



UPR of the United States of America – 2025

Coalition report from the World Council of Churches

Human Rights in the United States of America

Introduction

This report is submitted by the World Council of Churches in coalition with the United Church of Christ and the Pennsylvania Council of Churches.

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The right to health

The World Council of Churches is concerned for the protection of the right to health across the US, and for the millions of people around the world who depend on US support for life saving medicines and services.

Health care in the US operates as a profit-incentivized system in which insurance companies charge high costs for both the insured and uninsured. Such a system disproportionately impacts people who are already vulnerable to barriers to a right to health.

Substantial cuts to health care programs such as Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program have been proposed by President Trump and some Congressional representatives.¹ This, in addition to some states (Wisconsin, Wyoming, Kansas, Texas, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina and Florida) not accepting additional federal resources which would provide health insurance for millions of poor families, is continuing to leave many sick people unable to access adequate health care or burdened with unmanageable debt due to high costs.² It also greatly reduces access to preventative care.

The availability of medications imported into the US, particularly from China, is threatened by the proposed tariffs on such countries. The import of such medications which are often life-saving and include items such as cardiovascular drugs, pain relievers, and cold and flu medicines, has increased by an estimated 600% since 2016³, and there is no clarity about how such medications would be replaced.

The shortage of professional healthcare workers also threatens the right to health in the United States. Research from 2022 illustrated that 80,000 new state and local positions are needed nationwide to meet foundational public health services.⁴

The health of vulnerable people is further threatened by proposed cuts to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and the Women, Infants, and Children program. Such cuts continue to reduce the chance for the US to achieve health equity, leading to the situation that health care is available only for the privileged members of society.

Racial injustice further compounds health these inequities, as demonstrated by the impacts of Covid-19 on non-white communities. The mortality rate from this pandemic was approximately 97.9 out of every 100,000 African Americans, which is a third higher than for Hispanics (64.7 per 100,000) and double than that for whites (46.6 per 100,000) and Asians (40.4 per 100,000).⁵

Land loss and hunger are also found in the urban "food deserts" in the African-American community, where many people have inadequate access to nutritional food. Rather, in low-income communities of color, where people have limited modes of transportation, there is often a surplus of convenience stores, liquor stores, and fast-food restaurants.⁶

Finally, the climate crisis negatively impacts the right to health in the U.S. For example, older adults, children, pregnant women, and people with preexisting medical conditions are just a few population groups vulnerable to heat-related illness brought on by extremely hot weather.

At the beginning of his Presidency in January 2025, President Trump again withdrew the US from the World Health Organisation. This action will impact the health of people both in the US and around the world as the ability of the organization to carry out its mandate to detect, monitor, and respond to

¹ <https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/02/20/nx-s1-5303475/republicans-medicaid-cuts-trump-hospitals>

² <https://www.kff.org/status-of-state-medicaid-expansion-decisions/>

³ <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/econographics/the-us-is-relying-more-on-china-for-pharmaceuticals-and-vice-versa/>

⁴ Public Health National Center for Innovations and De Beaumont Foundation, Staffing Up: Workforce Levels Needed to Provide Basic Public Health Services to All Americans (PHNCI, Feb. 10, 2022).

⁵ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7762908/>

⁶ <https://www.bread.org/blog/when-will-there-be-harvest-world>

emerging health threats, pandemics and infectious and other diseases is reduced. Many people who receive drugs and other medical supplies from WHO sources are being affected, as are those in the supply chain for them – including in the US itself. By the end of February 2025, Trump had announced that up to 90% of foreign assistance contracts provided by USAID would be cut, and \$60 billion in overall US assistance around the world, eliminating the majority of US development and humanitarian assistance abroad. Prior to this, the US contributed between 12-15 % of global health resources⁷ and the devastating impacts of these decisions - both on those immediately affected and for global health generally as diseases are allowed to develop and spread unchecked - cannot be understated. The US withdrawal and pause on foreign aid has a devastating impact on US and global health. This measure compromises sustainable development outcomes, international development, and the well-being of vulnerable people all over the globe.

Recommendations:

The Government must address social determinants of health by reducing poverty, improving economic stability, and mitigating the climate crises.

The Government must work toward more comprehensive efforts to meet health needs, with an increased focus on inclusive health equity by developing targeted interventions for racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic inequities. Investments must be made in public health and prevention strategies in order to achieve the triple aim of health care reform: better care of individual patients, better population health outcomes, and lower per capita costs of care.

Health care programs should prioritize the most vulnerable children and their families. The enforcement of existing anti-discrimination laws and proactive elimination of inequities caused by bias and discrimination would ensure that everyone in the United States has access to health care. For example, the government should support H.R. 3305, a comprehensive package of 13 bills aimed at addressing and ending preventable maternal mortality, which disproportionately impact women of African descent, who are three times more likely to die from a pregnancy-related cause than women of European descent.

