



EMPOWERING GIRLS:

ASSESSING THE U.S. GOVERNMENT'S
COMMITMENT AND ACTION

A THREE-YEAR ANALYSIS OF THE GIRL STRATEGY

A **Generation** at Stake

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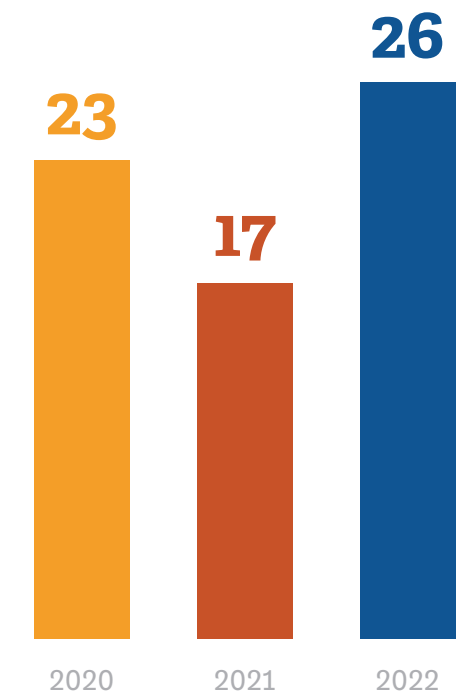
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Girls make up half of the world's largest population of adolescents in history. Their education, safety, and health are important now, and whether or not they attain these crucial aspects of their development will have reverberations for decades to come. Adolescence, for everyone, is a critical period in life. Physically and emotionally, it is a time of great change and growth that can set one up to flourish. For girls, adolescence can also be a period of unique and tremendous challenges. In low- and middle-income countries especially, there are multitude of factors that significantly impact their development and future opportunities, including limited access to quality education, experiences of violence, lack of healthcare and proper nutrition, and social norms that restrict their abilities to achieve their full potential. For many girls, adolescence is a time marked by child marriage, early pregnancy, female genital mutilation/cutting, increased care giving responsibilities in the home, and more. Recognizing and addressing these challenges is essential in empowering adolescent girls in the Global South, allowing them to overcome barriers and emerge as

NUMBER OF REPORTED U.S. GOVERNMENT-FUNDED PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES TO EMPOWER ADOLESCENT GIRLS GLOBALLY





“The current generation of young people is the largest in human history, and adolescent girls are a significant portion of those young people.”

strong, educated, and influential adults who can contribute meaningfully to their communities and societies as a whole.

Recognizing the importance of prioritizing adolescent girls’ education, care, health and safety, in March of 2016, the Obama administration was the first government in the world to release a strategy specifically focused on adolescent girls as a demographic and identified key objectives to achieving their empowerment and equality.

Since its release, there have been two changes in administration, as well as several important new strategies, policies, policy frameworks, leadership positions and bodies focused on youth and/or gender in the United States’ foreign policy. The world was also forever changed in 2020 with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and is still recovering from its resulting political, economic and health impacts. Despite these changes to the world in which this historically large population of adolescent girls live, the U.S. government has not updated the strategy and, until 2023, had not publicly reported on progress made to implement it.

To conduct this analysis, civil society actors collated Congressional reports from the years 2020, 2021, and 2022 and cross-referenced them with the implementation strategy for the U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls. The analysis sought to determine which issue areas, country contexts and diplomatic actions seemed to be priorities for the four implementing agencies across these years. The results of our analysis demonstrate differences in approaches that vary each year. The analysis in this document is intended to identify key takeaways and any gaps from these reports. All programs, activities and diplomatic efforts were categorized by issue area or issue areas mentioned in the reports to Congress for the purpose of data visualizations. The results of this analysis demonstrate that while adolescent girls do benefit from U.S. foreign assistance, their unique assets, needs and challenges appear to be far from central to U.S. programs, activities or diplomacy. While activities to benefit girls are taking place on the part of U.S. government and implementers, the strategy itself is not being utilized and the reports to Congress simply highlight a haphazard snapshot of existing efforts from State, USAID, MCC and Peace Corps.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Across all years of reporting, it appears that the 2016 *U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls* is not being meaningfully utilized by U.S. government agencies, its diplomats or implementing organizations. Ensuring that adolescent girls are healthy, educated, skilled and safe necessarily means measuring how and where the U.S. government is investing in them. To do this more effectively, we recommend:

- The President issue an executive order requiring the State Department, USAID, MCC, and Peace Corps to update their implementation plans for the *U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls*, with a requirement that these plans be linked to key goals and indicators outlined in other recently updated strategies such as the *U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to GBV Globally*, *U.S. Strategy on International Basic Education*, *U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace and Security (WPS)*, and the *USAID Youth in Development Policy*.
- USAID and the Department of State collect and transparently report annually on their programmatic activities utilizing disaggregated data that includes information such as sex, age, marital status, motherhood status, and disability. This data should be accompanied by information on the amount of funding that goes towards programming specifically intended to support adolescent girls’ empowerment.
- Future Congressional reports on the implementation of the *U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls* include updates from MCC and Peace Corps and include funding levels and age- and sex-disaggregated data wherever possible. These reports should also contain information on the number of girls reached through activities in alignment with USAID’s definitions of youth programming, including programs or activities which are girl-focused, -led, or -relevant.¹
- An increased number of consultations and a high-level list of recommendations garnered from those consultations with adolescent girls who are beneficiaries of U.S. government programs and activities on the ways in which U.S. foreign aid can be improved to better meet the needs of adolescent girls, and how the U.S. government is taking those recommendations into consideration.
- Future Congressional Reports should also include greater detail on efforts undertaken at bilateral and multilateral levels of diplomacy and a more detailed breakdowns of allocations for girls’ empowerment programs and activities globally.
- Future public statements issued in support of International Day of the Girl Child on October 11th outline ways in which the U.S. government is working to empower girls around the world with specific statistics and programmatic examples.

¹ Girl-focused: Adolescent girls are the primary program participants; Girl-relevant: An activity that includes adolescent girls within its targeted participants or beneficiaries or has a girl-specific component; Girl-led: An activity in which girls are the primary implementers. A girl-led organization focuses on girl-led development, promotes youth participation, and often has adolescent girls and other young people as staff.

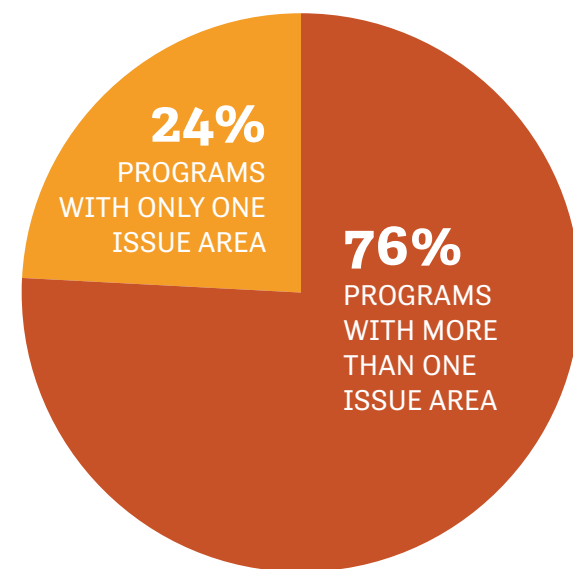


INTRODUCTION

Adolescent girls are a significant part of the world’s largest youth population in history. In fact, 16% of the world is comprised of adolescents and half of the 2.4 billion adolescents globally are girls who have unique capabilities and face unique challenges and barriers to realizing their rights (USAID, 2022). While adolescence is defined as the transition between childhood and adulthood that is marked by rapid physical, cognitive and psychosocial growth, it can also be a time when gender differences make it harder for girls to access educational, health, economic and other opportunities (UNICEF, 2023).

