



THE UNITED STATES GLOBAL STRATEGY TO EMPOWER ADOLESCENT GIRLS

2024





Cover Photo: Courtesy of Too Young to Wed (TYTW). Parisa (11 years old) pictured near a window in her home. Before the Taliban took control, Parisa's mother worked hard to ensure she attended school every day. Now, with the Taliban's decision to bar girls and women from education, her future and the future of all Afghan girls remain uncertain.

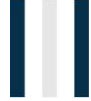


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Photo: Mads Nissen/Panos Pictures (as part of TYTW's 'Girls on the Brink'). Alexandra, 12, uses her mobile phone while on her way down a mountain as she heads home after finishing school in the remote mountain village of Pueblo Nuevo, an area badly affected by Colombia's armed conflict.

Adolescence is a key developmental life phase for young people when significant physical, emotional, and social changes interact with powerful societal norms and systems to shape their futures. With roughly half the world's population under the age of 30, a concerted effort is needed to address the significant and specific challenges adolescents, especially adolescent girls, face as they transition to adulthood. The development outcomes and overall progress of this population will be an essential determinant of any success in achieving greater economic growth, democracy, and stability.

Efforts to safeguard their human rights and to promote their participation in their societies and economies are critical to advancing U.S. foreign policy, national security, and international development priorities. This 2024 strategy update responds directly to a Congressional request to update the 2016 U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls.



Since the U.S. government issued the 2016 strategy, new challenges and opportunities have emerged, including the rise of digital technologies and their everyday implications for girls' lives and well-being, as well as the growing number of global humanitarian conflicts, natural disasters, and crises. As the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted education for children and youth around the world, adolescent girls faced some of the most significant barriers to returning to school and experienced spikes in gender-based violence (GBV). These developments, amongst others, are reflected in this updated 2024 U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls.

While adolescence is a time of great vulnerability for all children and youth, it is especially so for girls. Every three seconds, a girl is married before the age of 18.¹ Complications from pregnancy and childbirth have remained the leading cause of death among adolescent girls for decades.² In 2023, 224 million children were affected by crises ranging from war to earthquakes.³ Global conflicts, natural disasters, democratic backsliding and regression on longstanding protections for girls, and high levels of GBV are amongst the greatest challenges impacting the ability of adolescent girls to live safe, dignified, and empowered lives today. Strengthening investments in girls is more important now than ever.

In almost every part of the world, adolescence is the most precarious time for girls, yet it also represents an opportunity to cultivate girls' expertise and leadership in their communities, countries, and on the global stage. Girls continue to demonstrate how to effectively lead movements, drive social change, develop creative solutions to global challenges, contribute to sustainable peace, and shift harmful norms in their families and communities, benefiting generations to come.

The goal of the U.S. government efforts under this continued strategy is to ensure all adolescent girls are educated, healthy, economically and socially empowered, able to meaningfully participate in decision-making about their lives, and free from GBV and discrimination online and offline, thereby promoting global development, peace, security, and prosperity.

Our efforts aim to enhance their access to quality, safe, and inclusive education; to reduce their risks of experiencing GBV, including child, early, and forced marriage^A (CEFM) and female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C); to improve their physical, mental, and social wellbeing; and to provide them with the tools necessary to fully participate in their societies, exercise their rights, and make informed decisions about their lives.

^A As articulated in the United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally 2022, child or early marriage includes any formal marriage or informal union where one or both parties is under the age of 18. Forced marriage is a marriage at any age that occurs without the free and full consent of both parties, including anyone under the age of 18 who is not able to give full consent.



The strategy maintains the following objectives:

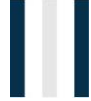
1. Enhance girls' access to quality education in safe environments;
2. Provide economic opportunities and incentives for girls and their families;
3. Foster adolescent girls' empowerment by providing information, skills, services, and supports that improve their well-being;
4. Work with communities to shift harmful norms and prevent and respond to gender-based violence; and
5. Strengthen policy and legal frameworks and accountability.

The U.S. Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Peace Corps, and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), are the primary implementers of the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls. Pursuant to the objectives of this strategy, efforts will be coordinated across the U.S. government and integrated into agencies' ongoing work. Agencies will implement the strategy through a range of approaches appropriate to their respective mandates, funding, and capacities, including diplomacy, programmatic interventions, public engagement and outreach, coordination with international and private sector partners, and evidence building and data collection.

Each agency acknowledges the value and importance of investing in and partnering with adolescent girls and, in keeping with their respective missions, intends to integrate efforts to advance the rights and empowerment of adolescent girls into their operations, including policy development, strategic and budgetary planning, staff training and capacity building, policy and program implementation, and the monitoring and evaluation of results.

CONGRESSIONAL MANDATE

The United States Congress has long emphasized the importance of focusing on issues affecting adolescent girls, particularly CEFM, and has played a critical role in strengthening U.S. efforts to address harmful norms and practices affecting women and girls. This strategy serves as an update to the 2016 United States Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls and fulfills the requirement of Section 7019(e) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2024 (Div. F, P.L. 118-47) and Senate Report 118-71.



THE CASE FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS

Defining Adolescence

Adolescence is a key developmental life phase, though it is not finite or linear. The U.S. government broadly defines youth as individuals between the ages of 10 and 35; it also recognizes that those under age 18 are universally considered children and subject to numerous national and international protections.⁴ This intersection of childhood and young adulthood is known as adolescence. **The different stages of adolescence include Early Adolescence (years 10–14) and Adolescence (years 15–19).** The United Nations has also defined adolescence as those between the ages of 10 and 19.⁵ These stages can, and should, be contextualized to differing country and cultural standards.



Photo: Stephanie Sinclair (as part of TYTW’s ‘Girls on the Brink’). Fatmata, 15, sits with her 9-month-old son in a small village outside of Kambia, Sierra Leone with her friend Sia, 13. In 2020, one-third of girls in Sierra Leone were married before the age of 18. In 2024, the President signed a new law banning marriage for children 18 and younger and imposing steep fines on adult spouses—a victory for girls like Sia and Fatmata, who experience or are at risk of CEFM.



Why Invest in Adolescent Girls?

There are currently 1.8 billion young people between the ages of 10 and 24 globally, and most of them (90 percent) live in low- and middle-income countries, yet the percentage of overseas development assistance spent on adolescents and youth still remains extremely low at just 5.5 percent.⁶ An even smaller amount of global funding flows to organizations and groups that work directly with – and crucially, fund and resource – girls’ movements and girl-led organizations. Adolescent girls have immense, and widely untapped, potential for innovation, leadership, creativity, and entrepreneurship.

