

**USAID responds to humanitarian spending, staffing concerns** By [Michael Igoe](#) // 26 October 2022 --The [U.S. Agency for International Development](#) has responded to U.S. lawmakers' concerns about its ability to deliver record amounts of humanitarian aid to address the global food crisis and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

In a [letter](#) on Oct. 19, Jodi Herman, [USAID](#)'s assistant administrator for legislative and public affairs, outlined how the agency has spent billions of dollars from emergency funding packages provided by the Congress, while working to shore up a short-staffed humanitarian workforce. The letter comes after Republican senators led by Joni Ernst, from Iowa, wrote to USAID Administrator Samantha Power in [July](#) and in [September](#) with concerns about the pace of the agency's spending and doubts about the number of employees available to manage it. USAID sent its response to Ernst one day after [Devex published an article](#) describing significant staffing and morale problems inside USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance.

"There is no question that BHA staffing, and associated CO [contracting officer] support, has not kept pace with the growth in humanitarian budgets," Herman wrote in response. "In recognition of this issue, one of the Administrator's top priorities is to address longstanding issues in the USAID workforce, reflected in the increase in personnel in USAID budget requests to Congress."

The letter notes that USAID's humanitarian bureau made funding commitments of over \$11.6 billion in fiscal year 2022, which ended Sept. 30. That is 40% more than in fiscal year 2021.

Much of that increase resulted from two Ukraine supplemental funding bills that U.S. lawmakers passed, which included \$7 billion in emergency funding for USAID. The letter states that USAID obligated nearly \$4.38 billion of that supplemental funding — or roughly 62%. *"Given the complexity of these needs, these programs take additional time to design, but are critical to famine prevention."*

— Jodi Herman, assistant administrator for legislative and public affairs, USAID

A USAID spokesperson wrote to Devex that the agency plans to commit about \$2 billion more from the Ukraine emergency supplemental funding this calendar year, which would account for more than 90% of that funding.

"To move funding as quickly as possible, BHA has been infusing money into existing awards, with a focus on public international organizations partners, such as the World Food Programme (WFP), that have the capacity to scale quickly," Herman wrote in her letter.

She added that USAID is working with nongovernmental organizations to design multisectoral programs "because food assistance alone is not sufficient to address the global food security crisis."

The letter notes that acute food insecurity creates additional needs related to health, nutrition, and protection for women and girls that require a comprehensive package of assistance.

"Given the complexity of these needs, these programs take additional time to design, but are critical to famine prevention," Herman wrote.

To address the mismatch between unprecedented amounts of funding moving through USAID's humanitarian bureau and a relatively small number of staff with the authority to spend it, the agency has temporarily surged contracting officer support into its humanitarian bureau, the letter says.

USAID also plans to increase the number of contracting officers in the bureau from the current number of five to seven. The agency is also looking to use pay incentives to increase the number of contracting officer applicants to help its hiring push, Herman wrote.

“I am pleased that USAID has recognized my concerns and is committed to addressing their staffing shortages. The agency's response demonstrates how aggressive and effective congressional oversight can make important change, in this case, helping U.S. humanitarian aid move more efficiently and protecting the American taxpayer,” Sen. Ernst wrote to Devex in a statement. “Adding a few additional contracting officers is a start, but with the recent surge in funding and ongoing humanitarian crisis, the agency still lags behind. I remain committed to working with my colleagues in Congress to ensure that USAID is fulfilling its obligation to effectively and wisely steward hardworking taxpayers’ dollars,” she added.