The *U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls* states that “Empowered, educated, healthy, and safe adolescent girls possess a better complement of tools to make the transition into adulthood and engage productively in the economy as adults” (U.S. Department of State, 2016). Research backs that up and demonstrates that investments in girls’ futures pay dividends, and that a failure to address the barriers to their equal inclusion in society costs countries and the world far too much both monetarily and in lost human potential. The strategy included implementation plans from the State Department, USAID, Peace Corps and MCC. The following objectives were put forward for all implementing agencies: 1) Enhance girls’ access to quality education in safe environments; 2) Provide economic opportunities and incentives

2020 U.S. GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS



“Research has shown that for every dollar invested in girls’ education, as much as \$2.80 is generated in economic growth.”

for girls and their families; 3) Empower girls with information, skills, services and support; 4) Mobilize and educate communities to change harmful norms and practices; 5) Strengthen policy and legal frameworks and accountability. The strategy also noted that the U.S. government would “adopt a holistic, multi-sectoral, comprehensive approach” to empowering girls, given that challenges facing girls are interrelated, such as educational barriers, early and forced marriage, and access to quality health care (U.S. Department of State, 2016).

Across all three years of reporting, it is clear that the U.S. government attempted to heed this call to fund programs and activities that address multiple, rather than isolated, issues facing girls: in fact, over three-fourths of programs listed included more than one issue area and just over 70% of diplomatic commitments and activities did the same.

Given how critical adolescence is to girls, there is a case to be made that investing in them is the right thing to do. However, with many competing priorities and limited foreign assistance funding, Congress

and the administration have to make tough choices in how money is appropriated and allocated, and not every demographic or issue area receives the funding advocates believe is necessary to address global needs and the fair share of what the U.S. government should contribute as a donor.

Research has shown that for every dollar invested in girls’ education, as much as \$2.80 is generated in economic growth, equating to billions of dollars in additional GDP growth (Qin, Curmi, Gauer, & Gallinetti, 2020). Conversely, a study by the World Bank found that the barriers to girls completing 12 years of education are costing the global economy between \$15 and \$30 trillion in lifetime opportunity and earnings (Wodon, Montenegro, Nguyen, & Onagoruwa, 2018). Based on the implementation reports reviewed, data on funding levels are inconsistent or not included. Given the known dividends for investing in girls, it is imperative that the U.S. government tracks and transparently reports on funding for adolescent girls as a critical component of measuring impact.

BACKGROUND

In March of 2016, the U.S. Department of State's Office for Global Women's Issues launched a multi-agency strategy focused on adolescent girls: the *U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls*. The strategy says, "While adolescence is a time of great vulnerability for girls, it is also an ideal point to leverage development and diplomacy efforts. It is an opportunity to disrupt poverty from becoming a permanent condition that is passed from one generation to the next" (U.S. Department of State, 2016). Four agencies created implementation plans for the strategy and committed to coordination between and within agencies. Those agencies were: the U.S. Department of State (State), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Peace Corps and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC). **The strategy has five objectives to achieve girls' empowerment: 1) education; 2) economic opportunities; 3) increasing information, skills and support; 4) social norm change; and 5) strengthened policy and legal frameworks.**

The strategy states that a working group will be set up to measure the progress of the implementation of the strategy. However, by November 2016, the year the strategy was released, a new president had been elected whose foreign policy priorities differed greatly from the previous administration. There is no public information regarding whether this working group was ever formed. When administrations changed in 2020 and foreign policy priorities shifted yet again, the strategy was not on the list of those to be updated. To many observers in civil society, it was unclear whether the strategy had ever successfully been implemented, and to what degree the U.S. government was prioritizing adolescent girls' empowerment, regardless of administration.

Members of Congress included a reporting requirement for information on the AGS implementation across the U.S. in appropriations legislation for Fiscal Years 2020, 2021, and 2022. This demonstrates an increased and bipartisan desire for greater transparency over its implementation. As mandated through the State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs (SFOPs)

Appropriations bill and Committee reports (SFOPs reports), the U.S. Department of State has produced three documents outlining actions taken over three 12-month periods—the years 2020 through 2022—to implement the *U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls*. The legislative mandate for these reports can be found in section 7019(e) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2021 (Div. K, P.L. 116-260), House Report 116-444 and Section 7019(e) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2022 (Div. K, P.L. 117-103), and Section 7019(e) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2023 (Div. K, P.L. 117-328) and House Report 117-401, respectively.

The Congressional language requiring these reports stipulates that the U.S. Department of State and USAID must report on actions to implement the *U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls*, including programs to: 1) reduce the incidence of harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) and address the needs of already married adolescent girls; 2) encourage the abandonment of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C); 3) address the needs of those who have already undergone these procedures; and 4) train staff on the specific challenges and needs of adolescent girls.

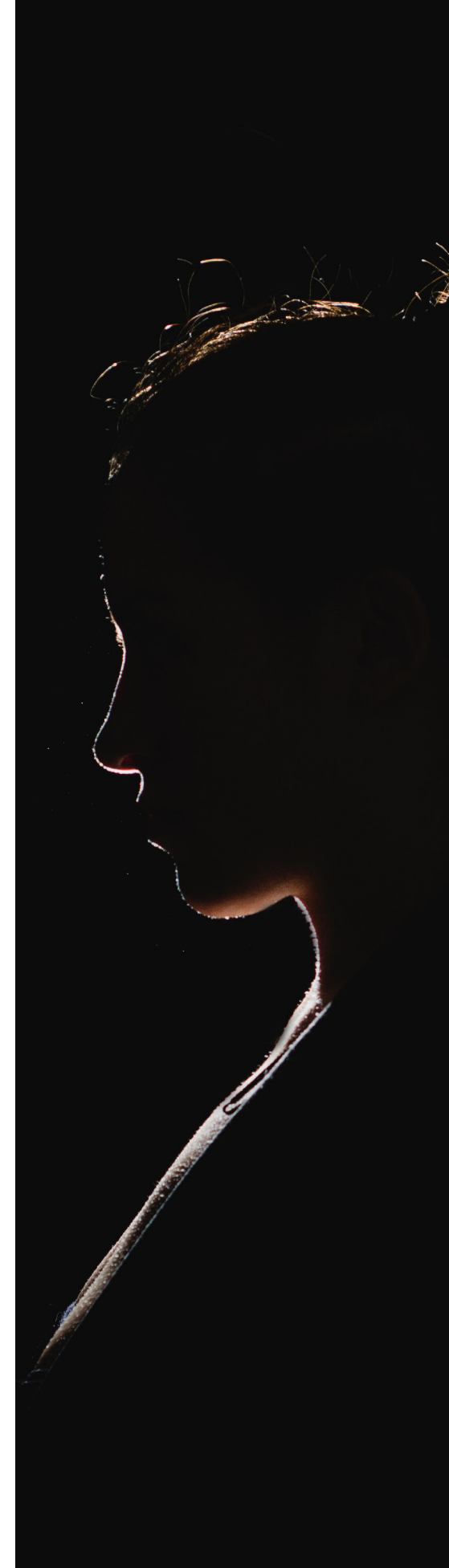
Although the first two of these reports (State Department Report Numbers 004160 and 004832) have not been made publicly available on any U.S. government website, they are unclassified and were shared with the following committees: House and Senate Foreign Affairs, House and Senate Appropriations, and both the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs. Staff from relevant Congressional offices shared these reports with civil society. The third report, released in 2023, was made publicly available on the State Department website. The analysis in this document is intended to identify key takeaways and any gaps from these reports.