Empowered, educated, healthy, and safe adolescent girls possess a better complement of tools to make the transition into adulthood, engage productively in the economy as adults, and meaningfully participate in civic and political spaces. Investing in adolescent girls not only benefits girls and their families, but also entire communities, nations, and economies. At just over \$5 per adolescent per year, interventions to improve adolescents’ physical, mental, sexual, and reproductive health can lead to economic and social returns of up to ten times their cost, making them “among the best investments that can be made” to achieve sustainable development.⁷

Girls’ attendance in school during adolescence is correlated with delayed marriage and childbearing, lower rates of HIV/AIDS, improved nutrition, fewer hours of unpaid care and domestic work, strengthened economic growth, and greater gender equity and equality. Importantly, these benefits accrue to the next generation.⁸ Investments of \$1.53 per day per girl to achieve universal secondary school completion could help developing economies expand their GDP by an average of 10 percent by 2030.⁹

GBV, including CEFM and FGM/C, is a human rights abuse and inevitably takes a toll on societies in terms of lost economic opportunity, including medical costs, lost education and earnings, lower growth potential, and continued cycles of poverty. For example, the practice of FGM/C costs an estimated \$1.4 billion per year in global GDP and with predicted population growth, this cost will rise to \$2.1 billion per year by 2047.¹⁰ Similarly, estimates suggest that ending the practice of CEFM would save billions of dollars annually, resulting in global savings of more than \$4 trillion by 2030.¹¹

Investments in adolescent girls are not only economically strategic, but they also reflect the United States’ commitment to promoting the human rights of all people, including women and girls. This commitment includes U.S. support for adolescent girls’ right to education; to freedom of expression online and offline, including freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds; and their ability to live free from violence and discrimination.



Photo: Stephanie Sinclair (as part of TYTW's 'Girls on the Brink'). In Forbesganj, India, girls take a break between classes. The girls are considered to be at-risk of experiencing violence, and the school is run by an organization whose mission is to end sex trafficking.

The State of Adolescent Girls

Since the launch of this strategy in 2016, significant progress has been made in advancing the rights of girls around the world. Globally, girls and boys are enrolling in primary school at nearly equal rates.¹² Ten years ago, one in four young women aged 20 to 24 was married as a child and today, that number has fallen to one in five.¹³ While population growth in many high prevalence countries poses a challenge to progress, FGM/C trends are declining overall.¹⁴ Girls and young women continue to play a key role in shifting harmful norms and mindsets, leading social movements, and identifying sustainable solutions to global challenges.

While there is cause to celebrate progress in recent years, girls across countries and contexts continue to face innumerable and disproportionate challenges to their empowerment. These underlying disadvantages and broad inequalities are exacerbated by increases in global conflicts and crises. In many countries, hard-won gains are being actively challenged and, in some cases, reversed. Elsewhere, girls' futures are threatened due to backwards movement on national legislation on issues such as FGM/C and CEFM; the proliferation of manipulated information denying the harm of these practices spread online and offline; and decreased funding for services that support girls.

In consultations to inform this strategy, adolescent girls and young women from around the world shared the challenges they still face to their empowerment including challenges in



accessing quality, inclusive, and safe education; receiving timely and accurate information and services to support their wellbeing; and in the prevention of and response to GBV.

Education

Staying in school through adolescence has both immediate and lifelong benefits for girls and young women, their families, and communities. Access to safe, quality, and inclusive education has been proven to reduce inequalities, strengthen economies, and can play a key role in supporting adolescent girls to become healthy adults.¹⁵ Research shows that promoting girls' education and literacy can also improve nutrition and encourage girls to seek regular health care, improving lifetime health outcomes.¹⁶ However,

adolescent girls in many countries face a number of unique challenges to enrolling, remaining in, and returning to school, particularly as they reach puberty, when disparities in educational enrollment and attainment appear and often widen with successive levels of education. Some girls are forced to leave school to earn income or perform unpaid caregiving and domestic work. Girls living in rural or remote communities often travel long distances to schools and may face GBV, such as physical or sexual violence, and harassment along the way.

Once girls arrive at school, they commonly face additional risks of GBV, including by teachers and peers, undermining their ability to learn in a safe environment and threatening their physical and psychological well-being.¹⁷ Some schools lack female teachers or may include instruction or curricula that discriminate against girls, perpetuating negative gender stereotypes.¹⁸ Where the costs of school fees, uniforms, or school supplies are prohibitive, families with limited resources often choose to educate their sons rather than daughters based on the perception that this investment offers a greater return for the family.¹⁹

The gender digital divide also affects girls' education and opportunities. Adolescent girls are less likely than boys to have access to mobile phones and less likely to have sufficient knowledge and digital skills to use technology, robbing them of crucial opportunities. In 2023, approximately 90 percent of adolescent girls and young women in low-income countries were not on the Internet, compared to 78 percent of adolescent boys and young men.²⁰ In an increasingly digital world, digital literacy and safe access to technology are critical to unlock educational opportunities and future employment potential for girls and young women.



Photo: Courtesy of Too Young to Wed (TYTW). Hasina, 16, reviews her old lessons with her sisters each day to keep her mind sharp even though the Taliban have banned all girls from secondary school.



Critically, adolescent girls who lack an education are less able to participate meaningfully in the economy or hold well-paying jobs. Women and girls are particularly under-represented in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields, representing only 35 percent of STEM graduates globally.²¹ Given the limited roles and economic opportunities available to women in many settings, parents sometimes decide that comparatively fewer years of schooling are sufficient for a girl, which can lead to school dropout, work in violation of national minimum age laws, or CEFM. In some contexts, discriminatory school policies preclude girls who are married, pregnant, or parenting from attending or returning to school, which not only halts their education, but intensifies social stigmas and adds another source of psychological stress.²² Conflicts, crises, and humanitarian emergencies also disrupt education for girls, as detailed in the sections below.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Sustainable development will not be achievable without addressing the unique forms of GBV that adolescent girls disproportionately face, including sexual violence; sexual exploitation and abuse; intimate partner violence, including dating violence; FGM/C; CEFM; reproductive coercion; gender-related killing of women and girls; human trafficking; stalking; school-related gender-based violence; and technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV).^B Among adolescent girls who have been in a relationship, nearly a quarter (24 percent) will have experienced intimate partner violence by the time they turn 20 years old, with the highest rates reported in Oceania (47 percent) and central sub-Saharan Africa (40 percent).²³ Children and youth who experience or witness violence can face lifelong health, education, and economic consequences, and this can fuel intergenerational cycles of violence.

Adolescent girls' multiple, intersecting identities can also put them at higher risk of experiencing GBV. For example, an estimated 40 to 68 percent of girls globally with physical or mental disabilities will be sexually abused before they reach 18 years of age.²⁴ It is critical that all girls and young women are able to receive timely GBV prevention and response interventions and services that are survivor-centered, trauma-informed, and inclusive of their unique needs.