The Office of Management and Budget should create mechanisms across the Department of Health and Human Services grant programs and those of other federal agencies (such as the Departments of Agriculture and Transportation, and the Environmental Protection Agency) to coordinate grant funding that addresses the drivers of health.⁸

The Government must address the shortage of physicians by improving working conditions and compensation for healthcare professionals, and sustaining and increasing investments in training new physicians.

⁷ <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/2025/the-consequences-of-the-us-withdrawal-from-the-who>

⁸

<https://www.commonwealthfund.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/TCF-002%20National%20Public%20Health%20System%20Report-r4-final.pdf#TCF-002%20National%20Public%20Health%20System%20Report-r1.indd%3A.65986%3A1122>

Communities of color must be provided with access to fresh and healthy foods. Increased support for small and medium sized farmers must be prioritized to increase the supply of healthy foods in underserved communities and scale up nutrition services used in health care.

Research on the associations between hunger and food insecurity with adverse health outcomes should be promoted and supported.

Federal nutrition programs must be strongly supported. These save the country billions of dollars per year in additional healthcare expenses and are the main way millions of households are able to afford healthy food.

The right to education free from racial discrimination

The education system in the US has continued to fail to address racial inequalities, and instead promoting a “color blind” education system which trivializes the intransigence of racism within structures of education. Racial colorblindness is the idea that ignoring or overlooking racial and ethnic differences promotes racial harmony.⁹

Whilst many recommendations were made at the last UPR of the US in 2020 concerning the need to address racial injustice in the country, these did not generally relate to the education system. Recommendation 26.313 from Botswana, calling upon the US to “Take further robust and comprehensive measures to promote wider and equitable access to quality education at all levels” remains unimplemented in 2025.

Particular concerns include the following: There is a growing controversy around the teaching of Black history, with growing tensions occurring in local school board setting about whether or not Black history should be taught. This challenge will increase, as education policy is impacted by the desire to meet “colorblind” learning. Sharing the experiences of people of African descent continues to be an important priority for education in the United States. As we mark five years since the onslaught of Covid 19 and its devastating effects, communities experienced significant isolation and still find difficulty in building community. Sharing the Black experience through the education experience is critical to building an inclusive society.¹⁰

Poor performance in schools in black and brown communities is often attributed to the family composition of the child – particularly the absence of males in the home – whereas the reality is due to race, class and economics. This misplaced attribution in turn divides pedagogic practice, enhancing opportunities for white advancement and creating roadblocks for children of color. One of the assertions in Project 2025 is that the Department of Education should make student data available by family structure available to the public. This appears to establish the predicate for educational

⁹ Afi-Odelia E. Scruggs, Colorblindness: The New Racism?, Southern Poverty Law Center The Law Center, <http://learningforjustice.org>, Issue 36 Fall 2009. See also Peter C. Meyers, The Case for Color-Blindness, September 6, 2019, The Heritage Foundation, <https://www.heritage.org/node/15819821/print-display#> pp. 1-35.

¹⁰ Clive Davis, NPR, “How teaching Black History in schools became a national controversy”, <https://www.npr.org/2024/02/29/1234998846/how-teaching-black-history-in-schools-became-a-national-controversy>, February 29, 2024.

performance to be attributed to the make-up of the family structure.¹¹ Similarly, the incorrect perspective that young children of color need a uniquely different course of training than white children because of inherent liabilities or liabilities attributed to parental failings has negatively shaped education policy making.¹²

The increase in inequality with respect to education in the United States is tied to economic factors. A parent's income is determinative of one's probability for access to higher education.¹³ Access to a university education in the United States is closely tied to parental income. The probability for access to higher education is slightly above 20 percent for the 10 percent of young people whose parents have lower income levels. The reality is that there is no equality of educational opportunity in the United States. The inequality of access is a direct hinderance for the most economically disadvantaged students.^{14 15}

There is an element of thinking in the educational policy of the United States that the foundational theory of the United States is based on equality and "colorblindness."¹⁶ The reality in the United States, however, is that racism continues as a significant impediment to Black educational achievement. The reality is that the nation is not colorblind, on the contrary, the color of a person's skin affects his or her opportunities for success.

The Optional Practical Training Program which has existed since 1992 to help immigrant undergraduate and graduate students to work for a year on a student visa, in order to get practical training to complement their education, has been identified as a priority to scale back or eliminate entirely by the current administration.

