



## **GBV Strategy Recommendations**

The Coalition to End Violence Against Women and Girls Globally welcomes the Biden Administration's [Executive Order on the Establishment of the White House Gender Policy](#) Council and commitment to prevent and respond to all forms of gender-based violence (GBV) globally. The diverse [members of our coalition](#) envision a world in which women, girls, and people of diverse gender identities can enjoy their human right to live free from violence. As the Biden Administration engages in a process of reviewing the [2016 U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally](#), we welcome further opportunities to consult and collaborate to inform and strengthen this global Strategy and the forthcoming whole-of-government Gender Equality Strategy. We offer the following recommendations and suggestions to build upon the foundations laid out in the 2016 Strategy<sup>1</sup> and welcome the opportunity to work directly on language and provide resources that address or fulfills these suggestions:

- **Maintain and Strengthen 2016 Definition of Gender-Based Violence (GBV):** The 2016 GBV Strategy made great strides by recognizing that GBV is an umbrella term for any harmful threat or act based on actual or perceived biological sex characteristics, gender identity and/or expression, sexual orientation, and/or lack of adherence to varying socially constructed norms around masculinity and femininity and that is rooted in structural gender inequalities, patriarchy, and power imbalances. As such, the Strategy should:
  - Maintain this definition and further clarify how violence against women and girls is a subset of GBV, but not an interchangeable term.
  - Include in the definition of GBV, an updated definition of harassment drawing on [ILO C90](#) (adopted in June 2019 with U.S. Government support)<sup>2</sup>
- **Align Strategy with International Standards on Human Rights:** The GBV Strategy should be situated within and reinforce international standards on human rights, centering the right to be free from gender-based violence. As such, the Strategy should:
  - Reaffirm the United States' commitment to the [Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women](#) (DEVAW) and recognize that the United States should ratify the [Convention on the Elimination of Violence Against Women](#) (CEDAW)

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<sup>1</sup>This document is a product of the feedback from a wide group of global gender equality experts, and the positions do not necessarily represent the views of all coalition members.

<sup>2</sup> Violence and harassment directed at persons because of their sex or gender or affecting persons of a particular sex or gender disproportionately and includes sexual harassment where violence and harassment is defined as "a range of unacceptable behaviors and practices, or threats thereof, whether a single occurrence or repeated, that aim at, result in, or are likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm and includes gender-based violence and harassment."

- Prioritize GBV in multilateral and bilateral diplomacy by outlining objectives, structures, and resources that build the capacity of USG personnel to promote GBV prevention and response in their diplomatic engagements
  - Ensure that international organizations and nongovernmental organizations receiving funding from the United States have the capacity and internal protocols, policies, and programs, to prevent and address gender-based violence, and report regularly on efforts to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse committed by humanitarian personnel.
- **Link and Elevate GBV Prevention in Other USG Engagement and Strategies:** Ending GBV requires coordinated action across agencies and policies, working to reinforce and enhance U.S. efforts to address this issue. The Strategy must reflect and ensure coherence within the USG and as such align with already complementary strategies/policies that can both help inform and be informed by the Strategy.<sup>3</sup> As such, the Strategy should:
  - Call for the implementation of other existing USG strategies, and those slated to be updated, to more strongly include GBV analysis, commitments, and programming.
  - Identify risks of, and strategies to prevent increased incidences of GBV caused by development and diplomatic efforts
  - Develop and standardize accountability mechanisms to ensure nondiscrimination and do no harm in USG efforts.
- **Operationalize Gender Mainstreaming:** The work of ending GBV must be built in not as a side endeavor but prioritized across the U.S. Government policy and strategies. Gender mainstreaming allows for consistent and robust commitments to build internal structures that ensure policy and programming to end GBV is effective. As such, the Strategy should:
  - Focus on effective, evidence-based implementation and strengthening of the gender infrastructure, resources, and accountability mechanisms and process.
  - Strengthen training and expertise of current staff and increase staffing as needed to adequately integrate GBV prevention, risk mitigation, and response into programs and humanitarian response,
  - Integrate gender into procurement guidance.
  - Within integrated programming, ensure that M&E systems are set up to track GBV outcomes in addition to sectoral outcomes (e.g. measuring GBV risk mitigation within WEE programming);
  - Maintain a holistic approach to gender equality by supporting cross-sectoral efforts and affirming the indivisible nature of different aspects of the lives of women, girls, and others marginalized due to their gender identity and/or expression.
- **Increase Funding for GBV Programs:** GBV interventions are vastly underfunded despite the need for multiyear, comprehensive, and flexible programs to prevent and respond to GBV. As such, the Strategy should:
  - Increase resources for program and actions that address GBV as a primary objective as well as programs that integrate GBV prevention/response into other areas, particularly climate change and displacement, decent work, migration, and procurement;