OVERVIEW & HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2020

The report released in 2021 is an overview of actions taken between January 2020 and December 2020. This report highlights actions taken in policy, diplomacy and through programs and activities to address gender-based violence (GBV), CEFM, FGM/C, and to empower adolescent girls. The report also includes a section on the staff training at the Department of State and USAID on topics related to gender. It is important to note that on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic (Cucinotta, 2020). The direct health impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic as well as the secondary impacts on health, education and other systems affected the implementation of policy and programmatic efforts in every sector.

OVERVIEW OF DIPLOMACY EFFORTS FROM 2020

In 2020, the U.S. government reported undertaking three core diplomatic actions to implement the *U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls*: 1) a December 2020 virtual panel discussion with three U.S. government leaders discussing child marriage in China; 2) a digital campaign that included social media and a blog in November and December 2020 to recognize the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and 16 Days of Activism Against GBV; and 3) in December 2020, the Embassy in Algiers hosted two virtual panels on combatting GBV and empowering women. Individual-level efforts noted in this report included statements, press releases, or remarks from: the Secretary of State, Ambassador at Large for Global Women's Issues Kelley E. Currie, Ambassador at Large to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons John C. Richmond, and Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom Samuel D. Brownback. Notably absent is any mention of girls' education, which has proven linkages to delaying marriage and ensuring positive outcomes in a variety of dimensions. Similarly, any mention of intersectional identities and vulnerabilities that girls may face, including belonging to minority religious or ethnic groups, disability, or identifying as LGBTQIA+ are absent.



“With the exception of one statement in early February of 2020, the diplomacy outlined in this report all took place within a 16-day period in the last two months of the year.”

GAPS IDENTIFIED IN DIPLOMACY EFFORTS FROM 2020

With the exception of one statement in early February of 2020, the diplomacy outlined in this report all took place within a 16-day period in the last two months of the year, and focused on awareness raising and educational activities rather than bilateral discussions or engagement with UN bodies to promote legal and policy frameworks that empower girls and advance their rights. Based on this report, it appears that there were several missed opportunities throughout the year to engage in diplomatic efforts in Washington, at embassies across the world and in key policy-making fora including the UN Security Council, UN General Assembly, UN Human Rights Council, Commission on the Status of Women, and UN executive boards. COVID-19 was certainly a factor, as the pandemic disrupted previously planned activities and methodologies for carrying those activities out. However, as many activities shifted to virtual spaces, adolescent girls could have still played a role and do not seem to have been included in key moments, despite the disproportionate impact the pandemic itself had on this demographic.

Although this report does not mention the annual Human Rights Reports that the U.S. Department of State compiles, these reports have historically been utilized as a diplomatic tool for the U.S. government to encourage other countries to improve human rights outcomes. The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 mandates “a complete and full report regarding the status of internationally recognized human rights” for countries that are part of the United Nations or who receive U.S. foreign assistance, annually. Child marriage has been included as a human rights

abuse since 2012, when it was codified as a reporting requirement in the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act of 2013 (U.S.C, 2013). Beginning in 2018, the Trump administration announced that the reports would no longer include information about maternal mortality, access to contraception, and significantly shortened sections in the report related to gender, despite the overall report length remaining largely the same (Oxfam, 2017). Although the reports did include information on child marriage by country, it may be fair to extrapolate that this administration did not consider the Human Rights Reports to be a diplomatic tool to combat child, early, and forced marriage since those reports are not included in this analysis of their work on the subject.

Similarly, the report fails to mention sexual violence against adolescent girls even as a part of the section on GBV.

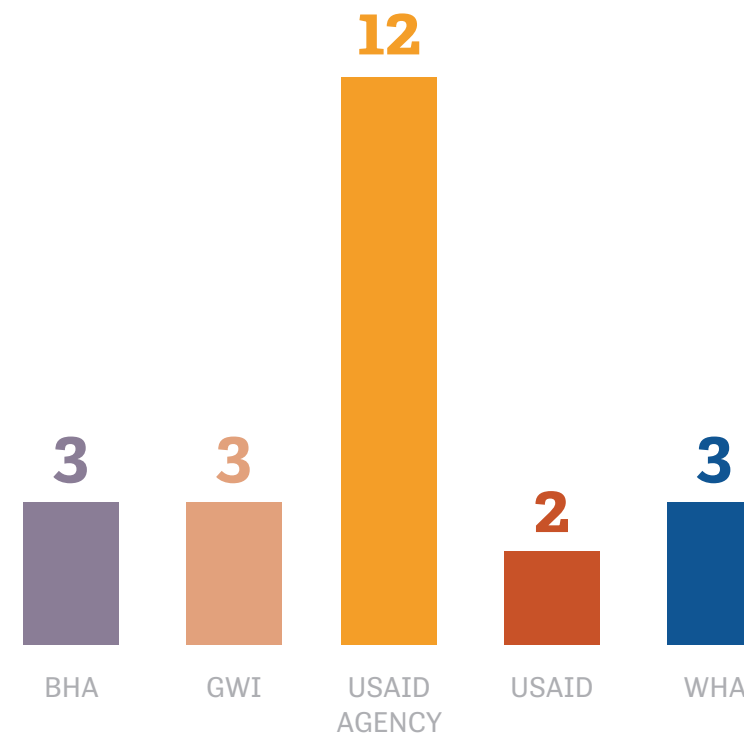
OVERVIEW OF PROGRAMMATIC AND STAFF TRAINING EFFORTS FROM 2020

The report for programmatic work completed in 2020 is divided into three issue areas: 1) CEFM; 2) GBV; and 3) supporting girls’ empowerment. According to this report, activities to combat the practice of child, early, and forced marriage took place in: Bangladesh, Dominican Republic, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Yemen, and the U.S. Mission in the African Union. Activities included new projects, enhanced global training materials and guidance for field staff, training for humanitarian partners, community mobilization, and life skills courses for both boys and girls in

communities where girls are at high risk for child, early and/or forced marriage. Efforts to train foreign service officers on gender issues were suspended in 2020 and the report does not highlight efforts to build capacity on gender within USAID or other agencies implementing the girl strategy.

The report includes a section on training for Department of State and USAID staff and notes that the course “Promoting Gender Equality to Advance Foreign Policy featuring modules on GBV, including training on forms of GBV against adolescent girls such as CEFM and FGM/C, was not offered in 2020 due to curriculum revisions and updates being undertaken by S/GWI but is expected to return in 2021.” According to this report, in 2020 the State Department trained 454 employees and USAID trained 71 staff members on issues related to gender and GBV, for a total of 525 people trained across both agencies. Although not included in this report, it is important to note that both USAID and State employ tens of thousands of people. The U.S. Department of State’s workforce includes some 13,000 members of the Foreign Service, 11,000 Civil Service employees, and 45,000 locally employed staff at more than 270 diplomatic missions worldwide (U.S. Department of State, 2023). As of 2020, USAID had approximately 11,000 people, including all employees, staff, and implementing partners, which includes non-governmental organizations and contractors, globally (Glick, 2020).

