

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 571

To improve United States consideration of, and strategic support for, programs to prevent and respond to gender-based violence beginning with the onset of humanitarian emergencies, to build the capacity of humanitarian assistance to address the immediate and long-term challenges resulting from such violence, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JANUARY 28, 2021

Ms. MENG (for herself, Mr. DIAZ-BALART, Ms. HOULAHAN, Mr. STEWART, Ms. LOIS FRANKEL of Florida, Mr. CASE, Mr. PHILLIPS, Mr. MEEKS, Mr. CICILLINE, Ms. TITUS, Mr. DEUTCH, Mr. LOWENTHAL, Mr. TRONE, Ms. LEE of California, Ms. PINGREE, Mr. CONNOLLY, Ms. SPANBERGER, Mr. BILIRAKIS, Mr. COHEN, Mr. CÁRDENAS, Mr. EVANS, Ms. BASS, Ms. WILD, Mr. HASTINGS, Mr. CARBAJAL, Mr. GRIJALVA, Miss GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN, Mr. LAWSON of Florida, Mr. POCAN, Mrs. HAYES, Mr. MCGOVERN, and Mr. CARSON) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs

A BILL

To improve United States consideration of, and strategic support for, programs to prevent and respond to gender-based violence beginning with the onset of humanitarian emergencies, to build the capacity of humanitarian assistance to address the immediate and long-term challenges resulting from such violence, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

1 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

2 This Act may be cited as the “Safe from the Start
3 Act of 2021”.

4 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

5 Congress finds the following:

6 (1) Displaced, refugee, and stateless women and
7 girls in humanitarian emergencies, conflict settings,
8 and natural disasters face extreme violence and
9 threats, including—

10 (A) rape and sexual assault;

11 (B) domestic or intimate partner violence;

12 (C) child, early, and forced marriage;

13 (D) trafficking for the purposes of sexual;

14 (E) exploitation and forced labor;

15 (F) harmful traditional practices such as
16 female genital mutilation or cutting; and

17 (G) harassment, exploitation, and abuse by
18 humanitarian personnel.

19 (2) Gender-based violence is known to increase
20 during humanitarian emergencies. Violent acts such
21 as intimate partner violence and child marriage that
22 take place during times of stability are often exacer-
23 bated during times of crisis.

24 (3) For example, according to the United Na-
25 tions Organization Stabilization Mission in the
26 Democratic Republic of the Congo, there was an in-

1 crease of 56 percent in reported cases of conflict-re-
2 lated sexual violence between 2016 and 2017.

3 (4) Nearly 1 in 5 women report experiencing
4 sexual violence during a humanitarian emergency.

5 (5) Intimate partner violence is pervasive and
6 becomes increasingly common during times of con-
7 flict and crisis. Residence in a conflict-affected dis-
8 trict is associated with a 50-percent increase in risk
9 of intimate partner violence, and women who have
10 experienced 4–5 cumulative years of conflict are al-
11 most 90 percent more likely to experience such vio-
12 lence than women who are not living in conflict set-
13 tings.

14 (6) Child, early, and forced marriages increase
15 during humanitarian crises and can be used as a
16 tool of last resort to cope with economic hardship
17 and to protect girls from increased violence. Conflict
18 can exacerbate cultural norms of child, early, and
19 forced marriage or create harmful cultural behaviors
20 where they had not previously existed.

21 (7) Women and girls are especially vulnerable
22 to trafficking during humanitarian crises, particu-
23 larly by non-state armed groups who abduct and
24 traffic women and girls for sexual exploitation, do-

1 mestic servitude, and child, early, and forced mar-
2 riage, among other forms of exploitation.

3 (8) The power imbalance between aid workers
4 and displaced people, combined with the economic
5 hardship caused by crises, creates markets for sexual
6 exploitation and abuse that are too frequently
7 abused by aid workers and peacekeepers seeking sex-
8 ual services from displaced or vulnerable people.

9 (9) In 2018, the United Nations received a
10 total of 148 sexual exploitation and abuse allegations
11 directly involving United Nations aid workers, and
12 111 involving staff from partner organizations im-
13 plementing United Nations programs.

14 (10) According to United Nations High Com-
15 missioner for Refugees, while women and girls are
16 most vulnerable to gender-based violence,
17 marginalized populations are also at particular risk
18 of gender-based violence in humanitarian crises, in-
19 cluding adolescent girls, older women, women and
20 children with disabilities, sexual and gender minori-
21 ties, and female heads of households.

