

URGE CONGRESS TO PRIORITIZE CHILDREN IN FOREIGN AID FUNDING DECISIONS



Every year, the President submits a budget request to Congress and then the House and Senate work on their own budget resolutions. Next, Congress must pass appropriations bills to provide the funding to carry out programs for that year. One area of consideration for Congress annually is how much it provides for poverty-focused foreign assistance and how it allocates that funding.

Opinion polls report that Americans believe spending on foreign aid falls around 25 percent of the federal budget and we should spend about 10% of the federal budget on foreign aid. In fact, our U.S. foreign assistance budget represents less than 1% of our overall federal budget.

Foreign assistance has traditionally enjoyed bipartisan support in Congress because it saves lives, reduces suffering, promotes international stability and trade and enhances our national security. Unfortunately, while international child-focused programs are supported by members of Congress in principle, children receive only a tiny morsel of the overall foreign assistance funding pie.

As members of Congress begin the annual appropriations process, we will be educating them and raising awareness about the fact that only 8.5 cents of every one dollar of foreign aid investments benefit children, despite children making up nearly 30% of the global population.

Join us in taking action!

This month, join First Focus on Children, policy experts and other ambassadors in urging our members of Congress to significantly expand the proportion of funding budgeted and appropriated to children internationally in Fiscal Year 2024.

Background

Every year, U.S. foreign assistance programs provide nutrition, health, primary education, clean water, humanitarian assistance and more to marginalized communities worldwide. Programs such as these have been incredibly successful. For example, maternal health and child survival programs have enabled the global community to [slash](#) preventable deaths of children under five from a rate of 12.6 million each year in 1990 to roughly 5 million today. Another example is [U.S. global HIV funding](#) which has contributed to the care and support of over 7 million orphans and vulnerable children and their caregivers and enabled 5.5 million babies to be born HIV-free.

Such achievements have resulted in millions of child-lives saved and an untold amount of reduced suffering for the world's most vulnerable children. Regrettably, as with [elsewhere](#) in the U.S. federal budget, children receive far fewer resources from U.S. foreign assistance than they should given their proportion of the population and their critical development needs. Recent analysis from [First Focus on Children](#) estimates that only 11.98% of the overall Federal budget was spent on children and within the 1% of the budget spent on foreign aid, only 0.085% of that benefitted kids.

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This disproportionate share of resources provided to children perhaps assumes that children can be treated as small adults and that they will benefit equally from programming geared towards grownups. Not only is this untrue, brain science says that the early years of human life are the most critical for future development and success because 80% of human brain growth occurs by age three and 90% by age five. If a child experiences adverse effects of poverty, such as poor nutrition, food insecurity, disease, lack of access to early learning or education and lack of protection during key developmental windows, it can have a devastating impact on their future health, longevity, educational attainment and income generation. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic [250 million children](#) worldwide were growing up with stunted brains and bodies due to the worst aspects of poverty. And the pandemic has vastly worsened the situation – resulting in [10.5 million](#) additional children who have lost a primary or secondary caregiver—meaning these kids lost their first line of defense, support, protection and nurturing.

For 2023, in an attempt to address some of these needs, Congress was able to include modest increases in a handful of the 24 foreign assistance accounts that benefit children and youth. This is good news. However, children still receive just a sliver of the U.S. budget. Congress must increase investments for children to reflect their proportion of the global population and better mitigate the adverse impact of poverty and disease on their young minds and bodies.

Indeed, children make up one-third of the world's population — and up to half the population in some countries — yet they remain an afterthought in U.S. foreign policy and assistance. Without expanded funding and focus on children internationally, their health and well-being will continue to falter.

Take Action!

Steps for Writing an Effective Advocacy Email:

1. Reflect on why you care about the well-being of children globally.
2. Consider including information about yourself and why you are writing now.
3. Write a rough draft of your email that includes the fact that children are last and least in our federal budget and annual funding decisions and urge Congress to expand the proportion of resources for children to reflect the proportion they are of the population.
4. When you are happy with your email, explore the website of your member of Congress for where to send it. Find your [Representative](#)/[Senators](#) here.
5. Share any responses you receive with the First Focus team.
6. For bonus points, consider also using social media to convey the message above to your member of Congress using a positive and encouraging tone. Don't forget to use the hashtags #Commit2Kids, #InvestInKids and #VoteKids and to tag @Campaign4Kids and your members of Congress ([you can find their social media accounts using our tool here](#)). [You may check out [the social media "how to" document](#) for additional advice.]