3</sup>

## Congressional Action

At the time of this writing, the U.S. House of Representatives' National Security, State Department and Related Programs (NSRP) Subcommittee of Appropriations has filed its FY 2026 foreign assistance budget.

The House bill reduces foreign assistance funding by 22% from the previous year's level, versus the President's 80% reduction. The House bill provides \$9.5 billion for global health overall but goes along with the President in prohibiting funding for the World Health Organization and eliminating resources for UNICEF (although the bill's accompanying report does state that the U.S. contribution to UNICEF could be provided from a new "National Security Investment Programs" account). The legislation provides flat funding for PEPFAR, Maternal and Child Health (including \$300 million for Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and polio), tuberculosis and neglected tropical diseases (NTDs), and expands funding for Vulnerable Children, Nutrition, and Malaria programs. While the bill does reduce the U.S. contribution to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria by \$150 million, its funding level puts the U.S. on track to exceed the President's proposed 20% cap on U.S. contributions to the overall pot of resources provided by donors.

Separately, both the House and Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittees have chosen to overlook the President's request to eliminate Food for Peace and McGovern-Dole school feeding programs. They instead provided level funding for McGovern Dole at \$240 million and \$1.2 billion for Food for Peace, down from \$1.62 billion in 2025.

It is encouraging that Congress has refused to eliminate key programs in its appropriations bills and has provided higher funding levels than the President, but it is worth noting that the Executive branch has largely ignored Congress' power of the purse in 2025. The Executive branch also dismantled USAID without Congressional approval, froze foreign assistance programs, eliminated

the CDC's global health offices and staff, and clawed back previously appropriated funding from 2024 and 2025. In essence, the Trump Administration has ensured that its budget "proposal" to Congress has in large part already been implemented.

## High-Impact Changes for the World's Babies

### Maternal, Newborn and Child Health

- **What changed:** The Trump Administration's FY 2026 budget omits funding for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health under USAID and CDC.
- **Impact on babies:** Ends support for pre- and postnatal care, skilled deliveries, newborn resuscitation and treatment for infections, prevention and treatment of pneumonia, diarrhea, malaria, and postpartum hemorrhage, support for breastfeeding, micronutrient supplementation, and treatment of acute malnutrition. An internal USAID memo projected these changes would eliminate postnatal care for more than 11 million newborns within the first two days of life and could lead to 7.9 million additional child deaths by 2040. Another 510,000 mothers will also likely die.<sup>4</sup>

### Routine Immunizations

- **What changed:** As part of the discontinuation of maternal, newborn and child health, the Administration halted U.S. contributions to Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, disrupting vaccine delivery worldwide.
- **Impact on babies:** 75 million children risk missing routine vaccinations over the next five years and an estimated 1.2 million children<sup>5</sup> will die as a result.<sup>6</sup>

### Nutrition and Food Security

- **What changed:** The President's FY 2026 budget proposal slashes nutrition and food-security funding, eliminating key programs that support breastfeeding, micronutrient supplementation, child feeding education, growth monitoring, social and behavioral change, emergency and long-term food assistance, and nutrient-fortified foods.
- **Impact on babies:** Increased rates of wasting, stunting, and death in the first 1,000 days of life. The cancellation of projects under the McGovern-Dole Food for Education program in May 2025 ended school meal programs for hundreds of thousands of children. In some cases, this program provided the only reliable meal a child received each day. The dissolution of USAID and cuts to aid programs left food intended for children and babies in warehouses to expire<sup>7</sup> or be destroyed.<sup>8</sup>

The economic cost of malnutrition — through lost human capital and increased health care expenses — can reduce a nation's gross domestic product by 3–16%. The World Bank estimates that every \$1 invested in tackling undernutrition returns \$23 in value in terms of child survival, human capital development, and economic prosperity.<sup>9</sup>

### Malaria, Tuberculosis, HIV and other Infectious Diseases

- **What changed:** The Administration's FY 2026 budget request and related foreign-aid actions slashed funding for global health, including for malaria — which mostly kills children under 5 and pregnant women — and for bilateral HIV programs. It also eliminated the U.S. contribution to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. PEPFAR Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) programs were dismantled in January 2025, cutting off services to 6.6 million HIV-infected and affected babies, children and their caregivers.<sup>10</sup>
- **Impact on babies:** The Administration's recently released America First Global Health Strategy<sup>12</sup> says the U.S. will continue to support prevention of mother-to-child HIV transmission, early infant HIV diagnosis, and pediatric HIV treatment. It also lists malaria and tuberculosis as priorities. However, the Administration's previous actions are at odds with these stated goals: its elimination of CDC's global health offices undermines these efforts and its cessation of PEPFAR's OVC programs ends nutrition support, home visits, and caregiver assistance that help infants and toddlers stay healthy in HIV-affected households, increasing their risk of infection, malnutrition, neglect, and abuse.

