



Zonta partnerships more important than ever

Since January, Zonta International has been closely following the news of the USAID stop work orders and decreased government funding for development and humanitarian assistance and has been in dialogue with our partners regarding any impacts to our international service projects. During the sixty-ninth session of the annual Commission on the Status of the Women in New York last week, Zonta International leadership had the opportunity to meet in person with our partners at UNFPA, UNICEF USA and the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage to discuss our current projects and hear the latest developments.

Following is a summary of what we know today about each of our international service projects for the 2024-2026 Biennium; however, one thing is abundantly clear: Funding for programs benefiting women and girls, which were already underfunded, is now even more vulnerable. That is why support from the private sector and organizations like Zonta International is more important than ever before to ensure they have access to critical services and their rights are protected.

[Climate Empower: Community Empowerment and Innovation for Gender-Transformative Climate Action](#)

UNFPA's programming has been significantly affected by the USAID stop-work orders and funding cuts, as seen in several countries. In Afghanistan, over 9 million people will lose access to essential health and protection services as nearly 600 mobile health teams, family health houses and counseling centers shut down, resulting in the loss of jobs for more than 1,700 female health workers. In Yemen, more than 220,000 displaced individuals will no longer receive emergency relief. In Ukraine, programs supporting 640,000 women and girls—offering gender-based violence prevention, psychosocial support, safe spaces and economic empowerment—are now at risk. While these examples illustrate the significant impact of funding rollbacks on UNFPA's services in vulnerable regions, Zonta's partnership with UNFPA to prevent climate-induced gender-based violence and other harmful practices like child marriage in Madagascar, Mozambique and South Sudan has not been directly impacted. The situation, however, is changing on a weekly or daily basis. Zonta International will continue to monitor the situation; and, with UNFPA, will be hosting a webinar in April/May to provide an update on this project and will share any further developments at that time. Watch for more information to be released soon.

[UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage](#)

The Global Programme to End Child Marriage anticipated US\$5 million from the U.S. Government for Phase III of the Programme (2024-2030), which they will no longer receive. In fact, all major bilateral donors to the Global Programme: the UK, Norway, Netherlands, with the exception of Canada, have also indicated significant cuts to their foreign aid budgets since the start of this year. However, due to the "interlinkages with other programmes," a decreased funding for sectors such as education, health, and social and humanitarian, particularly GBV and protection, will also have impacts on efforts to end

child marriage. These rollbacks come on top of already existing funding shortfalls of at least 25% for 2025, consequently impacting programme delivery.

UNFPA country offices were leveraging on the investments in GBV prevention and response both in development and humanitarian settings. The current termination of humanitarian funding will risk the continuation of GBV services for women and girls, including safe spaces, maternal health and contraceptives supplies in humanitarian crises.

For 2025, the Global Programme had planned to mobilize US\$40 million, but now it is looking likely to be at most US\$30 million in 2025. The Global Programme is looking for alternative sources of funding, including the private sector, individual philanthropists and domestic financing; however, at the same time, they have revised their 2025 targets and prioritizing investments to ensure the greatest impact. The Global Programme remains committed to delivering services in the 12 targeted countries.

[Laaha](#)

UNICEF is committed to serving the needs of women and girls, even in the toughest humanitarian crises. One of the most innovative and exciting features of UNICEF's gender-based violence in emergencies program is Laaha, the first-ever digital web-based platform created by UNICEF with women and girls from crisis-affected regions, strives to increase knowledge on gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health and to reduce isolation by building safe online spaces of support for adolescent girls. Digital tools like Laaha are more critical than ever as gender-based violence in emergencies is an area that has been hit especially hard by recent humanitarian funding cuts. According to our partners at UNICEF USA, the funding shortfall for Laaha is US\$1.5 million. This shortfall is impacting staffing and UNICEF's ability to achieve its goal of expanding to 15 languages and reach 1 million girls by the end of 2025. Thanks to the generous support of Zonta, Laaha is able to continue this important work and still reach half a million women and girls across 10 different languages this year. Zonta International and UNICEF USA will be hosting a virtual Laaha experience in the coming months. More information will be released in the upcoming months about the program's progress, in the meantime here is a link to the [Laaha newsletter](#) with current updates.

The way forward

Zonta International and Zonta Foundation for Women do not receive any government funding, and our contributions to UNFPA and UNICEF will continue to support these three critical programs to prevent violence against women and girls, advance climate justice and end child marriage as approved by our members at the 2024 Zonta International Convention. We will continue to diligently monitor the situation to ensure that the projects can proceed as planned and will update our members and donors of any new developments.

Thank you to all our donors for supporting this life-changing and life-saving work and for your trust and confidence. With your unwavering support and generosity, Zonta International will remain a steady and reliable source of funding for essential programs to build a better world for women and girls and ultimately a better world for all.