



Foreign Assistance Pause FAQ

How did we get here?

On January 20th, the administration issued an [executive order](#) (EO) pausing “foreign development assistance” while the State Department completes a 90-day review process. It also granted the Secretary of State authority to waive that pause for particular programs. On January 24th, the State Department issued initial [implementation guidance](#) that went beyond the EO and halted nearly all U.S. foreign assistance, only exempting emergency food aid and foreign military financing to Egypt and Israel.

On February 3rd Secretary Rubio announced his appointment as acting Administrator for USAID. He then delegated his authority over USAID to Peter Marocco, the new administration’s Director of Foreign Assistance at the State Department. Although he is not Senate-confirmed, Marocco is overseeing the review and waiver process, as well as USAID’s consolidation within the State Department.

What programs and activities are frozen?

On January 28th, USAID issued additional [implementation guidance](#) directing all USAID implementing partners to immediately pause all USAID program-funded activities and refrain from further expenditures of USAID funding until further notice. It also stated that the freeze remains in effect until an implementer receives formal notification from their Contracting Officer (CO) or Award Officer (AO) that all or part of their grant is covered by a waiver.

On February 13th, a federal judge granted a [Temporary Restraining Order](#) (TRO) blocking the administration (1) from enforcing its blanket suspension/pause of appropriated funds for foreign assistance contracts, grants, and awards in place as of Jan. 19, and (2) from implementing or enforcing related terminations, suspensions, and stop-work orders. However, the effect of the (TRO) – which did not prohibit the administration “from enforcing the terms of the contracts and grants” – remains unclear. The administration has since [claimed](#) that “substantially all of the terminations, suspensions, and stop-work orders” were allowed by the express or implicit terms of the individual contracts and grants, and so are not barred by the TRO.

See also: [Interactive Chart of Assistance Impacted by the Pause](#)

Didn't Secretary Rubio issue waivers?

Yes, but they are not being implemented as intended (more on that below). The initial “stop-work order” issued on January 24th [exempted](#) “emergency food assistance” and foreign military financing for Egypt and Israel. Subsequently, on January 28th, Secretary of State Rubio signed an [Emergency Humanitarian Waiver](#) exempting “life-saving humanitarian assistance” from the foreign assistance pause, which was intended to include “core life-saving medicine, medical services, food, shelter, and subsistence assistance, as well as supplies and reasonable administrative costs as necessary to deliver such assistance.” However, the waiver is vague, leaving many implementers unsure of which programs and activities can resume operations.

There had also been intense speculation and confusion over whether PEPFAR’s activities – many of which were paused – were included in this waiver. On February 1st, PEPFAR received a [limited waiver](#) and could resume operations for specific activities only. These activities include HIV care and treatment services, including antiretroviral medications and prevention services critical to keeping patients healthy, treatment to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV, and reasonable administrative costs necessary to deliver this assistance. All other activities under PEPFAR by implementing partners are to remain paused until further guidance is issued.

On February 6th, the State Department issued [implementation guidance](#) on the limited waiver received by PEPFAR on February 1st. The guidance allows for the continuation of HIV testing, care, and treatment for all people living with HIV (PLHIV), laboratory support, supply chain management, and limited activities for PLHIV at risk of tuberculosis. However, it excludes important prevention and key population programming, stating “people other than pregnant and breastfeeding women who may be at high risk of HIV infection or were previously initiated on a PrEP option cannot be offered PEPFAR-funded PrEP during this pause.” [Updated guidance](#) released shortly after encourages implementing agencies to “take necessary actions to expedite resumption of these services.”

As of February 9th, a [survey](#) of 65 PEPFAR implementers noted that only 5% of organizations have been told they may resume services, with 70% of respondents not having received any official communication of the waiver applying to their activities. Additionally, 36% of PEPFAR-funded providers who were [surveyed](#) reported that they have completely shut down.

Why haven't waivers been implemented?

The process is not working. Implementing partners have been unable to access obligated funds and in many cases are still owed substantial sums of money for work done before the

stop work orders were issued. This means that even organizations whose work would be covered by a waiver cannot resume work.

Reports on the ground suggest that stop-work-orders are still in place for many lifesaving activities and programs, notwithstanding the announced waiver. While the PEPFAR waiver provides reasonably clear guidance on which activities can resume, the Secretary's previous [Emergency Humanitarian Waiver](#) is vague. The waiver included a broad list of interventions that can be funded, like "medical services, food, shelter, and subsistent assistance."

However, many implementers have been unable to secure the required formal notification from their contract officers that their activity is covered by the waiver, and with recent changes to USAID it is unclear how many COs and AOs remain on duty, or who at the State Department has assumed the responsibility to make such determinations. In recent weeks, USAID's headquarters has been closed, thousands of its personnel have been furloughed, its online content has been removed from the Internet, and its overseas personnel have been left in limbo, waiting to see whether they will be directed to return to the United States. Without specific notification that contracts or activities fall under the administration's interpretation of "life-saving humanitarian assistance," implementers cannot resume operations.