22 (11) Gender-based violence is under-reported,
23 both in times of stability and during crises. While
24 data may not be immediately available in each crisis
25 or conflict, evidence shows that gender-based vio-

1 lence is consistently a major and pressing concern
2 for women and girls facing humanitarian emergency
3 contexts and should be assumed to be a protection
4 concern in all humanitarian planning and risk as-
5 sessment, even in the absence of data.

6 (12) Men and boys play a critical role in pre-
7 venting gender-based violence, and engaging them in
8 prevention and accountability activities while empow-
9 ering women and girls in the transformation of gen-
10 der roles and combating harmful norms that lead to
11 increased rates of gender-based violence at the onset
12 of emergencies, leads to lasting results.

13 (13) Survivors of gender-based violence during
14 humanitarian emergencies and their families require
15 immediate, life-saving assistance, including post-rape
16 care or access to other comprehensive medical and
17 psychosocial services, to address the physical, psy-
18 chological, and social impacts of gender-based vio-
19 lence. They also require long-term support such as
20 opportunities to earn livelihoods, build skills or re-
21 ceive an education, and access to justice and com-
22 munity-level reintegration. Early medical interven-
23 tions after incidents of rape can help to prevent in-
24 fections, HIV, and pregnancy.

1 (14) Empowering women to assume leadership
2 roles in delivering humanitarian response and mean-
3 ingfully engaging local organizations, including wom-
4 en’s rights, humanitarian, advocacy, and service-pro-
5 vider organizations, through training and directed
6 resources to operate in emergency settings and pro-
7 vide life-saving assistance is critical to supporting
8 survivors or those at risk of gender-based violence.

9 (15) The international community has
10 prioritized addressing the issue of gender-based vio-
11 lence in humanitarian contexts by launching a Glob-
12 al Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based
13 Violence in Emergencies in 2013, which the United
14 States implemented through establishing the “Safe
15 from the Start” initiative, carried out by the Depart-
16 ment of State and the United States Agency for
17 International Development.

18 (16) Safe from the Start aimed to prevent and
19 respond to gender-based violence at the onset of an
20 emergency and to provide resources to strengthen
21 the core capacity of humanitarian assistance imple-
22 menters to address gender-based violence at the ear-
23 liest phases of an emergency, including through sup-
24 porting the development of training, guidelines, tool-
25 kits, and other resources to guide operations.

1 (17) The Women’s Entrepreneurship and Eco-
2 nomic Empowerment Act (Public Law 115–428) re-
3 quires the United States “to strive to eliminate gen-
4 der-based violence and mitigate its harmful effects
5 on individuals and communities” in its development
6 cooperation policy. Recognizing the need to prevent
7 and respond to gender-based violence globally, Con-
8 gress has appropriated \$150,000,000 annually in
9 each of fiscal years 2013 through 2019 for this pur-
10 pose.

11 (18) The United States has further committed
12 to prevention and response to gender-based violence
13 globally through the interagency United States
14 Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based
15 Violence Globally, the Women, Peace and Security
16 Act Strategy and Implementation Plan, the U.S.
17 Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls, the
18 U.S. Strategy to Support Women and Girls at Risk
19 from Extremism and Conflict, and the U.S. Govern-
20 ment Strategy on Advancing Protection and Care
21 for Children in Adversity.

22 **SEC. 3. STATEMENT OF POLICY.**

23 It is the policy of the United States—

24 (1) to take effective action to prevent, mitigate,
25 and address gender-based violence occurring during

1 humanitarian emergencies around the world to pro-
2 mote respect for basic human rights and gender
3 equality, economic growth, improved public health,
4 and peace and stability;

5 (2) to ensure collective commitment to and ac-
6 countability for immediate humanitarian action on
7 gender-based violence at all levels, especially on the
8 part of senior humanitarian leadership;

9 (3) to maintain sustained political will and ro-
10 bust systems and processes in order to establish,
11 monitor, and enforce accountability for humanitarian
12 action;

13 (4) to systematically integrate and coordinate
14 efforts to prevent and respond to gender-based vio-
15 lence in United States foreign policy and foreign as-
16 sistance programs, including conflict prevention, hu-
17 manitarian relief and recovery, and peace-building
18 efforts;

