ASK

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 Safe from the Start Act (H.R. 571, S. 765).

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 Safe from the Start Act, led in the House by Representatives Meng (D-NY), Diaz Balart (R-FL), and other bipartisan cosponsors and led in the Senate by Senators Menendez (D-NJ), Murkowski (R-AK), and Shaheen (D-NH), would codify this critical program 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 the incidence 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.
About the bill

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

- Prevent, mitigate, and respond to GBV in emergencies and support activities that empower survivors
- 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 and strengthen coordination among humanitarian responders to protect 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

These bills also authorize Safe from the Start program funding at no less than FY18 spending levels. It will also improve congressional oversight through a budget report and progress report outlining the drivers of GBV in emergencies, successful program models, and detailed descriptions of all activities undertaken by the U.S. through the program.

Preventing child marriage in Afghanistan

Afghanistan has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world. The converging challenges of conflict, displacement, and poverty have led many families to consider child marriage as an option – often the only option – to provide for their children.

World Vision is working to prevent and address this through community change groups, where members learn about the consequences of child marriage and envision solutions together. Accompanied by supportive faith leaders, facilitators intervene in pending child marriages. After attending a community change group, one father of young girls remarked, “My hope is that my children get an education and select their future husband for themselves.” Watch this video to learn more: https://bit.ly/2S2oIKs

References

3. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5898300/

Child marriage increases during humanitarian crises as families attempt to cope with economic hardship. In Yemen, more than two-thirds of girls are married before 18, compared to half before the conflict escalated.2

Risk of intimate partner violence increases by 50% for women living in a conflict-affected area.3

Approximately one in five women report experiencing sexual violence during a humanitarian emergency.4