Female Genital Mutilation and Cutting (FGM/C)

More than 230 million girls and women alive today have experienced FGM/C, marking a 15 percent increase from 2016, when the strategy was initially launched, primarily due to population growth in high prevalence countries.²⁵ FGM/C can lead to immediate health risks as well as long-term complications that harm the physical and mental wellbeing of girls and young women and can even result in morbidity and mortality, either due to infection or later, due to

^B TFGBV is [defined](#) as a subset of gender-based violence that describes any act that is committed, assisted, aggravated, or amplified by the use of information communication technologies or other digital tools, that results in or is likely to result in harm, or other infringements of rights and freedoms.



obstructed childbirth or other related causes.²⁶ Girls subjected to FGM/C are also often at an increased risk of experiencing CEFM, dropping out of school, and living in poverty, threatening their ability to build a better future for themselves, their families, and their communities.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage (CEFM)

While progress has been made in the last decade to end CEFM, including informal unions, it will take another 300 years to eliminate this human rights abuse if efforts are not significantly sped up.²⁷ Approximately one in five girls around the world is married in childhood.²⁸ This happens across countries, regions, and contexts, including in high-income countries. CEFM impedes girls' education, increases risks of GBV and early pregnancy, and increases risk of maternal mortality and morbidity, obstetric complications, and other health-related challenges. Children of mothers under the age of 18 have higher rates of infant mortality and malnutrition compared to children of adult mothers.²⁹ CEFM is also associated with inequitable distribution of household resources, decreased earning potential, and gaps in gains and returns to agricultural productivity, limiting women's economic security and impeding overall economic growth.

Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV)

Digital technology is an essential tool for global development, with potential for accelerating girls' and young women's access to information, educational and employment opportunities; facilitating communication; and improving health outcomes. These technologies have simultaneously exacerbated pre-existing forms of GBV through their scale, speed, and reach, and have also led to the emergence of a new and rapidly growing threat of TFGBV, which manifests in many ways, such as stalking, harassment, threats of sexual and physical abuse and violence, impersonation, hacking, image-based abuse, doxing, and defamation, among other harms.

TFGBV poses a significant threat and impediment to the expression and well-being of adolescent girls around the world, including their meaningful participation in social, political, civic, and economic life. Notably, a 2024 global study found that one in 10 girls and young women reported having harmful online experiences daily—and this is likely underreported.³⁰ In addition, girls who experience multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination face higher rates of TFGBV. A 2020 global study found that 42 percent of girls who identified themselves as LGBTQI+ and 37 percent of adolescent girls belonging to an ethnic minority reported experiencing harassment because of their identity.³¹



Photo: Stephanie Sinclair (as part of TYTW's 'Girls on the Brink'). Children with special needs play after school in their dormitory at the Kabanga center in Tanzania. Worldwide, albinism, which hinders the body's ability to produce pigment, affects about one in 20,000 people, but in Tanzania, as many as one in 1,400 people have the condition.

Health and Well-Being

Globally, adolescent girls face unique health-related challenges such as high rates of CEFM, early pregnancies, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, maternal mortality and morbidity, and adverse mental health outcomes.³² Gender norms enforced by peers, partners, families, and communities heavily influence adolescent girls' health. These norms shape girls' experiences and their ability to make decisions about issues affecting their health and their lives. Along with stigma, discrimination, and legal barriers, these norms also affect girls' ability to access the education and services they need both to survive, and hopefully, to thrive.³³

Early Pregnancy

Each year in low- and middle-income countries, approximately 21 million girls between the ages of 15 and 19 become pregnant³⁴ and girls between the ages of 10 and 14 experience half a million births each year.³⁵ The majority of first births to adolescent girls occur within marriage or cohabiting unions.³⁶ Adolescent births and parenting often limit girls' education and earning-potential and may have devastating health consequences for girls and their babies, including increased risk of maternal and infant morbidity and mortality.³⁷ Generally, adolescent mothers are less likely to receive prenatal or antenatal care and face higher risks of obstetric fistula, eclampsia, puerperal endometritis, and systemic infections than adult mothers.³⁸ Multiple studies have found rates of perinatal mental illness in pregnant adolescents to be as high as three times that of older women.³⁹ Children born to adolescent mothers face higher risks of low birth weight, preterm birth, neonatal mortality, and severe neonatal conditions.⁴⁰ In



comparison to older mothers, adolescent mothers may also experience higher rates of intimate partner violence.⁴¹

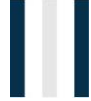
While gains have been made in reducing maternal and child mortality, complications from pregnancy and childbirth remain the leading cause of death among adolescent girls between the ages of 15 and 19 in low- and middle-income countries.⁴² Targeted approaches are needed to address specific gaps and provide services and information to adolescents which are responsive to their needs. More than 160 million women and girls worldwide have unmet contraceptive needs, with more than half of these women and girls living in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.⁴³ When adolescent girls are unable to access sexual and reproductive health information and services, they are at greater risk of sexual exploitation and violence, sexually transmitted disease and infection, and unintended pregnancy.



Photo: Josh Estey/ USAID Africa. Maggie, 18, who lives in Malawi, was forced to drop out of school because she became pregnant. In 2015, Maggie was recruited into One Community's Go Girls! Club, a part of the PEPFAR DREAMS program in her community. She has now become an active peer educator working with girls in her community to raise awareness about the importance of remaining in school and protecting oneself against HIV.

HIV/AIDS

HIV disproportionately affects adolescent girls in sub-Saharan Africa and continues to affect young women into early adulthood due to a variety of socio-economic factors including gender inequity, poverty, and lack of access to education and health services.⁴⁴ In recent years, the steepest drops in numbers of individuals infected by HIV have been among children and young



people. Despite this progress, there were approximately 210,000 new HIV infections among adolescent girls and young women globally in 2022. In sub-Saharan Africa, three out of every four new HIV infections among individuals ages 15-24 are among adolescent girls and young women.⁴⁵

Girls face barriers due to both age and gender in accessing HIV prevention services, including pre-exposure prophylaxis, age-of-consent laws, lack of youth-friendly services, transportation, inaccessible clinic hours, and provider stigma and bias, among other barriers. Pregnant women and girls living with HIV are at increased risk of pregnancy complications and life-threatening infections such as sepsis and opportunistic infections, including tuberculosis, pneumonia, and meningitis.⁴⁶ For adolescents, these risks are exacerbated by early, unintended, and repeated pregnancies. In cases in which HIV results in the death of the mother, the impact on her surviving children is devastating.

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH)

Despite progress, millions of girls and young women around the world still lack access to basic drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene. When households lack access to water, women and girls often disproportionately shoulder the burden of collecting it, which may require significant travel time or long waits at water sources, often resulting in girls' absenteeism from school and increasing risk of GBV.⁴⁷ A recent global analysis found that, in seven out of ten homes without on-premises water taps, women and girls were responsible for water collection. This task, depending on context, can take nearly an hour of time each day.⁴⁸ Girls and young women are often expected to manage water resources at the household level, including using water for cooking, cleaning, and agricultural production. This expectation can prevent them from attending school or completing assigned coursework, or from engaging in social activities critical to their healthy development.



