

117TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. 1661

To support and expand civic engagement and political leadership of adolescent girls around the world, and other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MARCH 8, 2021

Mr. TRONE (for himself and Mrs. RODGERS of Washington) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs

A BILL

To support and expand civic engagement and political leadership of adolescent girls around the world, and other purposes.

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

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Girls Leadership, En-
5 gagement, Agency, and Development Act of 2021” or the
6 “Girls LEAD Act”.

7 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

8 Congress makes the following findings:

9 (1) Inclusive democracy and governance are
10 fundamental objectives and critical foundations for

1 sustainable development and global peace. Pro-
2 motion of democracy, human rights, and governance
3 is a reflection of fundamental American values and
4 identity.

5 (2) Democracies score consistently higher than
6 nondemocracies on a broad range of socioeconomic
7 development indicators, including infant and child
8 mortality, life expectancy, primary school enrollment,
9 adult literacy, female youth literacy, female sec-
10 ondary school enrollment, and access to clean water.

11 (3) Women's political participation results in
12 tangible gains for democracy, including greater re-
13 sponsiveness to citizen needs, increased cooperation
14 across party and ethnic lines, and more sustainable
15 peace, as emphasized in the Women, Peace, and Se-
16 curity Act (Public Law 115–68).

17 (4) Women in leadership positions are more
18 likely to resolve national crises without resorting to
19 violence, sustain peace agreements over longer peri-
20 ods of time, advocate for social issues that benefit
21 all, and allocate budgets to health and education.

22 (5) Despite comprising over 50 percent of the
23 world's population, women are underrepresented at
24 all levels of public sector decision making. At the

1 current rate of progress, it will take over 100 years
2 to achieve gender parity in political participation.

3 (6) Engaging adolescent girls more in civil and
4 political activities contributes to increased political
5 participation and women's leadership around the
6 world over time. Adolescents who participate actively
7 in their community from early on are more likely to
8 become engaged citizens and voters, with higher lev-
9 els of ambition for future leadership positions in
10 both politics and the private sector. Their safe,
11 meaningful, and appropriate participation is key to
12 creating democratic societies with informed and en-
13 gaged citizens.

14 (7) Adolescence is a critical period in a girl's
15 life, when significant physical, emotional, and social
16 changes shape her future. Adolescent girls are par-
17 ticularly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and other STDs
18 and STIs, child, early, and forced marriage, and
19 other forms of gender-based violence, including traf-
20 ficking in persons and sexual exploitation, harass-
21 ment, and assault, which are detrimental to their fu-
22 tures.

23 (8) School closures related to the COVID-19
24 pandemic have pushed nearly 743,000,000 girls
25 around the world out of school, on top of the ap-

1 proximately 132,000,000 girls between the ages of 6
2 and 17 already out of school.

3 (9) The economic impacts of the COVID–19
4 crisis are projected to put an additional 2,500,000
5 girls at risk of child marriage between 2020 and
6 2025, in addition to the 12,000,000 adolescent girls
7 under 18 who will marry annually. The number one
8 cause of death for adolescent girls 15 to 19 years old
9 is childbirth, and 90 percent of births to adolescent
10 girls 15 to 19 occur within a marriage.

11 (10) Every 10 minutes, somewhere in the
12 world, an adolescent girl dies as a result of violence.
13 A girl’s risk of dying as a result of violence increases
14 from early to late adolescence. Violence is the second
15 leading cause of death among adolescent girls glob-
16 ally. Girls with disabilities may face up to 10 times
17 more violence than girls without disabilities.

18 (11) Empowering adolescent girls and young
19 women in childhood and as they transition to become
20 adults, investing in their leadership potential, and
21 ensuring there are established pathways to positions
22 of political leadership and civic engagement con-
23 tribute to ensuring a world where women can thrive
24 as political leaders and decision makers, in economic
25 spaces and across society as a whole.