NUMBER OF PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES BY AGENCY OR BUREAU IN 2020



GAPS IDENTIFIED IN PROGRAMMATIC AND STAFF TRAINING EFFORTS FROM 2020

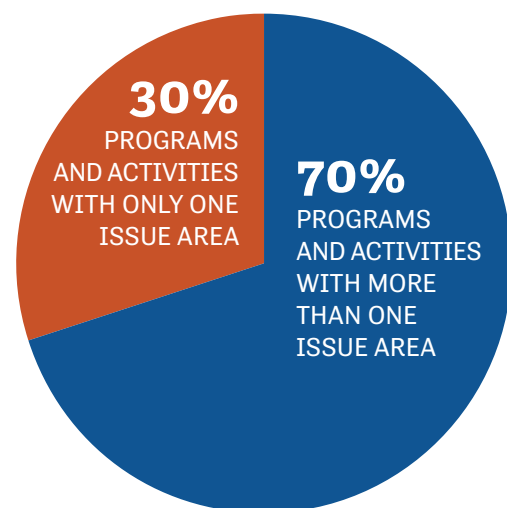
This report lacks consistency in reporting on the dollar amounts for programs and activities as well as the number of people reached through those programs and activities, making it impossible to extrapolate from the data the degree to which efforts to impact girls and young women are being prioritized.

It is worth noting that this optional training for foreign service officers (FSOs) is the only training they may have received on gender, so to discontinue it completely seems to indicate an intentional knowledge gap for FSOs on the part of the administration. In addition to discontinuing this course for an entire year, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted attendance for other trainings that were previously offered in-person or in a hybrid in-person/online manner. In a year where most work became remote, which afforded more people the opportunity to partake in virtual trainings, it is alarming to see access to this training was pulled completely. This report does not detail the total number of existing staff who have been trained on gender topics. Without knowing how many people are trained

annually, as well as how many people are already trained on gender and GBV topics, it is very hard to say whether those working for State and USAID have a baseline knowledge on gender equality and girls' empowerment. For decades, advocates have said that every USAID mission should have a gender advisor. The role of this technical expert on gender topics is to support country plan development, evidence-based programming including the design and implementation of strategies and programs that advance gender equality, and to broadly support USAID staff and implementing partners who may not be gender experts. This report does not articulate whether those mission-level positions have been filled and if legislative requirements such as the gender analysis for all USAID projects required in Public Law 115-428, the Women's Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment Act of 2018 (U.S.C., 2019), are being utilized in programming that targets or may benefit girls and young women.

A 2022 audit from the Office of the Inspector General at USAID "found in several instances that the Agency had a shortage of experienced, highly skilled personnel familiar with USAID guidelines, standards, and processes for both programming and support functions." The audit noted that USAID had struggled to spend the funding that Congress appropriated and hired just over half of their targets for civil and foreign service staff. According to that same report, "USAID's ability to meet and maintain sufficient staffing levels while addressing skill gaps impacts the overall effectiveness of the Agency, with potential consequences to its ability to align human capital resources with its evolving mission (Office of Inspector General, 2022). This severe lack of qualified staff most certainly had an impact on the quality of policies, strategies, and their implementation, as well as on programmatic and activity-level efforts to empower girls.

2021 U.S. GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS



OVERVIEW & HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2021

This report highlights actions taken in policy, diplomacy and through programs and activities to combat CEFM, FGM/C, and to empower girls and ensure equitable access to educational opportunities from January–December 2021. The report also includes a section on staff training at the Department of State and USAID on gender-related topics. Unlike the first year's report, this year also includes the topic of girls' education. The report is 12 pages long compared to the previous year's 7 pages.

Importantly, President Biden was inaugurated on January 20, 2021 (Baker, 2021). It has subsequently been reported that the previous administration, under President Trump, eschewed traditional transition planning processes and memos that leaders have followed for decades (Whipple, 2022), inclusive of directives from the White House not to share briefing books and office space with transition teams (Lisa Rein, 2020). These factors may have impacted the speed with which the new administration was able to articulate and implement policy directives. It is also worth noting that the first COVID-19 vaccine was approved for use in the United States in August 2021 (U.S. Food and Drug Administration, 2021), although it did not become widely available in the U.S. or abroad until the following year. The direct health impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic as well as the secondary impacts on health, education and other systems affected the implementation of policy and programmatic efforts in every sector.

On March 8, International Women's Day, the Biden

administration created the first-ever Gender Policy Council, via Executive Order (The White House, 2021). This new policy-making and coordination body at the White House is intended to address structural barriers to equitable participation in society and requires the co-chairs of the council to create a government-wide strategy to address gender in policies, programs and budgets, and an annual report to measure progress on implementing the strategy to be submitted to President Biden.

This is the first-ever national strategy on gender and will include both domestic and foreign policy priorities. The strategy will require consultation with civil society, state and local government officials, tribal nations, foreign governments and multilateral institutions. Although there was a White House Council on Women and Girls during the Obama administration established in March of 2009, this body was dismantled during the Trump administration (The White House, 2009) (Palmeri, 2017).

Adolescent girls from lower- and middle-income countries were not included in the initial promulgation of the GPC or consulted in the conceptualization of the strategy. Diverse groups of girls from the domestic sphere were consulted. The lack of coordination with girls from other countries whose perspectives may differ from U.S. voices does not seem aligned with the goals of the GPC to "regularly seek and reflect input from the people whom the strategy is directly intended to benefit" as the strategy claims to do.



“The report on efforts undertaken in calendar year 2021 begins by noting that adolescent girls were a focus for the Biden administration.”

OVERVIEW OF POLICY AND DIPLOMACY EFFORTS FROM 2021

The report on efforts undertaken in calendar year 2021 begins by noting that adolescent girls were a focus for the Biden administration, starting with the previously mentioned formation of the Gender Policy Council in March, and the move to develop the first-ever government-wide *National Action Plan to End GBV* and to update the *U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to GBV Globally* (Global GBV Strategy). Both, the report notes, will be “anchored by the National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality, [and] will provide a roadmap to guide the Biden-Harris Administration’s whole-of-government effort to empower women and girls.” In addition to these two policy directives, the report highlights the inclusion of adolescent girls’ issues in the *U.S. Strategy on International Basic Education*, *U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace and Security (WPS)*, and the *USAID Youth in Development Policy*, which they aimed to release in May 2022.

Unlike the previous year’s report, the report covering work in 2021 included updates on diplomatic efforts that included bilateral and multilateral diplomacy in addition to public diplomacy. This includes recognizing the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and the accompanying 16 Days of Activism Against GBV, which is similar to the previous year’s reports, but also goes on to include consultations with civil society, including two stand-alone consultations with girls and girl leaders on the GBV Strategy. In addition, the Department of State’s S/GWI signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with The Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum (ICYF), which they say will “advance USG priorities among this important demographic globally, including countering violent extremism; GBV in all its forms to include FGM/C, trafficking in persons, and CEFM; women’s economic security; and women, peace, and security (U.S. Department of State, 2022).” The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which took place in March 2021 and just two months after Biden was inaugurated as president, demonstrated the new administration’s clear articulation of girls’ issues. The U.S. was active in this United Nations space and did support the adoption of the Agreed Conclusions, that include a recommendation to increase references to LGBTQ individuals and uphold girls’ access to education (U.S. Mission to the United Nations, 2021). The two mentions of CSW in this report focused not only on the co-sponsorship of a resolution focused on girls, but note that the U.S. government successfully “negotiated the inclusion of text addressing the empowerment of adolescent girls as leaders and innovators in the context of climate, environmental, and disaster risk reduction policies and programs in the session’s Agreed Conclusions (U.S. Department of State, 2022).” It is a welcome change that the 2021 U.S. government report highlighted U.S. diplomatic efforts at CSW, which seem to strongly align with the policy goals articulated in the *U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls*.