19 (5) to promote accountability and access to jus-
20 tice for acts of gender-based violence;

21 (6) to build local capacity in countries respond-
22 ing to humanitarian crises, including the capacity of
23 governments at all levels and of nongovernmental or-
24 ganizations, especially women-focused and women-

1 led organizations, to prevent, mitigate, and respond
2 to gender-based violence;

3 (7) to consult, cooperate, coordinate, and col-
4 laborate with a wide variety of nongovernmental
5 partners and international organizations, including
6 women-focused and women-led organizations, when
7 designing and implementing humanitarian response
8 programs;

9 (8) to support activities that prevent and miti-
10 gate the impacts of gender-based violence in humani-
11 tarian settings and that empower survivors or those
12 at risk of gender-based violence, including through
13 economic opportunities, access to education and
14 skills building, and promotion of women's leadership
15 and participation in humanitarian response;

16 (9) to ensure that international organizations
17 and nongovernmental organizations receiving fund-
18 ing from the United States have the capacity and in-
19 ternal protocols to address gender-based violence, in-
20 cluding sexual exploitation and abuse committed by
21 humanitarian personnel, integrate gender-based vio-
22 lence prevention and response initiatives into policies
23 and programs, and report regularly on efforts to
24 prevent and respond to gender-based violence;

1 (10) to employ a multisectoral approach to pre-
2 venting and responding to gender-based violence
3 globally, including through activities in the eco-
4 nomic, education, health, protection, nutrition, and
5 legal sectors;

6 (11) to ensure protection against sexual exploi-
7 tation and abuse by humanitarian actors; and

8 (12) to include the active leadership and par-
9 ticipation of women and girls in humanitarian pro-
10 gram design, implementation, and evaluation.

11 **SEC. 4. SAFE FROM THE START AUTHORIZATION.**

12 (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Secretary of State, in co-
13 ordination with the Administrator of the United States
14 Agency for International Development, is authorized to es-
15 tablish an interagency effort, to be known as the “Safe
16 from the Start” program, to—

17 (1) coordinate efforts to prevent, mitigate, and
18 address gender-based violence in humanitarian cri-
19 ses; and

20 (2) provide assistance to international and local
21 non-governmental organizations to carry out Safe
22 from the Start programming.

23 (b) PROGRAMMING EFFORTS.—The Secretary shall
24 support efforts to prevent, mitigate, and address gender-

1 based violence through Safe from the Start, including the
2 following efforts:

3 (1) Building capacity to recognize, prevent, and
4 address gender-based violence in humanitarian set-
5 tings and to support survivors and those at risk.

6 (2) Promoting women's leadership and partici-
7 pation in humanitarian response activities, including
8 the design, implementation, and evaluation of hu-
9 manitarian responses.

10 (3) Ensuring quality protection for survivors of
11 such crises beginning with the onset of the emer-
12 gency, by developing technical capability for advo-
13 cacy, monitoring, data collection, evaluation, and
14 communications, including timely gender analyses,
15 throughout the United States Government, recipient
16 country's government, local nongovernmental organi-
17 zations, and international non-governmental organi-
18 zations.

19 (4) Increasing and improving empowerment ac-
20 tivities for survivors of gender-based violence, includ-
21 ing women's and girls' access to economic opportuni-
22 ties and livelihoods, education and skills, and leader-
23 ship roles.

24 (5) Building and improving international stand-
25 ards and evidence-based best practices with respect

1 to gender-based violence prevention, monitoring, and
2 response, through support to programs, evaluations,
3 research, and the development of innovative new
4 practices.

5 (6) Developing safe spaces for the safe disclo-
6 sure of incidents of gender-based violence, meaning-
7 ful dialogue, psycho-social interventions, and cul-
8 turally-specific support.

9 (7) Safeguarding against sexual exploitation or
10 abuse by humanitarian personnel by prioritizing ac-
11 tivities that ensure that Federal employees and con-
12 tractors delivering United States humanitarian as-
13 sistance are equipped to address sexual exploitation
14 and abuse in settings of humanitarian aid delivery,
15 including by strengthening guidelines, training, re-
16 porting mechanisms, and remedies that both recog-
17 nize and address the risks within the humanitarian
18 aid context that can create vulnerabilities for sexual
19 exploitation and abuse.