1 **SEC. 3. STATEMENT OF POLICY.**

2 It shall be the international development policy of the
3 United States to—

4 (1) promote and ensure that all adolescents
5 from the most marginalized populations, including
6 both girls and boys, are able to fully participate in
7 society, and are specifically able to exercise their
8 civil and political rights as agents of change in their
9 communities and countries;

10 (2) increase the capability of adolescents, par-
11 ticularly adolescent girls, in assuming leadership
12 roles, holding decision makers to account, and influ-
13 encing decision making at the household, commu-
14 nity, and societal levels;

15 (3) ensure meaningful engagement and con-
16 sultation with adolescents, particularly adolescent
17 girls, to ensure that United States foreign assistance
18 initiatives, including the planning, implementation,
19 and evaluation of projects, are effective and respon-
20 sive to this input with a focus on country and com-
21 munity ownership;

22 (4) ensure that consultation processes are
23 transparent, voluntary, inclusive, safe, respectful,
24 and responsive to structural barriers affecting ado-
25 lescent girls' meaningful engagement;

1 (5) actively work to decrease discrimination to-
2 wards, and the abuses of, the rights of adolescent
3 girls, particularly among the most vulnerable popu-
4 lations; and

5 (6) utilize evidence-based approaches and prac-
6 tices in developing such programs, including taking
7 into account the role of family, religious, and com-
8 munity leaders in creating supportive environments,
9 the identification of mentors and role models, and
10 the creation of safe spaces for adolescent girls.

11 **SEC. 4. STRATEGY TO ENCOURAGE THE CIVIC AND POLIT-**
12 **ICAL PARTICIPATION OF ADOLESCENT**
13 **GIRLS.**

14 (a) STRATEGY REQUIRED.—Not later than one year
15 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary
16 of State and the Administrator of the United States Agen-
17 cy for International Development shall jointly submit, sep-
18 arate from or as part of other public strategies, to the
19 appropriate congressional committees and make publicly
20 available a single strategy on strengthening the participa-
21 tion of adolescents, particularly adolescent girls, in democ-
22 racy, human rights, and governance. The strategy shall
23 include a detailed description of how each agency’s democ-
24 racy and governance center intends to fulfill the policy ob-
25 jectives set forth in section 3.

1 (b) ELEMENTS.—The strategy submitted under sub-
2 section (a) shall include the following elements:

3 (1) A specific implementation plan from each of
4 the relevant Federal agencies that describes—

5 (A) the anticipated contributions of the
6 agency, including technical, financial, and in-
7 kind contributions, to implement the strategy;
8 and

9 (B) the efforts of the agency to ensure
10 that the policies and initiatives carried out pur-
11 suant to the strategy are designed to achieve
12 maximum impact and long-term sustainability.

13 (2) Strategic objectives and activities, including
14 social accountability, research, and learning, to ad-
15 vance the leadership, civic, and political engagement
16 of adolescents, particularly adolescent girls, includ-
17 ing a description of how such efforts will advance
18 gender equality and reduce the distinct barriers that
19 adolescent girls and boys each face, including the
20 most marginalized adolescents, to their civic partici-
21 pation in existing structures, institutions, and the
22 broader enabling environment.

23 (3) Metrics, benchmarks, and a monitoring,
24 evaluation, and learning plan to ensure the account-

1 ability and effectiveness of all activities related to
2 the policy objectives set forth in section 3.

3 (4) An explanation of how such objectives and
4 activities will be aligned with existing United States
5 foreign assistance policies and strategies relevant to
6 promoting global gender equality and women's and
7 girls' empowerment.

8 (5) An explanation of how gender analysis has
9 informed the strategy and implementation plan, in-
10 cluding the strategic objectives and activities to ad-
11 vance the leadership, civic, and political engagement
12 of adolescents.

13 (6) Plans for consultations with civil society
14 that include girl-led and women's organizations and
15 other local civil society in partner countries, United
16 States civil society, and other stakeholders to inform
17 the development and implementation of the strategy,
18 the creation of metrics, and the monitoring and eval-
19 uation of program interventions.

20 (c) CONSULTATION.—The strategy required under
21 subsection (a) shall be developed in consultation with civil
22 society in the United States and affected foreign countries,
23 including adolescent girls.

1 **SEC. 5. IMPLEMENTATION OF FOREIGN ASSISTANCE**
2 **PROJECTS, PROGRAMS, AND ACTIVITIES.**

3 The Secretary of State and the Administrator of the
4 United States Agency for International Development shall
5 implement United States foreign assistance projects, pro-
6 grams, and activities designed to strengthen the participa-
7 tion of adolescents, particularly adolescent girls, in democ-
8 racy, human rights, and governance, including—

9 (1) increasing adolescent girls' civic and polit-
10 ical knowledge and foundational skills, advocacy,
11 confidence, leadership and research skills, leadership
12 opportunities, intergenerational mentorship opportu-
13 nities, data and media literacy, and supporting their
14 meaningful political participation and engagement in
15 civil society and the public sphere;