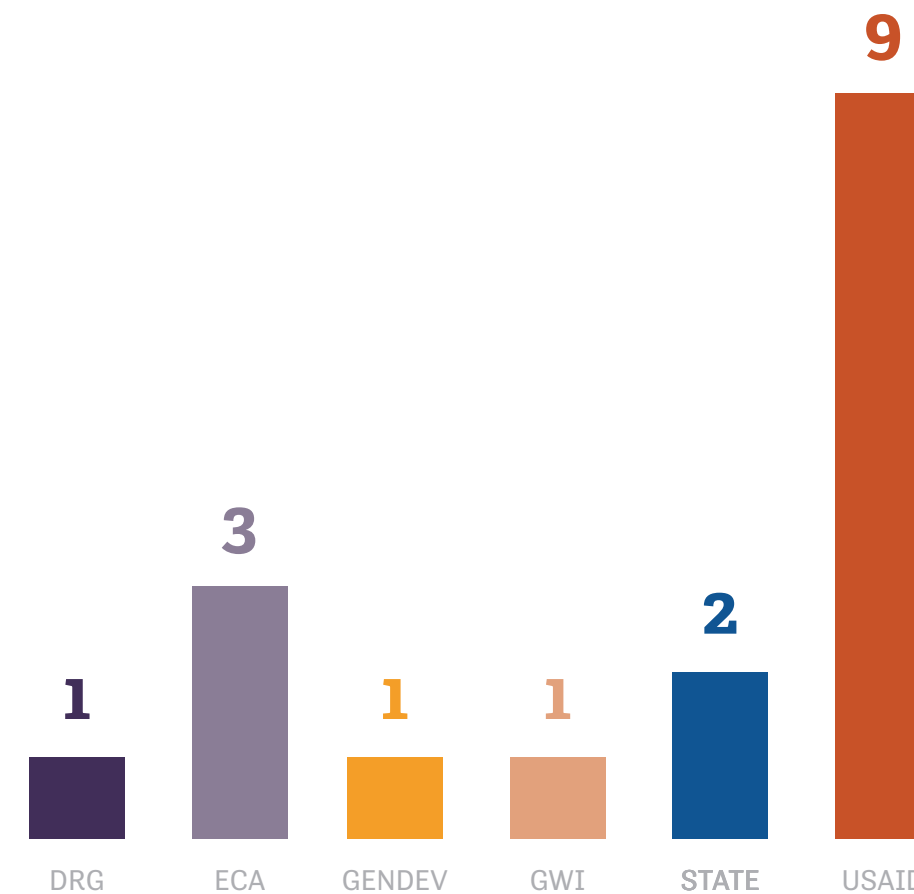
GAPS IDENTIFIED IN POLICY AND DIPLOMACY EFFORTS FROM 2021

The report on efforts undertaken this year in diplomacy and policy focuses on violence against women and girls. Notably absent is any mention of intersectional identities and vulnerabilities many girls face, including girls that identify as LGBTQIA+, girls from minority populations, or girls with disabilities. The State Department’s Human Rights Reports are again not mentioned, which may indicate that the Agency is no longer considering those reports to be a tool of diplomacy to encourage upholding the rights of girls globally. Although the title of this section does reference multilateral efforts, none are enumerated.

OVERVIEW OF PROGRAMMATIC AND STAFF TRAINING EFFORTS FROM 2021

The 2021 report notes programmatic efforts undertaken with the African Union and in: Bangladesh, Cambodia, Egypt, India, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Malawi, Mauritania, Nigeria, Uganda, Zambia, and through inter-cultural exchanges with Asian American and Pacific Islander American girls. In addition to these specific country-level efforts, the report notes a number of other global efforts aligned with the *U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls*. The 2021 report is explicit in its alignment with the objectives of the strategy and discusses specific efforts to address both the root causes and symptoms of gender inequality.

NUMBER OF PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES BY AGENCY OR BUREAU IN 2021





GAPS IDENTIFIED FOR PROGRAMMATIC AND STAFF TRAINING EFFORTS FROM 2021

The report notes the continued implementation of the DREAMS (Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored, and Safe) public-private partnership, which “provides a comprehensive, multi-sectoral package of core interventions to address key factors that make adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) particularly vulnerable to HIV. These include structural factors, such as GBV, exclusion from economic opportunities, and a lack of access to secondary school (U.S. Department of State, 2022).” Impressively, the report notes that “PEPFAR doubled its annual funding in support of DREAMS programs across 15 countries in FY 2021, bringing the total investment in support of the DREAMS goals to more than \$1.6 billion since 2014. Since 2015, new HIV diagnoses among AGYW have declined in all geographic areas implementing DREAMS, 96% of which have had a decline of greater than 25% and nearly two-thirds (62%) of which have declined by greater than 40%” (U.S. Department of State, 2022).

Of note is the inclusion of girls’ education and the acknowledgement that the lack of gender parity in educational enrollment and attainment must be addressed through sectors that include but also go beyond education itself. This includes training school leaders to prevent and respond to school-related GBV and to establish school clubs to empower girls. Another program in Haiti worked to ensure that clean drinking water and toilet facilities that are gender-segregated and wheelchair-accessible are available to students. These efforts highlight the ways in which the U.S. government understands that multisectoral work is critical to success. In Haiti, for example, they found that girls’ attendance in school was impacted not only by quality educational materials and trained teachers, but a WASH response to address the lack of access to

socially acceptable and physically accessible toilets to reduce stigma facing girls who are menstruating. Similarly, in Mali, USAID reported on a program that paid for school fees, uniforms, and latrines to increase girls’ retention and transition rates. Other programs highlighted increasing girls access to science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), including mentorship and exchange with experts in the U.S. (ECA’s TechWomen and TechGirls programs) and coding and robotics skills-building (ECA’s Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund in South Africa). The Girls’ Resilience, Enterprise, and Technology (SHE’s GREAT!) program that was highlighted in the 2020 report is highlighted again in 2021, noting this year that implementation occurs “in countries in Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Western Hemisphere” (U.S. Department of State, 2022). This year’s report covers issues as diverse as GBV, CEFM, FGM/C, girls’ education, STEM, climate change and climate adaptation, global health, including HIV/AIDS prevention and response, WASH, economic security, and the socialization of information to increase support of gender equitable norms and attitudes at individual, household, and community levels.

Both USAID and the Department of State note that they offer training to staff on gendered topics that include girls’ issues, including a specific training for U.S. diplomats that includes a module on CEFM and FGM/C. This course was delivered online and in-person and to FSI Area Studies for the Central Asia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka area study courses. USAID offered a stand-alone course titled “Preventing and Responding to GBV Across Sectors,” four times, and reported that they trained just under 100 employees.

Throughout the report to Congress on actions taken in the year 2021 to empower adolescent girls, data is presented inconsistently, and this is particularly true in the section on programs and activities funded by the U.S. government. The 2021 report includes actions taken by both State and USAID, and as with the 2020 report, omits any actions taken by MCC or Peace Corps. Information from some programs or activities include data on the number of girls who benefitted from U.S. funding and others list a dollar amount, while still others contain neither number of girls nor dollar amounts. This inconsistency makes it impossible to extrapolate the numbers of girls who benefitted, or the amount of money prioritized through U.S. foreign assistance to benefit girls with any certainty to a global level. Moreover, the language included makes it seem like the programs and activities described includes or may focus on older women and not adolescent girls.