In 2017 the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Global Ideas for US Solutions team issued a call for proposals to solicit strategies for addressing social isolation in the United States. This work led to significant conversations about the legacies of injustice and social isolation in the United States. What this work has surfaced is the need to acknowledge inequities and providing resources to create equal opportunities. Segregated educational realities must be offset by intentional efforts to expose Black and Brown children to expanded educational opportunities, and addressing the social isolation of communities requires solutions that are centered in inclusive and antiracist and anti-othering approaches.¹⁷

Member churches of the WCC in the US express concerns about the growing impact of Christian Nationalism on the administration of education in the United States. This ideology - that Christians should be in every level of authority and power, in government, education, entertainment and other

¹¹ Paul Doms and Steve Grove eds, Project 2025: Mandate for Leadership, p. 338

¹² Jonathan Kozol, An End to Inequality: Breaking Down the Walls of Apartheid Education in America, The New Press, New York, 2024, p. 3.

¹³ Thomas Picketty, Capital in the Twenty-First Century p. 485

¹⁴ Thomas Picketty, Capital and Ideology, The Belnap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2020, pp. 34-35.

¹⁵ Understanding racial Inequality in Education: Challenges and Solutions, The United Way of the National Capital Area February 14, 2025, <https://unitedwaynca.org/blog/racial-inequality-in-education>

¹⁶ Paul Dans and Steven Groves, Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise, Project 2025, Presidential Transaction Project, The Heritage Foundation, Washington, D.C., 2023 pp. 342-343.

¹⁷ Socially Connected Communities: Solutions for Social Isolation, Healthy Places by Design, www.healthyplacesbydesign.org, Socially-Connected-Communities_Solutions-for-Social-Isolation.pdf, pp 8,11.

public endeavors, privileges Christianity over and against other faith communities, and is effectuating the dismantlement of the separation of church and state. This ideology is also being introduced into school systems, school boards while promoting reactionary measures such as book banning and eliminating curriculum that addresses the history of Black people and other ethnic groups.

Recommendations

The Government must ensure the provision of adequate wages above minimum levels across the US, which would improve access to quality education and hence address social inequities which particularly impact communities of color.

Funding inequalities for education at local, state, and national levels must be addressed.

The Government must promote an educational system which reflects local, state, and national interests which have been informed by the experiences of diverse communities which in turn have exposure to other racial, economic, and social groups.

Schools must be constructed in communities of color that meet and advance the technological needs of students in the 21st century.

The creation of space for the inclusion and celebration of Black culture and history in pedagogical material must be encouraged.

The Federal Department of Education that is mandated to promote educational opportunities for diverse communities and is the largest provider of student financial aid in the United States must be maintained.

The Department of Education's collection and reporting of statistics that share school discipline indicators - such as detentions, suspensions, and expulsions inclusive of the race and gender of students involved must be maintained.

The school meal programs which is provided through the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program (under the Department of Agriculture) must not be reduced or eliminated.

Rights of refugees and immigrants

During the last UPR of the US in 2020¹⁸, 11 recommendations pertaining to the rights of refugees and migrants were made. Qatar called upon the US to eliminate racial discrimination against migrants and

¹⁸ <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/46/15>

¹⁹ 26.127

²⁰ 26.342

²¹ 26.346

refugees¹⁹, Fiji²⁰, Mexico²¹, Norway²², and Ghana²³ called on the US to ensure adequate conditions in detention centres for migrants and refugees (particularly for minors -Norway). Iraq recommended efforts to combat racism and hate speech against immigrants and asylum seekers²⁴, and Botswana called for measures to address the disproportionate impact of violence on the poor, minorities and immigrant women²⁵. Not only have these recommendations not be implemented, but the situation for refugees and migrants has deteriorated dramatically in 2025.

The United States has a long history of offering refugee status to the most vulnerable groups, including women and children, LGBT, elderly and victims of violence. The current administration, claiming to “realign” refugee policy, is exacerbating an already worsening position for those who are seeking help by criminalizing such people, particularly targeting refugees as well as immigrants who are non-white.

On January 20, 2025, President Trump issued a series of executive orders, ten of which target immigrants and asylum seekers, including families and children. These policies include the suspension of entries anywhere along the U.S.-Mexico border, including at ports of entry, and instructs agencies to turn away asylum seekers and anyone seeking relief. The policies include a return to the “Remain in Mexico” program, which forces people seeking asylum in the United States to remain in dangerous conditions in Mexico while their cases proceed in the United States. The federal courts previously ruled the program to likely violate asylum law by returning people to harm. The Supreme Court affirmed Biden’s decision to end Remain in Mexico, noting in part the policy’s foreign relations implications with its southern neighbor. This policy will also be challenged in court.²⁶

The policies include a mass, indefinite expulsion policy which risks separating children from their families, and the indefinite suspension of refugee resettlement, which would strip children of their rights to seek asylum in the United States. The “US Customs and Border Protection” mobile application for asylum seekers has been cancelled. This app was the primary way for people to make an appointment with the Department of Homeland Security at a US point of entry to seek asylum. The removal of this app cancelled long-awaited appointments for an estimated 30,000 people, leaving no possibility for people in Mexico to seek asylum. The policies also include the detainment of those seeking refugee status include placing people in detainment centres and preventing them from accessing legal assistance.

