

Executive summary

PROJECT 2025

An ultraconservative plan for expanding extreme anti-gender laws and dismantle the multilateral system

A summary of Malayah Harper's report "Project 2025: How the blueprint for the next Republican administration may impact US foreign and development policy on SRHR and gender equality".

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BACKGROUND: RFSU'S STUDY ON PROJECT 2025

Media attention in Europe is increasingly focused on the upcoming US elections in November. This includes coverage of [Project 2025](#), a far-right conservative and Christian nationalist road map that aims to dramatically reshape the US federal government. It is a product of [The Heritage Foundation](#), an American think tank with an advisory board of influential ultra-conservative and anti-rights individuals and organisations.

While the impacts of Project 2025 domestically in the US have come under scrutiny, far less attention has been given to its potential international impacts. The project outlines a complete overhaul of foreign and development policy. The US is a strong voice in the UN and the largest contributor to development assistance. The US is also the largest contributor to global health. In turn, a large share of US global health funding is channelled to initiatives and multilateral bodies that contribute to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). To understand Project 2025's implications for US and European ODA and foreign policy, RFSU commissioned an analytical study. The final report is called [Project 2025: How the blueprint for the next Republican administration may impact US foreign and development policy on SRHR and gender equality](#). The report zooms in on the devastating impact the Project's implementation would have on the multilateral system, global health, gender equality, SRHR, and the rights of LGBTQ+ persons.

WHAT IS PROJECT 2025?

Project 2025 is divided into 4 "pillars". The central element is "Pillar 1", a 920-page authoritarian policy roadmap called [The Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise](#). It outlines plans to centralise power into the hands of the President, appoint politically partisan courts and remove career civil servants in favour of political appointees. The Mandate was drafted over two years and brought together 34 authors and over 420 contributors.

DONALD TRUMP AND PROJECT 2025

Donald Trump has distanced himself from Project 2025, saying he has “no knowledge of the Project” and calling some elements “extreme.” However, these denials have been questioned. [CNN reports](#) that at least 140 people who worked in the Trump Administration contributed to the Project. According to [the Guardian](#), 29 of the 36 speakers in the so called Presidential Academy training videos worked for Donald Trump in some capacity.

What are the suggestions for US foreign policy and the UN system?

Project 2025 outlines how to:

- Break down the multilateral order, including by defunding and potentially withdrawing from the United Nations (UN)
- Extend international anti-abortion policies and silence dissenting voices through a massive expansion of the so-called Mexico City Policy (MCP).
- Do a comprehensive restructuring of the US Agency for International Development (USAID). At a minimum, USAID should return to the agency’s 2019 pre-COVID budget level.
- Remove all language on gender, abortion, reproductive health and rights and anything inclusive of diverse gender identities from all materials and programming of USAID.
- Remove the 180 gender advisors across USAID.

In particular, Project 2025 proposes extensive rollbacks in US foreign and development policies on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), LGBTQ+, equality, racial equity, climate, and environmental protection. The Project stands out for its focus on anti-abortion messages. It outlines how to stop any access to abortion information, comprehensive sexuality education and emergency contraception. The global consequences extend far beyond removing access to abortion and will significantly affect contraceptive access, maternal health and gender equality programming.

The changes proposed by Project 2025 in the US relationships with the UN are so substantial that they would have considerable impacts on all UN member states, including Sweden and the EU. It suggests to fundamentally alter American diplomacy by using its voice to push anti-gender, anti-abortion and anti-LGBTQ+ agendas. UN organisations that do not comply risk being defunded. These are not idle threats: under the last Trump administration, the UN Fund for Population and Development (UNFPA) was defunded, the World Health Organisation (WHO) came under substantial pressure, and the US withdrew from the Human Rights Council. Project 2025 goes further than this.

EXPANSION OF AN EXTREME VERSION OF US ANTI-ABORTION POLICIES GLOBALLY

The Project calls for a massive expansion of the Mexico City Policy (MCP), also known as the Global Gag Rule (GGR). Since 1984, the MCP has been implemented by each Republican administration and rescinded by each Democratic. Under the original conditions of the MCP (which applied to Family Planning assistance only) Foreign Non-Governmental Organisations that receive US funding has to agree not to use the US funds or funds from other donors for performing, providing counselling, referring, or advocating for safe abortion. Other partners (such as Swedish Sida) cannot support these organisations in providing those services. 'Gagging' vast numbers of civil society organisations in recipient countries limits the number of partners on the ground, breaks down the infrastructure of local organisations and weakens and silences civil society groups.

In 2017, President Trump reinstated and expanded the MCP, applying it to all health assistance. Project 2025 goes further. MCP is proposed to be expanded to cover ALL foreign development assistance. The name of the expanded policy is Protecting Life in Foreign Assistance (PLFA).

The PLFA would attempt to tie US bilateral government-to-government agreements, possibly by having countries endorse the Geneva Consensus Declaration (GCD). The declaration is a global anti-abortion manifesto that was developed in 2020 under the first Trump administration.

The suggested measures would have severe and far-reaching effects beyond substantially reducing essential service access.

The Project 2025 expansion of the MCP would cover:

- All US foreign assistance: USD 66 billion (2023). [Estimations show](#) that USD 51 billion goes to non-US Government prime recipients, the funding most likely subject to the expanded MCP.
- USD 30 billion annually to multilateral agencies. In the past, these organisations, including the UNFPA, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria (the Global Fund), and the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI), have not had to certify compliance with the MCP.
- USD 16 billion annually to humanitarian assistance, previously exempted from the policy.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

If fully implemented, the grave impact of Project 2025 on US ODA and foreign policy is undeniable. It would negatively impact the lives and health of the poorest and most vulnerable, particularly groups of women, girls and LGBTQ+ persons. Project 2025 should not be viewed as a short-term plan. Regardless of the outcome of the elections, delivering on its core objectives will be central to groups of far-right and Christian nationalists in the conservative movement.

RFSU encourages the Swedish and like-minded European governments, donors, academia, the general public, and civil society to read about Project 2025, understand what is at stake, and spread the word to others.

RFSU's recommendations to the Swedish and like-minded governments:

- Coordinate and develop a joint road map in preparation for a possible implementation of Project 2025. There is an urgent need for a stronger coordination and infrastructure for analytical work, information sharing, and action around Project 2025. Elevate Project 2025 to a foreign policy issue that impacts democracy, human rights and sovereignty.
- Establish an emergency fund (or enhance an existing mechanism). This is necessary to protect and grow all the programs, agencies and organisations that are at risk of losing US funding. Be prepared to fill the funding gaps, including for humanitarian action.
- Work closely with UN bodies and multilateral organisations such as the UNFPA, the Global Fund, WHO, and Gavi, supporting them to prepare and be vocal in defence of human rights and the impacts of implementing Project 2025.
- Work together with governments and other actors from the Global South. Substantial support is needed for coordinated voices and actions from governments and civil society in the Global South. Work hand in hand with key allies and support like-minded governments to have a global voice on human rights, gender equality and SRHR. Ensure that local voices are empowered and at the forefront of shaping the laws, policies, and programs that affect their communities.

By implementing these recommendations, European governments and civil society will help proactively address the challenges posed by Project 2025 and support human rights, dignity and equality for all.