After losing her mother from diarrhea in 2014, **Shomy** (26 years old), a Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange and Study (YES) alumni, devoted her life's work to help ensure everyone can access clean water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH). Through her nonprofit, Awareness 360, Shomy empowers other young people with skills in pitching, storytelling, project management, and impact measurement. Awareness 360 has made significant global impacts, including serving underserved populations in Bangladesh and providing WASH essentials during the pandemic, fostering long-term relationships and inspiring other nonprofits to assist.

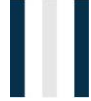


Menstrual Health and Hygiene (MHH)

Inadequate or insufficient menstrual health and hygiene (MHH) highlights various systemic vulnerabilities and inequalities, especially those related to gender-based discrimination, poverty, limited control over resources, and insufficient access to information and basic services.⁴⁹ Up to 80 percent of adolescent girls in low- and middle-income countries report limited knowledge and understanding about menstruation before getting their first period.⁵⁰ Adolescent girls with disabilities are even less likely to access or receive MHH information and services.⁵¹ Due to a lack of access to menstrual hygiene products and pain medication, inadequate or inappropriate sanitation, hygiene, and waste disposal facilities at schools, and fear of stigmatization, bullying, and harassment, adolescent girls may also stay home during menstruation, resulting in them missing several days of classes per month and falling behind. Socio-cultural restrictions placed on girls during menstruation by their families and communities include reduced movement, inability to attend religious services, to prepare food, or access shared resources such as water, and to attend community events.⁵² The onset of menstruation may also trigger CEFM in some contexts.⁵³



Photo: Luis Rubayo/AFP/Getty (as part of TYTW's 'Girls on the Brink'). A teacher, wearing a biosecurity suit as a preventative measure against the spread of COVID-19, teaches a lesson to a girl at home in Cali, Colombia.



Mental Health

Mental health issues are the leading cause of disability for young people globally and, according to the World Health Organization, mental health and substance use disorders among youth have risen by 13 percent in the last decade.⁵⁴ Mental health challenges or illness can impede critical physical, cognitive, emotional, and social growth that occurs in adolescence and negatively influence life outcomes. Globally, it is estimated that one in seven adolescents has experienced mental health conditions.⁵⁵ Adolescent girls face an elevated risk of mental health conditions that can impact their physical health and overall wellbeing. After the onset of puberty, the risk of depressive disorders increases substantially, especially among girls, who are 1.5 to 2 times more likely than boys to be diagnosed with depression.⁵⁶ Digital technologies also impact adolescent mental health and can increase risks of experiencing depression and anxiety – with disproportionate effects on girls. Girls report higher rates of cyberbullying than boys, as well as higher rates of certain forms of online sexual violence, with one global study indicating almost three in five girls (57 percent) experienced one form of sexual violence online during childhood.⁵⁷ Adolescent girls also face significant mental health challenges in times of conflict and crisis. Failing to support the mental health and psycho-social support needs of adolescents between the ages of 10 and 17 affected by humanitarian emergencies is estimated to result in the equivalent of a global \$203 billion loss in potential.⁵⁸

Conflicts, Crises, and Humanitarian Emergencies

The growing number of humanitarian crises, natural disasters, and armed conflicts exacerbate existing gender inequalities and amplify threats to girls' safety, health, and education. Over 600 million women and girls lived in conflict-affected contexts in 2022 – 50 percent more than in 2017.⁵⁹ In addition, over 130 million people are estimated to be forcibly displaced or stateless in 2024, a number likely to further rise in 2025.⁶⁰

Destruction, displacement, and upheaval erode support networks, access to services, and social protections, including access to education, health care, food, water, shelter, and economic opportunities. In crisis contexts, adolescent girls face many risks, most notably physical and sexual violence, including conflict-related sexual violence; intimate partner violence; CEFM; FGM/C; trafficking in persons; and sexual exploitation or forced sex in exchange for food, water, shelter, or other basic needs. Girls living in fragile settings are twice as likely to experience CEFM as the average girl globally,⁶¹ and four in ten girls and women who have undergone FGM/C live in contexts affected by conflict or fragility.⁶²

Aasha (whose name has been changed for her protection) was 12 years old when her parents wanted her to get married to an older man. Members of the Girls' Empowerment Forum (GEF), a girl-led school-based club supported by USAID and the UK Government in South Somalia, immediately sprung into action. As one member described it, "we went to her parents and talked to them about the importance of empowering girls in the society and also educating them... Thanks to them they have taken our advice and they also cancelled the marriage, now the girl is studying at the school."



Despite the heightened risks they face, and their critical role in social cohesion and understanding of the diverse needs of populations, girls are often overlooked in response interventions and peace and security planning processes. Girls in humanitarian contexts are rarely consulted in the design and implementation of humanitarian interventions. They commonly lack access to education, MHH resources, and safe spaces or shelters.



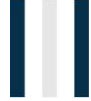
Photo: Stephanie Sinclair (as part of TYTW's 'Girls on the Brink'). The wedding of 16-year-old Anita in Kagati village, just outside Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. The country experienced a massive earthquake the year prior, which increased CEFM.

The climate crisis also poses distinct challenges for girls and young women globally. As natural resources become increasingly scarce, girls and young women experience greater risk of GBV. For example, girls in drought-stricken areas are five percent more likely to be married by age 18 than their counterparts living in non-affected areas.⁶³ These realities, as well as broader challenges associated with poor natural resources management, natural disasters, environmental degradation, and biodiversity loss, are associated with an overall reduction in their wellbeing. In consultations with girls and young women, they shared how mental health is increasingly affected by an uncertain climate future, and that access to sexual, reproductive, and mental health services are negatively impacted by natural disasters, migration and displacement, uncertain energy supplies, and water insecurity.⁶⁴

Climate change is also linked to a loss of educational opportunities for girls. In response to natural resource scarcity, families frequently remove girls from school to care for younger siblings, help collect food and water supplies, or engage in income-generating activities.⁶⁵ Insufficient access to water and sanitation also limits

girls' ability to stay in school. If current trends continue, it is estimated that these downstream effects of climate change will prevent 12.5 million girls from finishing their education annually.⁶⁶ This is particularly troubling since girls' education – including in STEM fields, where they remain critically underrepresented – is necessary to build climate resilience and supports the ability of women and girls to contribute to climate adaptation and mitigation efforts and improve community sustainability.

In the face of a myriad of challenges, girls and young women around the world have proven to be some of the most motivated and innovative agents of change in times of conflict and crisis. Their efforts as grassroots leaders, entrepreneurs, peacebuilders, and community advocates cannot and should not be ignored as they continue to raise awareness, build capacity, and influence decisions related to climate, peace, security, and humanitarian action.



UNITED STATES APPROACH TO SUPPORTING ADOLESCENT GIRLS' EMPOWERMENT GLOBALLY



Photo: Ronny Przysucha/U.S. Department of State. A young woman speaks at a sports diplomacy event hosted by the Secretary of State and other high-level principals from the governments of Mexico and Canada in Doha, Qatar.