A previous announcement on the USAID website stated that all USAID direct hire personnel – including those overseas – would be placed on administrative leave on February 7th. Hours before that decision went into effect, a judge temporarily blocked the administration from placing the 2,200 USAID personnel on leave and reinstated an additional 500 USAID staff that were already placed on administrative leave prior to the February 7th decision. The [temporary restraining order](#) remains in place until Friday, February 21st. However, given staff reductions and the persistent lack of clarity about the waiver process, a recent USAID Inspector General [report](#) notes that the court order "does not obviate... concerns regarding the capacity of Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance staff to work with implementing partners to protect and distribute humanitarian assistance commodities and conduct vital oversight of taxpayer-funded program."

How has the pause impacted American workers and organizations?

The pause has placed intense financial pressure on the organizations – many U.S. based – tasked with implementing U.S. foreign assistance. Organizations are unable to access obligated funds or payment for work done before the stop work orders were issued, meaning they do not have the capital to sustain operations. As a result, these organizations cannot pay local partners and other subcontractors who play a critical role in delivering

lifesaving assistance and strengthening American goodwill in the local communities where they work. To date:

- **More than [13,000 American jobs](#)** linked to USAID contractors have been lost due to layoffs, furloughs, and salary cuts. This continues to grow each day, with some estimates claiming that the actual total is [four-times](#) that number.
- Without payment, **numerous U.S. small businesses** will be unable to survive the 90-day pause.
- **Faith-based organizations** that have partnered with the U.S. government for decades are at risk of closure, and some are already [significantly cutting staff](#).

What about the distribution of aid that has already been purchased? Will it be wasted?

Yes, already-purchased food and medical supplies are in transit, but may never reach the intended recipients. Although emergency food assistance has been exempted from the pause, perishable U.S. food commodities have been caught in the suspension as shipments are delayed around the world and ongoing confusion persists among implementers and USAID staff on which programs are covered by the waiver.

According to USAID, this uncertainty risked spoilage for roughly [\\$490 million](#) of American-grown food that is in transit, sitting at ports, or in warehouses waiting to reach those in need. An additional [500,000 metric tons](#) of food sourced from American farmers, but not included in the Secretary's emergency food assistance waiver, is also currently on ships or ready to be shipped abroad. American farms supply roughly [40% of the food](#) that USAID and the Department of Agriculture send around the world each year, valued at more than [\\$2 billion](#).

Apart from food commodities, nearly \$90 million in HIV medications are also in transit but are stuck in limbo because programs lack the funds to transfer, properly store, and distribute them. The U.S. relies on roughly 400 supply chain partners around the world to deliver lifesaving medications.

Additionally, the [Prompt Payment Act](#) penalizes the U.S. Government for delayed payments to contractors, granting contractors 4.625% interest for invoices not paid within 30 days. This means that the pause in payments will cost federal agencies more than if disbursements continued during the review process.

How are authoritarian regimes responding?

Authoritarian regimes, who have sought for decades to eliminate U.S. influence and goodwill throughout the world, have praised the decision to abruptly pause U.S. foreign assistance.

- **In Russia**, Dmitry Medvedev, a top advisor Putin and the subject of US sanctions, cheered the decision a “smart move.” Russian ultra-nationalist Alexander Dugin also [called](#) the move “so significant that it is hard to comprehend.” Russian state media has also suggested that the U.S. is turning away from traditional allies and is instead seeking to deepen relations with China and Russia. Additionally, during a January 28 [interview](#), Putin stated that without Western funding, the war in Ukraine could end in a month and a half. The U.S. has since resumed weapons shipments to Ukraine.
- **Iranian media** [welcomed](#) the pause because it would halt U.S. support for pro-democracy activists in the country. Other media compared it to a “cold shower” for Iran’s opponents abroad and [joked](#) that the U.S. was abandoning its allies like “disposable tissues.”
- **In China**, the government’s response has been more subtle. The South China Morning Post [highlighted](#) the potential for political instability in Bangladesh due to cuts in social services that were supported by U.S. assistance. [Xinhua News](#) and [other Chinese outlets](#) have also covered the aid suspension, with a notable focus on how it impacts U.S. economic and military support for Ukraine.
- **Georgia’s** Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze, a member of the Georgian Dream Party that is aligned with the Kremlin, [welcomed](#) the decision to suspend aid and “expressed hope that foreign aid will be suspended for a longer period than the announced 90 days.”
- **Belarusian** President Alexander Lukashenko [noted](#) that the decision to freeze funding cuts off support to the country’s “fugitive opposition,” referring to groups within the country fighting for democracy and the rule of law.
- **Venezuela’s** Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello Rondón, one of Maduro’s closest advisors, [cheered](#) the aid pause on state-media, calling USAID funding a “black box of corruption.”
- **In Nicaragua**, state-media owned by President Daniel Ortega’s son [declared](#) that the decision “turned off the faucet” for pro-democracy activists.