



ADDRESSING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN EMERGENCIES

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.

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).**



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 Syria

Syria is one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a child. A new report confirms that 10 years into the conflict, child marriage has increased substantially. Some estimates show that the rate of child marriage among Syrian refugees in 2017 was four times higher than it was before the crisis. Unfortunately, child brides in Syria also experience high levels of domestic and intimate partner violence.

World Vision is working to prevent and address gender-based violence for Syrian refugees through safe spaces for women and girls, psychosocial support, and GBV prevention and response services. In 2020, almost 3,4000 Syrian women and girls participated in information sessions focused on preventing GBV in their communities. Read more [here](#).



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QUICK FACTS

➤ **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



Syrian refugee girls living in an informal settlement in Lebanon.
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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/>

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