Building on an Existing Policy Framework

In 2016, the U.S. government launched the first iteration of the United States Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls to advance the human rights and welfare of adolescent girls worldwide. The purpose of this strategy was to establish a whole-of-government approach to identify, coordinate, integrate, and leverage current efforts and resources. Today, it remains one of the only whole-of-government strategies dedicated specifically to the advancement of adolescent girls' rights and empowerment.

Countless examples of U.S. support for and success on behalf of girls have been reported to the U.S. Congress, as requested through annual appropriations since Fiscal Year 2019. For example, through sustained bipartisan support across U.S. Administrations, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) has invested more than \$2 billion since 2014 in comprehensive HIV prevention programming for adolescent girls and young women through the Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-Free, Mentored, and Safe (DREAMS) Initiative. USAID reached over 18 million girls in 2023 with education assistance from pre-primary through higher education. The U.S. Department of State demonstrated its commitment to elevating the voices of adolescent girls in multilateral fora by selecting an adolescent girl representative to join the U.S. Delegation to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in 2023 and 2024.



Recognizing the significant challenges that still remain to achieving gender equality for all girls, the United States has integrated adolescent girls' empowerment into several landmark strategies, policies, and initiatives, including the: [U.S. National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality](#); [U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally](#); [Women, Peace and Security Strategy and National Action Plan](#); [Advancing Protection and Care for Children in Adversity: a U.S. Government Strategy for Children to Thrive](#); [U.S. Strategy on Global Girls' Civic and Political Participation](#); [USAID Policy Framework](#); [USAID's Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy](#); [U.S. Government Strategy on International Basic Education](#); and [USAID's Youth in Development Policy](#); among others.

With this 2024 update to the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls, the U.S. government seeks to strengthen and harmonize existing priorities and objectives across sectors to continue working to ensure all adolescent girls are educated, healthy, economically and socially empowered, able to meaningfully participate in decision-making about their lives, and free from GBV and discrimination online and offline, thereby promoting global development, peace, security, and prosperity. Our efforts aim to enhance girls' access to quality education; to reduce their risks of experiencing GBV; to improve their physical, mental, and social wellbeing; and to provide them with the tools necessary to fully participate in their societies, exercise their rights, and make informed decisions about their lives.

Guiding Principles

The United States' approach to empowering adolescent girls is guided by the following principles:

Safeguarding and Do No Harm: Commit to principles of safety, respect, confidentiality, and non-discrimination in all work and regularly assess efforts to not put GBV survivors, program participants, staff, and community members, including those from underserved communities, at physical or emotional risk.

Evidence-Based: Through data and evidence of best practices, ensure that interventions yield the greatest impact and achieve U.S. policy goals. Through this strategy, the U.S. government will support evidence-based and informed programming and invest in monitoring and evaluation to learn from and continually improve efforts. The U.S. government is committed to learning, sharing, and contributing to the body of evidence regarding what works to empower girls and young women.

Human Rights-Informed: Respect and promote the human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as civil liberties, of all people of all ages and statuses everywhere. Incorporate international human rights considerations into policies, programming, and services. This approach reflects values of respect, compassion, and human dignity for all



and prioritizes transparency, accountability, empowerment, consultations, and participation.

Intersectional: Address how aspects of an individual’s identity, from disability to displacement status and beyond, intersect to create different lived experiences of discrimination and opportunity. Consider the historical, sociocultural, and systemic disadvantages and power imbalances members of different groups face; and recognize their strength, resilience, partnership, and leadership in developing tailored solutions.

Locally Led/Informed: Build partnerships with local stakeholders, including individuals, communities, networks, organizations, private entities, and governments, and enable them to set their own agendas and co-create solutions. This includes prioritizing meaningful engagement with women and girls themselves; as well as women-led, girl- and youth-led, and girls’ and women’s rights organizations, activists, and community influencers; marginalized and underserved communities; and engaging men and boys as allies and champions of girls’ and women’s rights to achieve lasting change in addressing democratic and peace and security challenges, and advance gender equality for all.

Participatory: Partner with girls and young women in ways that are respectful, inclusive, and intentional, whereby power and decision making are shared, their respective contributions are valued, and the ideas, perspectives, skills, and strengths of all girls and young women are integrated into the design, delivery, monitoring, and dissemination of programs, strategies, policies, funding mechanisms, and organizations that affect their lives and their communities, countries, and the world.

Holistic, multi-sectoral, and comprehensive: Recognize that, given the close relationship between decisions about schooling, marriage, health care, including family planning, and household economics, policies and programs targeting girls and young women must be comprehensive and combine interventions across a range of development sectors. This approach should include grassroots “bottom-up” activities as well as coordinated national reforms. Through this strategy, the U.S. government aims to integrate a specific focus on adolescent girls throughout the ongoing work of agencies implementing activities to address global health, education, economic growth, democracy and governance, technology and innovation, food security, climate change, natural disasters, and conflict and security.



Photo: Karen Kasmauski/ USAID Maternal and Child Survival Program. Dr. Hariniony Rakotoarimanana in Madagascar holds an educational session for young women before they have individual appointments at the local clinic.

Objective 1: Enhance girls' access to quality education in safe environments

The United States recognizes adolescent girls' education as a critical building block for the advancement of women's entrepreneurship and economic empowerment, gender equality, and other development objectives. Through education, girls and young women gain lifelong skills to advocate for themselves and others, challenge harmful gender norms, and create more just societies.

Under this strategy, the United States will support the improvement of learning outcomes for adolescent girls, particularly the most marginalized. Skills such as literacy, numeracy, digital, and social and emotional skills prepare adolescent girls to succeed in basic and higher education, pursue job opportunities, especially in high-growth industries, and control their income and assets. With increased focus on local leadership and collaboration, the United States will seek to understand and address the multi-dimensional ways that aspects of adolescent girls' identities, such as displacement status and disability, intersect with context-specific barriers, such as inequitable access to technology, inadequate water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities, insufficient MHH information or products undermine their learning potential.

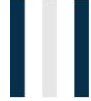
The United States recognizes that physical, emotional, and mental safety is a prerequisite for learning and that all learners and educators need to be safe from harm and treated with dignity and respect. The United States will collaborate with diverse communities – inclusive of men and boys – to create and promote safe in-person and distance-learning environments for adolescent girls, both online and offline.

The United States will collaborate with educational institutions, youth-led and youth-serving organizations, and adolescent girls themselves to enable them to exercise their rights and agency within education systems. The United States will support policies and programs that address the global underrepresentation of women educators in higher levels of education, school management, and education policymaking.

Finally, the United States will work across sectors to address harmful norms and practices such as CEFM, discriminatory policies such as those that prevent girls and young women who are pregnant or parenting from accessing education, and disproportionate caregiving and household responsibilities that inhibit girls’ transition from primary to secondary education. To prepare them to be economically competitive and to develop human capital across industries, the United States will strengthen pathways for girls and young women to pursue educational opportunities in all fields of study, including fields where they have been historically underrepresented, such as STEM fields.



