

Funding their way

Technically, the compromise foreign assistance budget that just emerged from the U.S. Congress is **not an increase — it's a 16% decrease from what was approved** by lawmakers last year. However, that 16% doesn't even compare to the nearly 50% cut that U.S. President Donald Trump wanted.

The [\\$50 billion topline figure for foreign assistance programs](#) in fiscal 2026 that the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate agreed to could be a long-awaited break for a beleaguered development community. But as with so many things on Capitol Hill, **it's not a done deal**. Both chambers still need to pass it, and Trump must sign it — not to mention that a potential Jan. 30 government shutdown looms large. There's also the big elephant in the room: Even if passed, will the White House spend the funds as Congress intended? Its track record on that, after all, is spotty.

The myriad questions aside, it's still a major step in parsing what U.S. foreign aid will look like moving forward. My colleague Adva Saldinger dug into the numbers and found lots to chew on. **Among the highlights: Global health programs emerge as relative winners**, retaining more than \$9.4 billion in total funding.

And while cuts still span most program areas, the compromise restores some funding absent from the House version, including support for [Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance](#) — more on that below — and the [International Development Association](#), the [World Bank](#)'s fund for the lowest-income countries.

The bill also **includes about \$5.4 billion for humanitarian assistance**, establishing a new budget line that merges funding previously split between the international disaster assistance and migration and refugee assistance accounts. Among many reporting requirements, Congress directs the [State Department](#) to outline how it will program, manage, and monitor humanitarian assistance funding.

But serious questions remain about how the State Department will administer aid programs and whether it has the staffing to do so. On that note, the bill provides almost **\$112 million for operating expenses tied to assistance administration**, a sharp contrast to the nearly \$1.7 billion for USAID's operating expenses in fiscal year 2024.

Still, there's a lot that could raise the hopes of aid advocates, including spending on institutions that looked like they had been fed into Elon Musk's proverbial wood chipper. Whether they come out somewhat rebuilt remains to be seen.

Read: [US lawmakers strike \\$50B foreign assistance deal, surpassing Trump's plan](#)

A shot at public health

One notable change in the fiscal 2026 compromise involves Gavi, which just six months ago faced a grand U.S. contribution of zero, with the Trump administration saying it would [cut all funding](#) for the vaccine-focused organization.

Gavi's inclusion in the fiscal 2026 funding bill, however, [comes with the usual slew of caveats](#): The compromise bill may go nowhere or get ignored by Trump, even if he ultimately signs it.

Still, it's an intriguing turn of events, writes Devex Senior Reporter Sara Jerving. At Gavi's high-level replenishment conference last June, U.S. health secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., a vaccine skeptic, said Gavi needed to "start taking vaccine safety seriously," criticized its recommendations around COVID-19 vaccines, and accused it of silencing dissenting opinions during the pandemic.

At the time, critics questioned whether RFK Jr. had the power to make such an announcement, given that Congress is tasked with deciding the nation's budget. This uncertainty has left the organization in limbo — though **this compromise bill could finally bring some clarity**.

Read: [US Congress backs Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, despite Trump admin cuts](#)

Learning their lesson

Education advocates also breathed a tentative sigh of relief after seeing the compromise attach **\$691.5 million for global education programs**, including \$152 million for multilateral partnerships supporting education.

As anticipated, the **total for the Nita M. Lowey Basic Education Fund came in slightly lower** than the \$737.6 million figure in last year's [U.S. House of Representatives bill](#). But the amount for multilaterals remained the same.

Giulia McPherson, the executive director of the Global Campaign for Education-US, tells Devex that the sum was still relatively good, “considering everything.”

“Overall, we’re encouraged that Congress has voiced its support for these programs and we will continue to encourage the administration to implement the congressionally mandated funds,” she tells Devex.

McPherson hopes Congress will pass the bill as soon as possible and that the State Department will begin allocating funding swiftly after that. [As Devex reported](#), the U.S. government **only spent about 7% of its \$922 million budget** for international basic education in fiscal 2025.

However, given that disbursing U.S. foreign assistance is now managed by the State Department, McPherson warns **it might take time for allocations to emerge** — while noting that the U.S. government has not indicated which agencies, NGOs, partner organizations, or countries might get a slice of the pie.

ICYMI: [Will the US start funding global education again in 2026?](#)