20 (c) PROGRAMMING IMPROVEMENT OF PROTECTION
21 MECHANISMS.—The Secretary shall improve the delivery
22 and quality of United States assistance to protect sur-
23 vivors of gender-based violence, through the Safe from the
24 Start programming described in subsection (b), by improv-
25 ing assistance activities, including activities carried out

1 under the Safe from the Start program, in the following
2 areas:

3 (1) Access to and quality of comprehensive
4 medical services for survivors and at-risk populations
5 in line with the international standards described in
6 subsection (b)(5), including—

7 (A) post-rape and post-sexual assault med-
8 ical care;

9 (B) psycho-social and mental health serv-
10 ices; and

11 (C) hygiene and dignity kits.

12 (2) Service delivery to hard-to-reach popu-
13 lations, prioritizing services that reach—

14 (A) survivors of natural disasters;

15 (B) refugee and internally displaced person
16 camps and settlements;

17 (C) active conflict zones; and

18 (D) refugees and IDPs living in urban
19 areas.

20 (d) IMPROVING STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES.—The
21 Secretary shall support global efforts to develop guide-
22 lines, toolkits, reporting mechanisms, and other institu-
23 tional response and accountability measures in order to
24 incorporate effective gender-based violence prevention and

1 response activities across all humanitarian assistance pro-
2 grams and projects, including through—

3 (1) the promotion of minimum standards, indi-
4 cators, and metrics to assess the adequacy of inter-
5 ventions relating to gender-based violence, taking
6 into consideration the “Guidelines for Integrating
7 Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humani-
8 tarian Action” published by the Inter Agency Stand-
9 ing Committee in 2015, the findings of the evalua-
10 tion of the Real-Time Accountability Partnership on
11 Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies in 2016, and
12 the “Minimum Standards for Child Protection in
13 Humanitarian Action” published by the Alliance for
14 Child Protection in Humanitarian Action in 2019;

15 (2) support to international organizations and
16 nongovernmental organizations, with the establish-
17 ment and implementation of standards, protocols,
18 and accountability mechanisms for preventing and
19 addressing sexual exploitation or abuse perpetrated
20 by personnel delivering humanitarian assistance; and

21 (3) assistance for the development of moni-
22 toring tools across all humanitarian assistance pro-
23 gramming to standardize monitoring and account-
24 ability relating to gender-based violence prevention
25 and response.

1 (e) CAPACITY BUILDING SUPPORT.—The Secretary
2 shall provide support for capacity-building of organiza-
3 tions seeking to prevent, mitigate, and address gender-
4 based violence, including by—

5 (1) building capacity of on-the-ground organiza-
6 tions to recognize, prevent, and address gender-
7 based violence in humanitarian settings and to sup-
8 port survivors and those at risk, including through
9 training and deploying female humanitarian aid
10 workers;

11 (2) performing on-the-ground gender-based and
12 gender-based violence analyses and otherwise rapidly
13 assessing and communicating the needs of women,
14 girls, and other populations that are vulnerable to
15 gender-based violence in crises;

16 (3) improving technical expertise and the avail-
17 ability of dedicated gender advisors in international
18 organizations to prevent and respond to gender-
19 based violence in humanitarian settings through the
20 Gender Based Violence Area of Responsibility of the
21 United Nations Populations Fund and across sectors
22 of humanitarian action, including through training
23 and sensitization of humanitarian aid workers on
24 support for survivors of gender-based violence;

1 (4) promoting supportive partnerships between
2 local humanitarian actors and nongovernmental or-
3 ganizations, including for women’s leadership and
4 participation in humanitarian response; and

5 (5) training for nongovernmental providers of
6 international development assistance during the
7 onset and subsequent phases of a humanitarian cri-
8 sis, so that such providers are equipped to continue
9 relief, recovery, and reconstruction work that is sen-
10 sitive to the prevention and mitigation of gender-
11 based violence after the immediate humanitarian en-
12 gagement has finished.

13 **SEC. 5. REPORTS REQUIRED.**

14 (a) **PROGRESS REPORT.**—

15 (1) **IN GENERAL.**—Not later than 1 year after
16 the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary
17 of State, in coordination with the Administrator of
18 the United States Agency for International Develop-
19 ment, shall submit to the appropriate congressional
20 committees a report on the progress made by the
21 United States and by partners, including inter-
22 national organizations, in the implementation or de-
23 livery of humanitarian assistance to prevent, miti-
24 gate, and address gender-based violence in humani-
25 tarian emergencies.