Jean (whose name has been changed for her protection) a 15-year-old girl from the rural eastern region of Côte d’Ivoire, had never seriously considered a future in science and technology, but when she had an opportunity to participate in a Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) camp funded by MCC and operated by the Millennium Challenge Account and the district office of the Ministry of Education, she discovered new possibilities for her future. “Through the exciting workshops at the camp, I discovered my interest in science and technology. Making soap, treating water, making paper, and learning about soil pH were incredible moments of discovery for me,” she said. Now she is looking forward to pursuing these subjects further in her secondary education.



Objective 2: *Provide economic opportunities and incentives for girls and their families*

The U.S. government will promote policies and programs that help families keep their daughters in school and delay child and early marriage to adulthood, including through measures such as scholarships, stipends, or conditional cash transfers that address specific issues that affect women and girls, promote gender equality, and are directed at alleviating economic pressures within poorer households.

The U.S. government will also promote policies and programs that increase financial security by providing adolescent girls and other family members with financial literacy, income-generating opportunities, vocational training, access to capital or savings, including microfinance, and access to technology. Such measures can provide a positive alternative to school attrition and CEFM and offer relief to girls and families facing economic hardship. Economic incentives are especially critical in regions affected by crisis or conflict and in regions where the prevalence of CEFM is high and/or the median age of marriage is low.

Economic empowerment programs or interventions specifically targeting adolescent girls can increase their financial literacy, help them build assets and access safe and legal employment and sustainable livelihoods, and increase their overall confidence and well-being. For married girls in particular, such interventions can provide a means for them to increase their financial security and mitigate the risks of CEFM. Economic empowerment strategies that target adolescent girls should be age-appropriate and data driven and should address the factors in a woman's or girl's environment that may prevent them from entering the formal labor market. For example, entrepreneurship, capacity-building, mentorship, and employment programs for young women should be grounded in real market needs and opportunities and address barriers to participation, such as unpaid labor and caregiving responsibilities. Strategies that target adolescent girls should also recognize the ways in which such programs can increase GBV risk, and such programs should actively work to mitigate this risk.

Efforts to close the gender digital divide also offer new opportunities for girls and young women to gain skills, learn, and participate in the economy, politics, and society. The United States will continue to support efforts to halve the gender digital divide by 2030; advance digital access and affordability; develop relevant products and tools; provide digital literacy and skills training; promote online safety and security and advance global partnerships to address TFGBV; and invest in age- and sex-disaggregated data and research.



Lika, a 17-year-old SHE's GREAT! Ambassador from Georgia, is finishing high school and has already secured a place at the American University in Bulgaria (AUBG). She will continue her studies in European studies, focusing on gender equality and addressing climate-related disasters. Lika is a member of her local Youth Council and a passionate advocate for youth rights dedicated to sparking interest and motivation in entrepreneurship among young people. Her impact is recognized widely, and she is frequently invited to city hall and municipality meetings as a representative. Lika's personal motto is: "Not the future, but today is for youth as well."

Objective 3: *Foster adolescent girls' empowerment by providing information, skills, services, and supports that improve their well-being*

In addition to formal education, girls and young women should benefit from a range of skills, services, information, and support networks to reach their full potential and grow as leaders. To stay in school and reap the benefits of education, girls and young women must be healthy and empowered with access to information, skills, services, and supports to make informed decisions.

In particular, adolescent girls need information about health, from nutrition to illness prevention to comprehensive sexuality education, to build the foundation for a lifetime of healthy behaviors for themselves and their families. The U.S. government will strengthen efforts to increase girls' and young women's awareness of their rights, their ability to advocate for themselves in a safe and meaningful way and support an enabling environment where their rights are realized.

The United States will promote policies and programs that are specifically designed for adolescent girls both in and out of school—as well as those girls and young women who are married and unmarried—to increase their awareness of, and access to, sexual and reproductive health information and services; family planning methods; HIV prevention, testing, and treatment; and mental health services. It is also important to educate and reach adolescent boys with information about sexual and reproductive health and rights and the consequences of violence, and to engage them in thinking critically about the effects and consequences of harmful gender norms.



Instability, conflict, and stress present acute challenges for girls that should be considered in the design and provision of humanitarian response. During climate-related crises, conflicts, and humanitarian responses, the U.S. government will work to link adolescent girls with girl-specific services and support. These include, but are not limited to, access to health, education, and livelihoods opportunities adapted to their needs; targeted age-appropriate sexual and reproductive health services, including family planning and HIV prevention education and services, MHH, and personal hygiene supplies; safe and confidential methods for reporting abuse; and protective peer networks and psycho-social support.

Staff with training in the prevention of and response to GBV should be deployed at the onset of each humanitarian response effort, and all staff should be trained on the specific needs of girls. As an especially vulnerable group, adolescent girls should also be involved in early warning and early response efforts, including information sharing, to ensure their unique vulnerabilities and needs are considered.



Happiness (24 years old), a deaf young woman in Malawi, has faced challenges and discrimination throughout her life. When she enrolled in the PEPFAR DARE (Deaf. Aware. Reached. Engaged) DREAMS project, she learned how to communicate more effectively using sign language, and how to protect herself from HIV and violence, strengthen her self-confidence, and fully embrace her identity. Happiness is a DARE DREAMS ambassador and club mentor empowering other deaf youth in her community.

Objective 4: *Work with communities to shift harmful norms and prevent and respond to GBV*

Gender equality and women and girls' empowerment are not achievable without addressing pervasive harmful norms and the unique forms of GBV that adolescent girls disproportionately face. To support a positive and enabling environment for adolescent girls' empowerment, which plays a key role in adolescent girls' ability to thrive, the United States will promote policies and programs that partner with communities and other stakeholders to challenge and eliminate the pervasive inequitable norms and practices that perpetuate GBV online and offline, inhibit girls from completing their education, and contribute to broader instability and economic stagnation.

The U.S. government will work to expand opportunities for all girls and young women to achieve their full potential by addressing their unique needs and risks of GBV. The U.S. government will also invest in the leadership of girls and young women in efforts to prevent,



respond, and resolve conflicts and crises by uplifting their voices as leaders, agents of change, and advocates in their communities. Doing so will strengthen efforts that help break cycles of conflict and instability, reduce drivers of fragility, and build community resilience to violence.



Photo: Stephanie Sinclair (as part of TYTW's 'Girls on the Brink'). A young girl in the Masanga community of Sierra Leone graduates from an alternative rites of passage ceremony that does not include FGM/C.

Interventions are most effective when they include the meaningful participation of whole communities, including girl-led groups, parents, grandparents, siblings, in-laws, and especially adolescent boys, as evidence shows that early adolescence is a key moment in the formation of norms and beliefs.⁶⁷ These interventions should also draw in traditional, faith, and religious leaders, and other members of the community with influence, such as political leaders, civil society organizations, mothers' groups, and parent-teacher associations, amongst others.