In an attempt to learn more, the authors of this report attempted to look for external data sources. One of the programs listed, TechWomen, notes on its program website that eligibility is contingent upon the completion of a four-year university degree and a minimum of two years of full-time professional experience in STEM (U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, 2023). It is unlikely that the even the oldest adolescent—a 19-year-old girl—would have both a 4-year degree and 2-years of professional experience, so the inclusion of this program is either an error or an intentional effort to overstate the degree to which the administration focused on the empowerment of adolescent girls.

The training efforts outlined in this report are encouraging—especially the reinstatement of the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) course, “Promoting Gender Equality to Advance Foreign Policy,” which was alarmingly cancelled in 2020. Unfortunately, none of

the trainings mentioned in this report are mandatory, nor are they available to all staff. The FSI course, for example, is only available to diplomats, which leaves many at the Department of State and implementers whose work is funded by the Department of State without access to consistent training. As the audit from 2020 noted, sufficient staffing is an issue for USAID. Without a mandatory gender course for all staff—civil servants and foreign service officers—and mandatory refreshers on the material, it is likely that there are gaps in knowledge among key staff. As these trainings are optional, it is possible that staff who self-select into the courses are already committed to gender equity and that those who are not enrolling may have biases that impact the work they do and the populations they consider when designing policies and programs. Moreover, because these courses focus on gender broadly and not girls specifically, it is possible that staff working with children and adolescents may not be trained on the specific considerations that one should reflect on and implement when considering the intersecting vulnerabilities of age and gender. Also notably, the FSI course is integrated into Area Studies for Asian countries, but not for Africa, Latin America, or the Caribbean—all areas where CEFM and FGM/C are prevalent.

The 2021 report on staff training efforts for both the USAID and State failed to articulate what percentage of staff, contractors, and implementers had been trained on topics related to girls’ empowerment. Even if USAID had trained all of the more than 100 people hired in 2021 as a part of mandatory orientation, that would fail to ensure that a majority of USAID staff had this information. In fact, a 2022 audit noted that USAID alone employs 9,500 staff working in more than 100 countries and that more than 60% of USAID’s staff are based overseas (Office of Inspector General, 2022).

“Since 2015, new HIV diagnoses among adolescent girls and young women have declined in all geographic areas implementing DREAMS.”



OVERVIEW OF POLICY AND DIPLOMACY EFFORTS FROM 2022

In addition to the ongoing impacts of the pandemic, 2022 was a year that saw great global turmoil. The withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan was completed on August 30, 2021, which left the country under the control of the Taliban. In March 2022, girls were banned from attending school above sixth grade (Ahmadi & Ebadi, 2022). Ongoing conflicts continued in Ukraine, Ethiopia, Yemen, Sudan, Myanmar and beyond. The report for 2022 highlights efforts to increase access to educational materials for girls in Afghanistan via online mechanisms but fails to mention diplomacy or programmatic efforts to reach other areas where adolescent girls live amid conflict settings and social upheaval, such as Ukraine, Ethiopia, Yemen, Sudan or Myanmar.

This report includes a commitment from USAID to reach “15 million girls and young women across the education continuum with strengthened support for improved access to education and improved

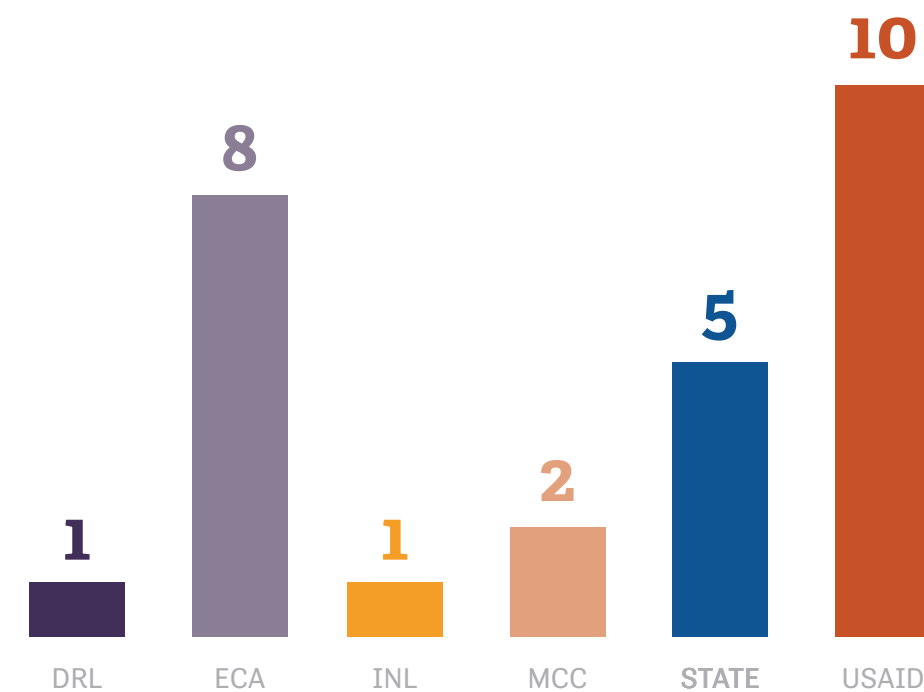
learning outcomes. This goal represents an increase of 3.4 million, or 23%, from those reached in FY 2020” (U.S. Department of State, 2023). Girls’ education was the first and arguably most important objective listed in the original U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls. The original strategy had a focus on girls’ education, including a well-funded initiative focused on girls’ education by the Obama Administration. Given the evidence on the importance of girls’ education for achieving a number of key positive outcomes for girls’ lives, this commitment has the potential to be instrumental in changing the lives of millions of girls, if it is achieved. Among other diplomatic and policy efforts spotlighted, the MCC country selection process uses metrics to determine eligibility for MCC assistance that include girls’ education as an incentive for girls within the country to remain in school, and an evaluation of laws including laws prohibiting child marriage. The State Department included a youth delegate in their

OVERVIEW & HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2022

For the first time, the report to Congress covering work completed in 2022 includes all four agencies with implementation plans in the original U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls: State, USAID, Peace Corps, and MCC. Moreover, the report is organized into efforts undertaken that align with the objectives from the *U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls*. There are several efforts that demonstrate continuity in programs and priorities across all three years of reporting, including programs like SHE’s GREAT!

Also for the first time, the 2022 Congressional report included information that maintained a focus on programs, activities, or diplomacy focused on populations other than adolescent girls. For the two previous years, data had to be excluded from analysis that focused on older demographics. There were several efforts included in the reports to Congress that were considered for exclusion, but which were ultimately taken into account in this analysis, such as the release of the *U.S. Strategy on Global Women’s Economic Security*. This report includes new issues, such as combatting drug use, mental health, and a greater number and variety of diplomatic, policy, programmatic and activity-level actions that benefit girls.

NUMBER OF PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES BY AGENCY OR BUREAU IN 2022





UN Commission on the Status of Women delegation to represent the voices of adolescent girls. This demonstration of uplifting girls' voices and centering their perspectives is to be commended.

In December, the Department of State appointed a new Special Envoy for Global Youth Issues, who will lead on diplomacy as a public representative on youth issues and consult with youth on the administration's foreign policy priorities and the formulation and implementation of policies and programs. Although this is a new position, it is encouraging to see the administration and State Department elevate youth in this way. The USAID Youth in Development Policy was also updated in 2022 and contains strong language and strategy for combatting gender inequality across the life-course.