**Malaria currently kills ~600,000 people — mostly children under 5 — every year. Even a 20% reduction in support to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria in its upcoming replenishment could lead to 33 million more cases and 82,000 more deaths by 2030.<sup>11</sup>**

### Early Childhood Development and Early Learning

- **What changed:** Cuts to Vulnerable Children, Development Assistance, and Economic Support Funds, combined with the dismantling of USAID, elimination of the Children in Adversity Office and the early learning efforts of the Basic Education office.
- **Impact on babies:** The Children in Adversity Office worked to reduce the number of children living outside of family care, either on the street or in institutions. In FY 2022 alone, its efforts reunited 28 million children with their families. The Office also promoted healthy beginnings through early childhood and parenting programs that fostered nurturing care, good health, nutrition, and cognitive stimulation of babies and early learning for toddlers and worked to protect the most vulnerable children from violence, abuse, and neglect. Some of this work is being led now by China. In early 2025, the U.S. cancelled two projects in Cambodia supporting healthy brain and body development for babies and young children. A week later, China's aid agency announced funding for Cambodia to achieve almost identical goals.<sup>13</sup>

### Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

- **What changed:** Deep cuts to development assistance and the end of USAID have reduced access to clean water and sanitation systems.

- **Impact on babies:** USAID funded a significant portion of international water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) programs, as well as related health and nutrition programs essential for infant survival. Without USAID, increased exposure to dirty water and poor sanitation will cause a range of severe health problems in babies and toddlers, leading to higher rates of diarrhea, malnutrition, and other waterborne diseases like cholera and typhoid. This is because children's underdeveloped immune systems are particularly vulnerable, making them more susceptible to dehydration and preventing them from absorbing essential nutrients. The consequences can be deadly, contributing to high mortality rates and stunting.

### International Humanitarian Assistance

- **What changed:** The President's FY 2026 budget request slashes humanitarian funding by more than half, including emergency food and nutrition programs.
- **Impact on babies:** Loss of therapeutic feeding, protection, and clean water in emergencies — all essential for survival in crises. In South Sudan, where U.S. funding accounted for 70% of nutrition assistance, the withdrawal of aid halted the delivery of Ready-to-Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF). Journalist Nicholas Kristof reported that children in a village were starving as a direct result.<sup>14</sup>

### UNICEF and World Food Program

- **What changed:** U.S. cuts caused a projected 20% drop in UNICEF's 2026 budget, reducing neonatal care, vaccines, and infant nutrition services. In 2025, the U.S. also cut its financial contributions to the World Food Program (WFP) by 90%, leading to severe operational and staffing reductions. And despite a waiver for emergency food assistance, the U.S. ordered the WFP to stop support for dozens of U.S.-funded grants. These canceled grants were worth tens of millions of dollars and delivered aid for extremely poor countries.
- **Impact on babies:** The cuts strain the capacity of humanitarian organizations, making it difficult to respond to ongoing and future crises. For example, there will be fewer newborn incubators to go around, disrupted vaccine drives, and less access to safe water in conflict and disaster zones. The WFP estimates that because of the cuts, nearly 14 million people could be pushed into emergency levels of hunger with young children at great risk of malnutrition and death.

### Looking Ahead

In September, the State Department released the **America First Global Health Strategy**,<sup>15</sup> which outlines plans to finalize bilateral compacts with recipient countries by the end of the 2025 calendar year and aims to rapidly wean recipient countries off of what is left of U.S. foreign assistance.

However, facing their highest debt burdens in decades, many of the world's poorest nations

are unlikely to be able to make that rapid pivot. And for children and babies living in countries without functioning governments, such as South Sudan or regions consumed by crisis like Gaza, the State Department's strategy is silent. It is also silent on critical child-centered programs such as PEPFAR's Orphans and Vulnerable Children efforts, which the Administration ended in January 2025, and the Children in Adversity Office. Both of those efforts and many others must be reinstated and enhanced as vulnerable babies and children need them now more than ever.

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