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Impact of the global gag rule on health sector: Q&A with DKT International CEO Chris Purdy

By [Christin Roby \(/news/authors/1274425\)](#) // 24 January 2017



A nurse with DKT Ethiopia counsels women on family planning in Oromia. Photo by: DKT Ethiopia (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/dktethiopia/13085545285/>) / CC BY (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>)

On the first working day of Donald Trump's administration, the new president signed an executive order reinstating the "global gag rule" (<http://www.globalgagrule.org/>) — an anti-abortion policy that prohibits any nongovernmental organization abroad that receives U.S. government funding from performing abortion services or giving information about abortions as a means of family planning.

The global gag rule, also known as the Mexico City Policy, has been a highly partisan policy that has been nullified by Democrat presidents and reinstated by Republican presidents. This rule was brought in by former President Ronald Reagan, but was struck down when President Bill Clinton took office in 1993. The act was reinstated under President George W. Bush and was quickly repealed by President Barack Obama in 2009.

Population Action International (<http://pai.org/>), a global family planning advocacy group, has described the move as part of an "agenda to punish women everywhere." Other family planning supporters said this policy undermines the work of Family Planning 2020 — a global partnership aimed at enabling 120 million more girls to use contraceptives by 2020 in support of the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals.

Devex spoke with Christopher Purdy, CEO of DKT International (<https://www.devex.com/organizations/dkt-international-27665>) — one of the largest private providers of family planning services and safe abortions overseas — to learn how the reinstatement of this policy will impact other health providers across the globe.

Trump executive order cuts funding to NGOs that provide abortion services, information (<https://www.devex.com/news/trump-executive-order-cuts-funding-to-ngos-that-provide-abortion-services-information-89510>)

On Monday President Donald Trump reinstated the "global gag rule," which prohibits federal funding from going to nongovernmental organizations that provide abortions or information about them. While the move doesn't come as a surprise, here's what it will mean.



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What is the global gag rule?

The global gag rule fundamentally bars non-U.S. organizations from talking about abortion if they receive U.S. government funds. It does not apply to U.S. [-based] organizations. If you are an organization, for example in Cote d'Ivoire, and you receive funding from the U.S. government, you may not even talk about abortion (even if you're funded by some other donor to talk about abortion). It gags you from even using other donors' resources to speak about abortion if you receive funds from the U.S. government.



It's really an insidious rule because if you're an organization that gets funding from another organization, you're even barred from using their funds to talk about something that is legal in the United States.

It's something that Republican presidents tend to do because there's a constituency of theirs that feels very strongly about [abortion] and there's not enough support on these kinds of issues.

What impact might the reinstatement of the global gag rule have on the FP2020 goals?

I think it's pretty significant. The U.S. government is a major supporter of family planning around the world. It's been a leader, and people look to the United States and USAID both for guidance but also for material support. There will be many organizations — and again it only applies to foreign organizations, but there's some big ones, as well as many local ones — that will refuse to be silenced and ultimately will be ineligible to receive U.S. government funds. Those organizations will have to cease providing services that were provided with U.S. government funds, all because of the global gag rule. That means that more women will not receive family planning services.

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There are some big international organizations impacted by this. Probably Marie Stopes International, which historically has not signed on to the global gag rule. International Planned Parenthood Federation typically does not sign on, so they both are at risk of losing significant funding, along with many local NGOs.

The great irony in this is that you will have more women who don't have access to family planning who are going to get pregnant and will have to go and get an abortion. So the very thing they are trying to prevent is probably going to increase because of the very thing they're doing.

What could the global gag rule reinstatement mean for the international community at large?

This impacts us, and will impact many organizations because, in addition to the global gag rule, there is a lot of uncertainty about Trump and what a Trump administration means for foreign aid and for reproductive rights and reproductive health in general internationally. Will there be continued funding and support for the FP2020 (<http://www.familyplanning2020.org/>) goals as there has been in the past? I don't think anybody has the answer to that question right now, but there is a bit of uncertainty. That uncertainty is never good because people have planning cycles and budgeting cycles, and if they are not sure if they will have the funds to do what they need/want to do, then they will cut back and slow down and stop.

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I think there will also be more competition for the available resources there are. This means that lateral donors, as well as foundations and private donors, to the extent that they can step up and do more, there's going to be pressure on them to do that. But I think the gap is pretty big to fill, so we shall see.

It's so hard to prognosticate because there is so little evidence to go on. I would say that Trump has surrounded himself with at least some decision makers and cabinet appointees who have been historically not particularly supportive of abortion care. Now whether that translates into him signing off on things, that's hard to say. His daughter has been a voice of reason in terms of women's rights, so it's hard to know what he's going to do. So I think everyone needs to hope for the best and prepare for the worst.

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