16 (2) addressing barriers to adolescent girls' and
17 women's civic engagement and political participation,
18 and integrating engagement of men and boys, fami-
19 lies, community leaders, religious leaders, schools,
20 political bodies, government bodies, and other stake-
21 holders to improve the enabling environment for ad-
22 olescent girls' civic and political participation;

23 (3) identifying and taking into account other
24 barriers to adolescent girls' civic and political en-
25 gagement, including child, early and forced mar-
26 riage, access to quality primary and secondary edu-

1 cation, unequal childcare responsibilities, gender-
2 based violence, early pregnancy and motherhood, ad-
3 olescent maternal mortality, mobility constraints,
4 malnourishment, displacement, lack of safe and reli-
5 able female sanitation and hygiene facilities, harmful
6 social norms, HIV infection, physical, communica-
7 tion, and attitudinal barriers faced by adolescent
8 girls with disabilities, and discrimination based on
9 religious or ethnic identity;

10 (4) integrating feedback from program partici-
11 pants into the monitoring, evaluation, and learning
12 processes of relevant United States departments or
13 agencies;

14 (5) supporting girl-led and girl-focused civil so-
15 ciety organizations with flexible, sustainable funding
16 and technical support;

17 (6) targeted efforts to increase work with part-
18 ner country governments, alongside local civil-society
19 organizations, and to build greater allyship among
20 men and boys for adolescent girls;

21 (7) ensuring age-appropriate and gender-sen-
22 sitive child-safeguarding provisions for all programs
23 that engage participants under the age of 18; and

24 (8) ensuring adolescents, particularly adolescent
25 girls, are provided opportunities and empowering en-

1 vironments so that they successfully enter adulthood
2 with skills which empower their leadership within
3 their communities or governments.

4 **SEC. 6. PRIORITIZATION OF SPENDING.**

5 The Secretary of State and the Administrator of the
6 United States Agency for International Development shall
7 prioritize foreign assistance funding made available for de-
8 mocracy, human rights, and governance programs in ac-
9 cordance with this Act.

10 **SEC. 7. ANNUAL REPORT.**

11 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than one year after the
12 date of the enactment of this Act, and annually thereafter,
13 the Secretary of State and the Administrator of the
14 United States Agency for International Development shall
15 jointly submit to the appropriate congressional committees
16 a report on progress made by relevant United States Gov-
17 ernment agencies towards increasing civic and political
18 participation of adolescent girls and boys around the
19 world, separate from or as part of other mandated public
20 reporting on efforts to advance gender equality and adoles-
21 cent girls' empowerment.

22 (b) ELEMENTS.—The report required under sub-
23 section (a) shall include the following elements:

24 (1) An estimate of the number of people
25 reached by all new United States Government-fund-

1 ed foreign assistance or development projects
2 disaggregated by age and sex.

3 (2) A description of how adolescent girls, par-
4 ticularly among the most vulnerable populations, are
5 integrated into existing democracy, human rights,
6 governance, and rule of law programming.

7 (3) The percentage of program participants
8 that are adolescent girls in all new democracy,
9 human rights, and governance programs focused on
10 issues, including civic engagement, political partici-
11 pation, advocacy, research, and leadership develop-
12 ment, the percentage of funds spent on those pro-
13 grams that focus on adolescent girls, and the coun-
14 tries in which those programs take place.

15 (4) The number of democracy, human rights,
16 and governance programs created to improve or that
17 otherwise support civic engagement, political partici-
18 pation, and leadership of adolescent girls, the
19 amount of funds spent on those programs, and the
20 countries in which those programs take place.

21 (c) PUBLIC AVAILABILITY.—The report required
22 under subsection (a) shall be posted and made available
23 on a text-based, searchable, and publicly available internet
24 website of the United States Agency for International De-
25 velopment.

1 **SEC. 8. DEFINITIONS.**

2 In this Act—

3 (1) the term “appropriate congressional com-
4 mittees” means—

5 (A) the Committee on Foreign Relations
6 and the Committee on Appropriations of the
7 Senate; and

8 (B) the Committee on Foreign Affairs and
9 the Committee on Appropriations of the House
10 of Representatives;

11 (2) the term “foreign assistance” has the mean-
12 ing given the term in section 634(b) of the Foreign
13 Assistance Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C. 2394(b)); and

14 (3) the term “gender analysis” has the meaning
15 given the term in section 3(a) of the Women’s En-
16 trepreneurship and Economic Empowerment Act of
17 2018 (Public Law 115–428).

○