The United States will continue to invest in critical evidence and learning to ensure better understanding of the prevalence, types, and impacts of GBV on adolescent girls, as well as the effectiveness and sustainability of norms change interventions. For example, the CDC's Violence Against Children Surveys are nationally representative household surveys that shed light on the types of physical, emotional, and sexual violence, online and offline, adolescent girls experience. The Demographic Health Surveys are the leading source of global data in over 90 countries on the prevalence of domestic and other forms of

violence against women. Together, these data sets are used not only to inform U.S. foreign policy, but as a critical public good in tracking national and international development progress.

Objective 5: Strengthen policy and legal frameworks and accountability

Many legal frameworks around the world do not protect girls from violence and discrimination, either because they actively discriminate against girls, fail to consider girls' needs, or because anti-discrimination provisions are inadequately enforced. Today, women enjoy fewer than two-thirds the rights of men.⁶⁸ Even where legal frameworks exist, girls face a myriad of obstacles to accessing justice, including a lack of awareness about the law, their rights under it, and of appropriate reporting mechanisms and services, as well as a fear of stigma, blame, and/or victimization through the justice system. Young people who identify as LGBTQI+, in particular, continue to be excluded by international legal movements and systems and to experience



violence and harassment by their peers, teachers, and communities. This discrimination is not only dangerous but sets young people behind economically.

Laws protecting the citizenship and rights of all girls are critical first steps toward gender equality and security for all. Without a proper legal framework, girls have no recourse for protection of their rights, and without equal access to citizenship (i.e. through mechanisms such as inheritance, birth, and marriage registration) and asset ownership, girls will continue to be left behind, exposed to violence, and experience the negative consequences of discrimination.

However, laws alone are insufficient. Governments are responsible for ensuring that laws protecting girls are implemented and enforced, and that all people, especially girls, are aware of their rights under the law. The U.S. government will work with governments and civil society organizations around the world to advocate for policy and legal reform to protect adolescent girls' rights, improve implementation and enforcement of existing laws and policies, and raise awareness of the laws and legal protections adolescent girls are granted under the law. Interventions will provide girls and young women with rights-based education and support networks, equip legal systems to address the needs of adolescent girls by preventing and responding to GBV, and address gender norms that perpetuate discrimination and violence.

Another challenge to advancing strong legal and policy frameworks for girls is their lack of representation in local and national government and global decision-making processes. Less than a quarter of global parliamentarians are women and the obstacles that girls and young women face when taking on leadership roles are numerous, interlinked, compounding, and rooted in gender inequality. To encourage the safe, full, equal, and meaningful civic and political participation of all girls and young women, the U.S. government will support policies and programs that increase girls' and young women's access to quality, safe, inclusive, and participatory civic education, mentorship, leadership, and skills development opportunities and that create an enabling environment for their leadership.



Zekia (16 years old) is a survivor and a champion in the movement to end FGM/C in Ethiopia, utilizing her knowledge to raise awareness among her community and peers. Zekia's advocacy has been instrumental in protecting girls from undergoing FGM/C, with none of the girls in her school or age group having been subjected to it. The UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of FGM works alongside local champions like Zekia, supporting over 11,000 groups globally that are dedicated to ending FGM/C. Since Fiscal Year 2017, the United States Department of State, at the request of Congress, has invested annual funding in the Joint Programme, which works at the local, national, and global levels has succeeded in advocating for legal and policy frameworks banning FGM/C in 14 of its 17 focus countries.

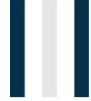


Photo: Stephanie Sinclair (as part of TYTW's 'Girls on the Brink'). Dada, 14, escaped with her child, born of a Boko Haram fighter, one year prior. Since 2009, many girls have gone missing or have been forced into CEFM and early motherhood with little support to rebuild their lives.

Implementing and Measuring the Strategy

The U.S. Department of State, USAID, the Peace Corps, and MCC are the primary implementers of U.S. government programs to support adolescent girls' empowerment globally. As appropriate, other U.S. government agencies may support these efforts by aligning their work with the goals and objectives outlined above. Bureaus, offices, and missions are strongly encouraged to use this strategy as a resource for incorporating efforts to support adolescent girls' empowerment into relevant strategies and operational plans.

Agencies will implement the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls through a range of approaches appropriate to their respective mandates and capacities, including diplomacy, programmatic interventions, public engagement and outreach, coordination with international and private sector partners, working with local grassroots, women- and girl-led organizations, groups, movements and networks, and evidence building and data collection. Pursuant to the strategy's objectives, efforts will be coordinated across the U.S. government and integrated into agencies' ongoing work, such as through relevant agency-specific implementation plans. Each agency acknowledges the value and importance of supporting the empowerment of all girls and, in keeping with its mission and authorities, intends to integrate advancing the rights, empowerment, and leadership of adolescent girls into its operations, including in policy development, strategic and budget planning, staff training and capacity building, implementation of policies and programs, and monitoring and evaluation of results.



An interagency working group, led by the White House, will meet to coordinate the implementation of the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls. In addition, consultations will be held with civil society, including adolescent girls and girl-led organizations, to discuss ongoing efforts. These consultations will be an opportunity for civil society to continue to provide feedback and inform implementation of the strategy. At the request of Congress, the U.S. State Department and USAID will coordinate a public report on actions taken to implement the strategy.



Photo: Stephanie Sinclair (as part of TYTW's 'Girls on the Brink'). Kadiatu, a teenage obstetric fistula survivor, is thrilled that she can finally walk safely and independently with the use of splints on her feet. She was participating in "Fistula Camp" at the Aberdeen Women's Center in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

The following summaries outline the specific modalities that each agency will employ to achieve the goals and objectives of the strategy:

U.S. Department of State

The U.S. Department of State recognizes that a concerted effort to empower adolescent girls globally and address the harmful norms and practices that impede their full and meaningful participation is essential to safeguarding girls' human rights and is of central importance in maximizing the effectiveness of efforts to advance U.S. security interests and foreign policy priorities. When a girl drops out of school, is married, or becomes pregnant too early, her ability



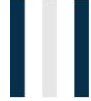
to exercise her rights is limited and she is constrained from achieving her full potential. In addition, her welfare and that of any future children is threatened, which perpetuates cycles of poverty and inequality. At the national level, these outcomes undermine economic productivity, threaten sustainable growth and development, and drive conditions that enable violence or insecurity. Our commitment to promoting the rights and well-being of adolescent girls is grounded in the Department of State's broader efforts to advance human rights and gender equality and empower women and girls globally. Under this updated Strategy, the State Department, including U.S. embassies around the world, is committed to promoting the protection, empowerment, and leadership of girls globally through foreign policy, foreign assistance, public affairs, and public diplomacy. The Department of State will work to build a world in which all girls are able to live free from violence and discrimination; fully, meaningfully, and equally participate in political and civil life; and contribute to, and benefit from, economic growth and global prosperity.

