Introduction

Since 2013, the U.S. has been a leader in global efforts to address gender-based violence (GBV) in emergencies through Safe from the Start, a State Department and USAID program. The Keeping Women and Girls Safe from the Start Act, led by Senators Murkowski (R-AK), Shaheen (D-NH), and Menendez (D-NJ), would expand this important work and ensure it continues during future global conflicts and crises.

Why it matters

Globally, one in three women experience violence.¹ In the midst of emergencies there is a dramatic rise in incidents of gender-based violence (GBV), including:

- Child marriage
- Intimate-partner violence
- Rape as a tactic of war
- Trafficking
- Sexual assault or exploitation
- Female genital mutilation and cutting (FGM/C)

Migration, displacement, the presence of armed actors, and lack of access to services create an environment where women and girls are at heightened risk. Too often, GBV isn’t recognized at the onset of an emergency, and humanitarian responders are underequipped to address it.

To protect women and girls from GBV, to ensure survivor-centered support from the very beginning of emergencies, and to empower women and girls to be leaders in helping their communities return to normalcy, please co-sponsor the Keeping Women and Girls Safe from the Start Act, S. 4003.
About the bill

In addition to ensuring the continuity of Safe from the Start programming through high-level leadership and dedicated resources, this bill establishes that it is U.S. policy to:

- Prevent, mitigate, and respond to GBV in emergencies and support activities that empower survivors
- Strengthen coordination among humanitarian responders
- Promote accountability on behalf of survivors
- Build capacity of governments and in-country civil society organizations to provide survivor-centered services and resources during humanitarian crises
- Integrate protocols for protecting women and girls from violence and from sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian actors
- Actively involve women and girls in the design, implementation, and evaluation of these programs, empowering them to be leaders in response efforts

This bill also authorizes Safe from the Start program funding at no less than FY18 spending levels, and requires U.S. government reports on the drivers of GBV in emergencies and descriptions of all programs supported by Safe from the Start.

GBV prevention: Rohingya refugee crisis response

Among Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, women and girls face disproportionate risks of gender-based violence, including domestic violence. Domestic violence can be linked to the extreme stress faced by refugee couples, as well as financial strain and cramped conditions. Of the reported incidents of GBV in the camps, 74% were committed by intimate partners.

World Vision is working to prevent and address this through Women’s Peace Centers in Camps 12, 13, and 16. Women participate in tailoring and handicraft production classes, where they build trusted relationships, learn valuable skills, and create networks for sustainable psychosocial support. They also learn how to prevent, and protect themselves against, GBV and how to access professional services when needed.

References
1 https://www.who.int/health-cluster/about/work/other-collaborations/gender-based-violence/en/
2 http://files.unicef.org/yemen/Yemen2Years-children_falling_through_the_cracks.pdf
3 https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5898300/
4 https://www.who.int/health-cluster/about/work/other-collaborations/gender-based-violence/en/