The policies provide for the Secretary of State to enter into third-country agreements forcing people to seek asylum in another country, exposing them to further danger and little possibility that they would be granted asylum in such countries.²⁷

Recommendations

¹⁹ 26.127

²⁰ 26.342

²¹ 26.346

²² 26.333

²³ 26.343

²⁴ 26.130

²⁵ 26.163

²⁶ <https://immigrantjustice.org/staff/blog/leading-cruelty-eight-impacts-trumps-first-day-executive-orders>)

²⁷ <https://ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/undermining-the-right-to-seek-asylum-analysing-the-proposed-us-border-measures-impact-on-the-fundamental-human-rights-of-migrants/>

The recommendations made by the Governments of Qatar, Fiji, Mexico, Norway, Ghana, Iraq, and Botswana in 2020 regarding the racial discrimination and inhumane treatment of refugees and migrants remain unimplemented and should be repeated.

The dehumanizing rhetoric of labelling such people as “illegals” by the US Government and certain media outlets is condemned in the strongest terms and must be halted immediately.

The US Customs and Border Protection app must be reinitiated as a matter of urgency to support people seeking asylum in the US.

Legal support for refugees and undocumented migrants must be reinstated.

Solitary confinement

Estimates suggest that between 80,000-100,000 people each day are held in solitary confinement,²⁸ including immigrants held at detention centers and youth facilities. Studies show that being held in solitary confinement dramatically increases a person’s likelihood to commit suicide by 78%.²⁹

Solitary confinement is disproportionately used against people of color.³⁰

Immigrants who enter the country without prior approval can be detained and held in U.S. custody as they await their immigration hearing. In 2024, the U.S. Coast Guard intercepted immigrants at sea and detained about 37 in Guantánamo Bay Prison, located in Cuba. When President Trump took office, his administration soon began detaining immigrants in the prison, and he has stated that he plans to detain at least 30,000 people in Guantanamo, reinstating the inhumane conditions last experienced by migrants in Guantanamo in the 1990s.³¹

People held in Guantanamo Bay do not have access to lawyers to help them apply for asylum, instead they must choose between returning to their home country or waiting in Guantanamo for a third country to accept them, in clear violation of human rights.

Recommendation

The U.S. government must immediately end the dehumanizing, cruel, immoral and illegal practice of solitary confinement before irreparable damage is done to an already vulnerable population.

Human Trafficking

²⁸ <https://www.cswe.org/CSWE/media/Diversity-Center/10-SWASC-Toolkit-1-5.pdf>

²⁹ <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2752350>

³⁰ <https://www.nrcat.org/torture-in-us-prisons>

³¹ <https://www.nrcat.org/about/nrcat-press-releases/1307-pressrelease-013025>

Human trafficking—is a human rights crisis in the United States. In 2024, approximately 24,000 people fell victim to human trafficking across the United States³². It is a hugely profitable industry, forcing people into domestic servitude, prostitution, forced marriage and other abuse. Human trafficking is prevalent due to a variety of social issues, such as racism, unequal access to healthcare, worker protections, gender-based violence, housing inequality, and forced migration. Individuals with pre-existing vulnerabilities are at an increased risk of being trafficked.

The US government has failed to address this crisis and must do more to stop human trafficking in all its forms.

The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000³³ provides the legal definition and framework for prosecuting and addressing human trafficking in the United States, and other legislation has built upon this framework including the Frederick Douglass Trafficking Victims Prevention and Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA)³⁴ which ensures funding for prevention efforts and survivor support services. Survivors deserve to heal and thrive, which starts with having access to life-saving support.

However, some funding provisions within the TVPRA have already expired or are soon expiring.

Recommendation

The Government must reauthorize the TVPRA, supporting the successful programs which were enacted by the original TVPRA and creating new programs and regulations to prevent trafficking, protect survivors, and prosecute perpetrators. This should be done as a matter of urgency before trafficking survivors lose access to these much-needed services.

³² <https://www.stepstogether.org/blog/understanding-the-numbers-behind-human-trafficking-in-the-usa>

³³ <https://www.congress.gov/106/plaws/publ386/PLAW-106publ386.pdf>

³⁴ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/5856/text>