U.S. Agency for International Development

USAID's work is deeply motivated by a commitment to adolescent girls and young women, in light of longstanding systemic discrimination and barriers that continue to affect their full participation and access to opportunity. USAID's commitment to empowering adolescent girls is integral to its broader efforts to advance development goals and achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. This includes leading advancements that benefit adolescent girls. USAID's contributions to the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls leverage the Agency's existing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy to enhance development efforts for gender equality. These investments create opportunities for adolescent girls to increase their contributions and agency within their societies. USAID focuses on developing best practices to strengthen the integration of adolescent girls into programs and interventions, ensuring their voices are heard and their needs are met.

In alignment with the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls, USAID applies intersectional, inclusive, evidence-driven, and transformative approaches that are context-informed and locally led to achieve gender equality and equity objectives. With programs in more than 100 countries, USAID is dedicated to addressing the needs and agency of adolescent girls across various sectors in development and humanitarian contexts. The Agency will continue to advance the vision to create enabling environments for adolescent girls to achieve and determine their aspirations, live without fear of violence and harassment, and engage in leadership and agency throughout their life cycles.

USAID's development efforts for adolescent girls are guided by several core policies. The Agency's updated 2022 Youth In Development Policy envisions a world in which young people have the agency, rights, influence, and opportunities to pursue their life goals and contribute to the development of their communities. It is based on a Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework that promotes inclusive, assets-based, and ages and stages approach to youth



programming The Policy advances three objectives:

- **Access:** Youth are better able to access high-quality information, safe services, and livelihood opportunities and build the skills they need to lead healthy, productive, and engaged lives.
- **Participation:** Youth have the right to fully participate in decision-making as key partners to contribute to individual, household, community, and national well-being.
- **Systems:** Youth have a stronger collective voice in, and are better served by, local and national systems through more coordinated and effective services, practices, and policies that embody the principles of positive youth development.

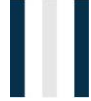
The Agency is also guided by its updated 2023 Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy, which establishes four objectives:

- Reducing gender disparities;
- Strive to eliminate GBV and mitigate its harmful effects;
- Increase women and girl's agency; and
- Advance structural changes and equitable gender norms.


Programs designed to advance adolescent girls' development reference the objectives above as part of the USAID's "whole-of-girl" approach. This approach addresses the unique challenges faced by girls at different stages of adolescence, supporting key moments in their lives and combating harmful practices such as CEFM, FGM/C, and TFGBV. Through these interventions, USAID advances gender equality throughout a woman's life, including childhood and adolescence. These investments prepare adolescent girls with the skills, competencies, analytic abilities, and better health and nutrition necessary to be healthy, engaged, and productive individuals.

The Peace Corps

The Peace Corps considers girls' education and empowerment as central components to just and equitable development. Educating girls and ensuring that they have access to resources creates a pathway for upward mobility for girls to grow and thrive, which is both a moral imperative and a known development accelerator. The Peace Corps' person-to-person localized development approach creates a unique opportunity for engagement with girls and young women within their communities. Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) live and work side-by-side with community members in more than 60 countries around the world, most often in rural and remote areas, and PCVs develop close, personal bonds of friendship and trust with members of their community. These relationships give them unique insight into both the opportunities, constraints, and barriers regarding the education of adolescent girls, as well as the credibility needed to catalyze community-led change in collaboration with local partners.



The Peace Corps recognizes that girls—especially adolescent girls—face challenges that are unique to their gender and that frequently interact in a multi-causal manner. The Peace Corps utilizes a holistic, human-centered approach in promoting gender equity and tailors interventions to meet the needs and interests of adolescents and youth at varied ages and stages of development. PCVs are trained to use the principles of Positive Youth Development to design, implement, and adapt activities with adolescent girls as partners. With over six decades of experience working with adolescent girls and their social networks, the Peace Corps is continuing its effective and successful community-based solutions in an integrated manner. The Peace Corps’ implementation plan presents a programmatic roadmap to enhance the work already done by PCVs in schools and communities.



Following the evacuation of Peace Corps/Colombia Volunteers due to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, three young Colombian women — **Leidys, Yulieth, and Alejandra** — all former Peace Corps Girls Leading Our World (GLOW) participants, joined forces to make sure GLOW activities would not only continue but also expand during the absence of Volunteers and continue to inspire confidence and leadership in girls through camps, clubs, and conferences. They published a magazine, obtained funding for a podcast project, attended virtual workshops, collaborated with a university, held virtual regional conferences, and began the process of registering GLOW as a foundation, all while maintaining club operations both virtually and in-person as COVID-19 restrictions allowed.

Millennium Challenge Corporation

The Millennium Challenge Corporation’s (MCC) commitment to adolescent girls is driven by a recognition of the role gender equality plays in achieving economic growth and poverty reduction and the understanding that opportunities available to individuals during childhood and adolescence shape their future economic potential. MCC’s approach to addressing the needs of women and adolescent girls is articulated through its unique model of foreign assistance. At each stage of compact development, we seek to address gender and other social inequalities and vulnerabilities that may limit women and adolescent girls’ ability to benefit from MCC’s planned investments.



Aligned with MCC's 2022 Inclusion and Gender Strategy and forthcoming 2024 Gender and Inclusion Policy, the Agency implements the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls by:

- Promoting human rights and gender equality through its country selection process,
- Improving educational access and achievement for adolescent girls,
- Equipping young women and girls with needed skills to help them transition to the 21st century economy through education, workforce development, and entrepreneurship projects and activities,
- Improving the health, food security, and wellbeing of adolescent girls,
- Reducing risks associated with infrastructure construction, such as sexual harassment, HIV/AIDS, child labor, and trafficking in persons, and
- Through investments in water, sanitation, and energy.

MCC's assistance starts with a competitive process for selecting countries eligible for MCC compacts: countries must achieve a passing score on MCC's indicator scorecard, which includes 20 indicators related to Ruling Justly, Economic Freedom, and Investing in People. The Girls' Education indicator incentivizes countries to ensure that girls complete primary school and their secondary education. The Gender in the Economy indicator measures the extent to which laws provide men and women equal capacity to generate income and participate in the economy and includes protections against domestic violence and child marriage. Indicators related to Child Health and Education and Health Expenditures also incentivize policies that benefit adolescent girls.

At each stage of compact development, MCC also seeks to create opportunities for women and for girls throughout their life cycle through investments in key sectors: education, health, nutrition, community development, water, sanitation, energy, transport, land, natural resource management and agriculture. Additionally, MCC often works on legal, policy, and institutional reforms within these sectors, addressing gender and social inequalities in areas such as service delivery or rights.

END NOTES

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Photo: Andrea Bruce (as part of TYTW's 'Girls on the Brink'). Bricthone, 11, and Isadora, 10, study in front of a solitary door frame, all that is left of their home after Hurricane Matthew devastated Haiti.