1 (2) ELEMENTS.—The report required by para-
2 graph (1) shall include each of the following:

3 (A) An aggregation and examination of
4 data and research regarding the key drivers of
5 gender-based violence during humanitarian
6 emergencies, the critical needs of and services
7 required by survivors or those at risk of such
8 violence, and successful program models to ad-
9 dress, prevent, and mitigate such violence.

10 (B) A detailed description of the programs,
11 diplomatic efforts, and other activities under-
12 taken by the United States to implement the
13 Safe from the Start programming focus de-
14 scribed in section 4, including specific descrip-
15 tions of—

16 (i) the steps taken to integrate pre-
17 vention, mitigation, and response to gen-
18 der-based violence into the delivery of hu-
19 manitarian assistance, the development of
20 humanitarian standards, and responses to
21 specific humanitarian crises;

22 (ii) the progress made, as of the date
23 of the submission of the report, toward
24 achieving specific objectives, metrics, and
25 indicators for implementation of Safe from

1 the Start programming, disaggregated
2 where appropriate by gender, age, and type
3 of violence;

4 (iii) a list of the projects funded or
5 supported through the Safe from the Start
6 programming focus, with specific details on
7 levels of funding or assistance and impacts
8 of such projects, disaggregated where ap-
9 propriate by gender, age, and type of vio-
10 lence;

11 (iv) an assessment of the extent to
12 which consultations with nongovernmental
13 organizations, including local actors, and
14 intergovernmental actors, have led to the
15 development of programs, standards, and
16 interventions to combat gender-based vio-
17 lence;

18 (v) a list of the policies or programs
19 implemented by international or multilat-
20 eral organizations receiving funding from
21 the United States Government to improve
22 capacity and internal protocols to identify
23 signs of gender-based violence, including
24 sexual exploitation and abuse, and inte-
25 grate initiatives to prevent and respond to

gender-based violence into all programs of the organization; and

(vi) a description of any diplomatic action taken bilaterally, multilaterally, or with international organizations to encourage international organizations and the governments of other countries to adopt policies to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in emergency situations, including any diplomatic efforts to strengthen the Global Call to Action on Protection from Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies by increasing the number of governments participating in and contributing to its gender-based violence prevention and response activities.

(3) CONSULTATION REQUIRED.—In developing the report required by paragraph (1), the Secretary of State and Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development shall consult with the Assistant Secretary for Population, Refugees, and Migration of the Department of State and the Associate Administrator for Humanitarian Assistance of the Agency for International Development.

1 (4) FORM.—The report required by paragraph
2 (1) shall be submitted in unclassified form but may
3 include a classified annex. The unclassified portion
4 of such report shall concurrently be published on a
5 publicly available website of the Department of
6 State.

7 (b) BUDGET REPORT.—Not later than 120 days after
8 the submission of each budget submitted to Congress by
9 the President under section 1105(a) of title 31, United
10 States Code, after the date of the enactment of this Act,
11 the Director of the Office of Management and Budget
12 shall submit to the appropriate congressional committees
13 a budget crosscut report that—

14 (1) displays the budget proposed, including any
15 planned interagency or intra-agency transfer, for
16 each of the principal Federal agencies that will be
17 carrying out activities through the Safe from the
18 Start programming focus described in section 4(a) in
19 the fiscal year for which such budget is submitted;

20 (2) separately reports the amount of funding to
21 be provided pertaining to Safe from the Start activi-
22 ties authorized pursuant to section 4(a), to the ex-
23 tent such plans are available; and

24 (3) to the extent practicable, identifies all as-
25 sistance and research expenditures at the account

1 level in each of the five previous fiscal years by the
2 Federal Government using Federal funds for Safe
3 from the Start activities.

4 (c) APPROPRIATE CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES DE-
5 FINED.—In this section, the term “appropriate congres-
6 sional committees” means—

7 (1) the Committee on Appropriations and the
8 Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Rep-
9 resentatives; and

10 (2) the Committee on Appropriations and the
11 Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate.

12 **SEC. 6. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**

13 There is authorized to be appropriated \$140,000,000
14 for each fiscal year to carry out this Act.

○