This year's report is much more robust than prior years and includes efforts to strengthen legal and policy frameworks, to combat trafficking in persons, to combat drug use, to train staff in gender, GBV, and child safeguarding. The inclusion of MCC and Peace Corps brings to light efforts that agencies other than USAID and State are undertaking to include adolescent girls in their work and center their needs in policies, programs and activities. The report itself is 28 pages long, compared to 7 pages in 2020 and 12 pages in 2021. The length of the report alone may indicate a greater interest on behalf of those agencies to demonstrate the depth and breadth of the work they are doing with and for adolescent girls globally. The 2020 report listed 23 total programs and activities and the 2021 report listed 17 programs or activities. By contrast, the report covering 2022 lists 26 programs or activities. In addition, there is an increase in the number of agencies and/or bureaus listed for this work, and an increase in the number of diplomatic actions taken.

GAPS IDENTIFIED IN POLICY AND DIPLOMACY EFFORTS FROM 2022

Much of the current administration's efforts to address gender inequality focus on adults, and primarily women. It was not immediately clear how several of the policy and strategy updates included in this year's report were tied to adolescent girls specifically. Although the report was laid out to indicate how different objectives are being met by the four implementing agencies, the work still largely remains uncoordinated across those agencies. Greater inter- and intra-agency coordination was one of the objectives of the original strategy. Moreover, although Peace Corps was included in this report for the first time ever, their work appears just two times: once for their part in implementing the multi-agency programs PEPFAR and PEPFAR DREAMS, and a second time in an introductory paragraph stating that they share in the mission to empower adolescent girls. Under the original strategy, Peace Corps arguably had the largest role in implementation due to their leadership of the Let Girls Learn program under the Obama administration. For their

work to remain unreported on as a part of this strategy's implementation is disappointing, even if the Obama-era program no longer exists.

While there are some strong examples of diplomacy and policy with and for girls, the majority of the efforts outlined here seem like small-scale efforts or short-term activities that are part of broader programs, rather than a truly coordinated and girl-centered effort on behalf of the U.S. government. For example, the section in the report about the *U.S. Strategy on Global Women's Economic Security* notes that "The strategy envisions a world in which women and girls, in all their diversity, are able to fully, meaningfully, and equally contribute to, and benefit from, economic growth and global prosperity." While the strategy does mention girls, 78% of the mentions of girls are in the context of "women and girls," and research has demonstrated that women and adolescents have very different needs, face different challenges, and also have different opportunities. Girls should be considered in their uniqueness for efforts intended to benefit them, as it is invariably hard for girls, even married girls with children, to be included in efforts intended to reach adults. Even when included, these girls may not have the same experiences, resources, and abilities to be able to benefit from programs in the same way that adults would. Additionally, the metrics for success enumerated in the strategy do not include a single metric that is both sex and age disaggregated, or which would focus on those under 18. Most focus explicitly on the number of adults benefitting from programmatic work. Although commendable, strategies like the U.S. Strategy on Global Women's Economic Security need to be closely considered to determine whether they are a strong indicator of U.S. government focus on girls' empowerment or merely tangentially related to girls. Future strategies and strategy updates should intentionally address how girls will be included in efforts and which direct indicators and metrics will measure the success of that inclusion.

OVERVIEW OF PROGRAMMATIC AND STAFF TRAINING EFFORTS FROM 2022

Unlike previous reports, this report does contain concrete information about funding to address specific issues facing adolescent girls. For example, the report highlights that "The Department of State and USAID provided \$17.46 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 foreign assistance to address CEFM and an earmark of \$3-5 million annually to address FGM/C. The Department of State also contributes \$5 million annually to UNICEF through the International Organizations and Programs funding for the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme. Several other programmatic examples include the number of girls who were engaged in activities, and some even disaggregate between adolescent girls and women to demonstrate the degree to which girls were or were not a majority of program participants. Even more so than previous years, the programs

"Girls should be considered in their uniqueness for efforts intended to benefit them, as it is invariably hard for girls, even married girls with children, to be included in efforts intended to reach adults."





and activities outlined in the report covering 2022 highlight the ways in which the U.S. government is attempting to engage in community dialogues, and to address the root causes of issues facing girls, including activities like adding additional bathrooms to schools, paying for school uniforms, or having hard conversations about CEFM or FGM/C.

In 2022, the Department of State trained 60 diplomats on gender, featuring modules on GBV inclusive of CEFM and FGM/C. USAID trained 42 members of staff on GBV integration across sectors, and the Children in Adversity team at USAID held an unnamed number of webinars for an unnamed number of participants in four regions. MCC and Peace Corps do not detail any efforts to train their staff.

Programmatic efforts detailed in the report on work completed in 2022 are much more aligned with the *U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls* than previous reports. This was the first year that efforts to address Objective 5—Strengthen policy and legal frameworks and accountability—were included. MCC’s example of the new compact with Lesotho requiring the passage of four legal reforms and addresses the gap from previous years’ reporting.. One of the bills listed would specifically strengthen legal frameworks to address CEFM. Notably, this

was the first year that the overall percentage of programs and activities that addressed more than one sectoral issue dipped below 70%. Although the overall number of programs and activities rose in 2022, as a percentage, 76% in 2020 and 70% in 2021 included more than one issue area as their main area of focus. While it is true that the percentage of multisectoral programs is lower for 2022, there are also more programs than reported in years prior as well as an increase in reporting on programs in sectors that were previously not included in reports to Congress. It appears that the U.S. government is funding approaches that achieve objectives in a single sector like increased school attendance (education) by addressing the root causes of that issue such as decreasing child, early and forced marriage through improved access to health, legal, and workforce readiness services, via the Adolescent Girls’ Education Somalia (AGES) activity. These are welcome developments and seem to be happening across geographic regions and country contexts.

GAPS IDENTIFIED FOR PROGRAMMATIC AND STAFF TRAINING EFFORTS FROM 2022

The 2022 report fails to mention diplomacy or programmatic efforts to reach adolescent girls who live amid conflict settings and social upheaval, such as Ukraine, Ethiopia, Yemen, Sudan or Myanmar. Trainings listed in this report cover just over 100 diplomats and staff from State and USAID and list trainings specific to gender and GBV mainstreaming that is inclusive of but not specific to adolescent girls. Given that previous years have had headcounts in the thousands at both State and USAID, this number seems dramatically low, and the training options far too limited. Some staff may not need an annual refresher on introductory topics related to gender or GBV, but all staff should be trained on new policies and their implementation, such as the USAID Youth in Development Policy or the *U.S. Strategy on Global Women’s Economic Security*. Each of the new strategies listed in this report have complementary elements to the objectives of the *U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls* and should be well-known across the U.S. government to ensure their success.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2023 AND BEYOND

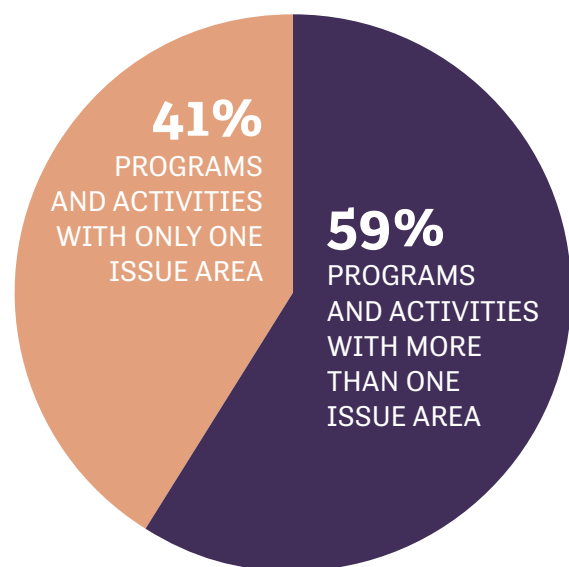
The *U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls* was the first-ever, of any government, strategy to address the multi-faceted needs of girls and the root causes of gender inequality that disempower them. The whole-of-government strategy includes implementation plans from USAID, the Department of State, Peace Corps, and the MCC. The strategy was launched late in the Obama administration and these implementation plans have never been transparently reported on across all agencies. The world has also changed greatly since 2016 due to changing administrations, the global COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing climate change concerns, and prolonged and increasing crises globally. Due to these factors, foreign policy goals and objectives have changed. Adolescent girls, however, remain an important demographic for achieving foreign policy goals and to ensuring national economic and security goals are reached.

