



Keeping **Women and Girls** Safe from the Start Act*

Gender-Based Violence in Humanitarian Emergencies

Armed conflict, natural disasters and climate change often have the greatest impact on the poorest countries, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable, including women and girls. **Global estimates indicate that nearly 70 million people are currently displaced around the world, and we are experiencing the largest refugee crisis in recorded history.**

Conditions in refugee camps and other displacement settings often expose women and girls to greater security risks due to issues such as inadequate lighting, lack of gender-appropriate sanitation facilities, and needing to travel long distances to access firewood, water or other basic commodities. Sexual exploitation and abuse by humanitarian personnel has also become a well-recognized concern, prompting action by the international community.

Despite the acute impacts that emergencies have on women and girls, they are often excluded from leadership and decision-making roles when it comes to humanitarian response. Without their voices included in the design and implementation of humanitarian interventions, responses risk ignoring or exacerbating the needs of women and girls in our response efforts.

The Keeping Women and Girls Safe from the Start Act – A Policy Solution to Address Gender-Based Violence in Humanitarian Emergencies

Safe from the Start is an existing program implemented by the U.S. State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to prevent gender-based violence (GBV) in humanitarian emergencies and protect survivors or those at risk. The **Keeping Women and Girls Safe from the Start Act** will

formalize and expand this vital program. The bill will help those who work in emergencies respond to the needs of refugees and others who are displaced, prevent gender-based violence and provide critical protection while opening opportunities for women to lead and make decisions that impact them and their communities.

The bill will ensure that:

- Tools and structures to prevent GBV are used for **greater efficiency and accountability of response and recovery efforts**, such as deploying additional senior protection officers to prevent and respond to GBV;
- Girls and women who are exposed to GBV during crises receive **appropriate care and access empowerment opportunities** that will help them recover from or prevent GBV; and
- **Funding and support for women’s rights organizations** are available so that women and girls can have a voice in the responses that affect them;

Specifically, the Keeping Women and Girls Safe from the Start Act will:

- Formalize the State Department’s and USAID’s existing Safe from the Start program, thus ensuring continuous attention and resources for the issue of GBV in humanitarian emergencies;
- Update the objectives of Safe from the Start, including goals related to protection and empowerment of women and girls in emergencies, and broad partnerships to improve and scale-up NGO and local capacity;

*The House version of the bill is called the Safe from the Start Act.

- Establish a Congressional reporting requirement to ensure accountability towards the goals and objectives of the Safe from the Start initiative; and
- Recognize that the U.S. Government should provide assistance and protection where needed, but also build the capacity of women and women-led local organizations to act as first responders, community leaders and drivers of sustainable change.

How does CARE address girls' and women's needs and involve them in emergency response?

CARE implements programs that improve women's and girls' opportunities, as well as their access to education, health, housing and other essential services. **When disaster strikes, CARE and our local partners provide humanitarian assistance to address urgent needs while also working to support long-term efforts to rebuild after the emergency has subsided.** In carrying out these activities, CARE takes a comprehensive approach that prioritizes the perspectives of women and girls, including:

- Prior to the start of emergencies, CARE works with communities to increase their **resilience, preparedness and capacity** to mitigate the effect of disasters when they occur.
- CARE routinely conducts **gender analyses** to understand the ways in which gender roles are impacted by emergencies. Throughout the crisis, the gender analyses inform our program design and implementation. We monitor the

different impacts of our responses on women, men, boys and girls so that we can quickly course-correct when needed.

- CARE works with **local partners** who are committed to empowering women and girls and provides training and guidance to strengthen approaches to advancing gender equality.
- We put forward the **voice and priorities of women and girls** in emergency response, recovery planning and decision-making.
- As communities start to emerge from crises, CARE **works with survivors**, especially women and girls, to help them recover and rebuild after the emergency has passed.

H.R. 4092 Original Cosponsors:

1. Rep. Grace Meng (D-NY-6)
2. Rep. Chris Stewart (R-UT-2)
3. Rep. Lois Frankel (D-FL-21)
4. Rep. Mario Diaz Balart (R-FL-25)
5. Rep. Chrissy Houlahan (D-PA-6)

S. 4003 Original Cosponsors:

1. Sen. Robert Menendez (D-NJ)
2. Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK)
3. Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH)

Story from the Field

Seno Wara lives in a refugee camp for Rohingya who have fled Myanmar. She says the living situation in the camp is dire. It is overcrowded, unsanitary, and the food rations are insufficient. She is also concerned with the uncertainty of the future and the safety of her daughters – particularly from human trafficking. Seno Wara has seen girls that were “forced or convinced” to leave the camp. As a result, she is afraid to send her children to school, worried they might be kidnapped.

“Sometimes they [traffickers] get caught at the check post, but some leave silently,” Seno Wara says. “Girls are trafficked, girls are tortured. We feel anxious.”



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