It is clear that significant improvements were made in reporting year over year. The number of diplomatic activities, staff trainings, policies, programs and activities all increased year over year. Some of this can be attributed to COVID-19 related pauses in normal work, while others may be attributable to changes in administration and related policy and programmatic goals.

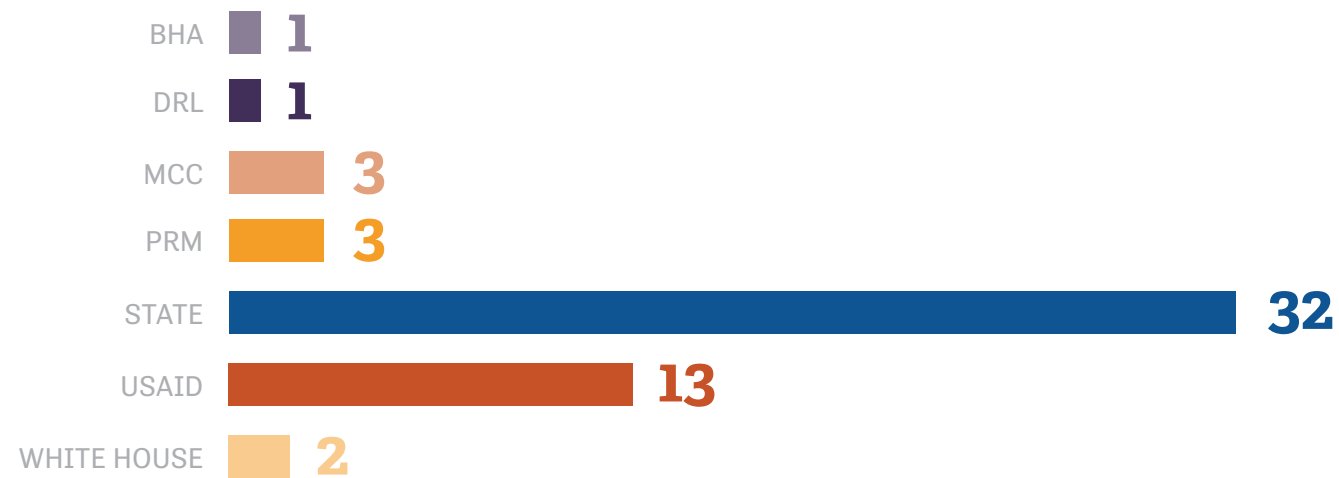
Despite the increase in details, activities, programs,

and diplomacy between 2020 and 2022, each of these Congressionally-mandated reports still fails to include any metrics on funding or reach. This lack of transparency means that no one knows the number of girls who were empowered through U.S. efforts or the amount of funding that was dedicated to these efforts. Perhaps most concerning, none of the three reports to date mention the interagency working group named in the original strategy whose aim was to coordinate amongst U.S. government actors, the National Security Council and civil society. The original strategy mentioned that it would be “reviewed regularly and updated as necessary to assess funding and respond to emerging challenges and opportunities” (U.S. Department of State, 2016). It is clear that strategy reviews and updates have not occurred despite major global changes since its creation. The current generation of young people is the largest in human history, and ensuring that they are healthy, educated, skilled and safe necessarily means measuring how and where the U.S. government is investing in them. After all, what gets measured matters, and it is apparent from the first three years of reports that girls are not measured and do not matter to the U.S. government to the degree that the *U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls* indicated they should. Specifically, we recommend that the U.S. Government:

2022 U.S. GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS



NUMBER OF DIPLOMATIC ACTIONS AND ACTIVITIES ACROSS ALL REPORT YEARS BY IMPLEMENTING AGENCY OR BUREAU



1 The President issue an executive order requiring the State Department, USAID, MCC, and Peace Corps to update their implementation plans for the *U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls*, with a requirement that these plans be linked to key goals and indicators outlined in other recently updated strategies such as the *U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to GBV Globally*, *U.S. Strategy on International Basic Education*, *U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace and Security (WPS)*, and the *USAID Youth in Development Policy*.

2 USAID and the Department of State collect and transparently report annually on their programmatic activities utilizing disaggregated data that includes information such as sex, age, marital status, motherhood status, and disability. This data should be accompanied by information on the amount of funding that goes towards programming specifically intended to support adolescent girls' empowerment.

3 Future Congressional reports on the implementation of the *U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls* include updates from MCC and Peace Corps and include funding levels

and age- and sex-disaggregated data wherever possible. These reports should also contain information on the number of girls reached through activities in alignment with USAID's definitions of youth programming, including programs or activities which are girl-focused, -led, or -relevant.

4 An increased number of consultations and a high-level list of recommendations garnered from those consultations with adolescent girls who are beneficiaries of U.S. government programs and activities on the ways in which U.S. foreign aid can be improved to better meet the needs of adolescent girls, and how the U.S. government is taking those recommendations into consideration.

5 Future Congressional Reports should also include greater detail on efforts undertaken at bilateral and multilateral levels of diplomacy and a more detailed breakdowns of allocations for girls' empowerment programs and activities globally.

6 Future public statements issued in support of International Day of the Girl Child on October 11th outline ways in which the U.S. government is working to empower girls around the world with specific statistics and programmatic examples.

METHODOLOGY

The data highlighted in this report comes directly from the reports submitted to Congress, covering calendar years 2020, 2021 and 2022. The reports were disaggregated by year, named thematic areas of focus, and further separated into programs and activities or commitments and diplomacy. Where programs and/or activities took place in multiple locations, each country was listed as a separate entry to ensure that each named effort was listed and included in data visualizations. Named issue areas included:

- Boys
- Child, early and forced marriage (CEFM)
- Civil society strengthening/Capacity building
- Climate change
- Conflict
- Female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C)
- Financial literacy
- Gender-based violence (GBV)
- Gender norms
- Girls' education
- HIV and AIDS
- Human trafficking
- Localization
- Mental health
- Nutrition
- School-based violence
- Sexual violence
- Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)
- Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM)
- Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

Any information from the reports that did not include girls was excluded from the analysis. For example, page 6 of the 2022 report highlights consultations with civil society in the U.S. and globally on the *U.S. Strategy on Global Women's Economic Security*. The strategy itself contains zero mentions of girls and



was thus excluded from this analysis. Similarly, the report covering 2020 mentions the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration's efforts to integrate gender and GBV considerations into humanitarian assistance programs and notes that girls are at an increased risk for GBV during conflict and crisis, but fails to articulate how and where the overall commitment to GBV integration specifically highlighted the unique needs of adolescent girls, how much programming or funding went to girls, or any other relevant data or information that would demonstrate that this commitment to GBV prevention and response actually reached girls and was thus excluded from this analysis.

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