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<sup>3</sup> Such policies and strategies include: [WPS Strategy](#), [USAID Gender Policy](#), [Adolescent Girls Strategy](#), [WEE/GEEA](#), [Central America policy](#), [asylum rules](#), the [APCAA strategy](#), [PEPFAR/DREAMS Initiative](#), [Human Trafficking](#), and [Ending Child Marriage](#).

- Direct that OMB, USAID, State, DOD, DFC, MCC, and other agencies include in their Congressional Budget Justifications funding for specialized gender offices and staff acting as GBV focal points across departments and agencies;
  - Work with OMB to ensure the President's Budget Request for FY23 is at least [\\$380 million](#);
  - Adapt grant processes and requirements that facilitate direct funding for local/community-based responses to GBV, with a focus on women-led organizations, women's rights organizations, girl-led groups, and other networks led by those impacted by GBV local countries;
  
- **Strengthen Victim/Survivor-centered Approaches:** The Strategy should seek to empower victims/survivors of violence by prioritizing their agency, rights, needs, and wishes. As such, the strategy should:
  - Ensure that victims/survivors are included and are actively informing the development of policies, processes, and supported to lead their implementation
  - Work with agencies to invest in training and awareness-raising efforts, reporting and investigation policies and systems, and accountability structures that center the needs and wishes of victims/survivors that are trauma-informed
  - Advance policies and direct agencies and institutions to assess and strengthen appropriate, safe, accessible, and quality services that will not further re-victimize those seeking the services.
  
- **Apply a Whole of Community Approach:** GBV prevention and response programming must be inclusive of all stakeholders and varying levels. Preventing and responding to GBV must be situated within a socio-ecological model that includes impacted communities, traditionally marginalized groups, schools, workplaces, communities of faith, public authorities, law enforcement, social service providers, institutions, and others. As such, the Strategy should:
  - Prioritize holistic solutions that reach across multiple sectors and stakeholders in addressing the root causes of violence, and promote community support, participation and engagement for solutions.
  - Ensure an inclusive approach to partnerships across a wide-range of stakeholders including unions and workers' rights organizations, locally-led women's organizations, women's rights organizations, LGBTQI+ rights organizations, environmental, humanitarian, indigenous and girl-led groups.
  
- **Enhance Primary Prevention Efforts and Strategies:** Approaches to GBV prevention and response must survey, adapt, and implement [global evidenced-based best practices](#). Efforts such as addressing childhood exposure to violence and school based interventions to educate young people around gender norms and violence are examples of proven and critical prevention strategies and have high returns on investment. Evidence shows that programs that apply a gender transformative lens with deep community engagement to shift power imbalances and address rigid social norms have long term impacts that address the root drivers of violence. As such, the Strategy should:
  - Enhance the focus on community-based solutions that work with multiple stakeholders, including men and boys as partners and community leaders/gatekeepers

- Support early-intervention programs that focus on children and youth to address and break the cycles of violence
  - Integrate a specific focus across USG policies and programming to address discriminatory social and gender norms, particularly as those norms drive or exacerbate GBV (i.e. economic insecurity)
  - Integrate gender transformative, rights based approaches into USG responses, going beyond simply addressing symptoms of gender inequality to working to dismantle the norms.
  - Expand grants to allow for longer project cycles to address critical gender and social norms that require multiyear investments to show impact.
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- **Improve Data- and Evidence-based Approaches:** USG programs and policies on GBV must be rooted in approaches with proven impact, using data and evidence-based approaches as basis for decision-making and resourcing. As such, the Strategy should:
    - Improve efforts to collect and analyze data that is disaggregated by sex- and age, (including specific tracking of violence experienced by children and elderly women) in development and humanitarian contexts, at a minimum, and as appropriate collect data by disability status, race, migratory status, religion, and gender-responsive data metrics.
    - Increase funding for research efforts that enhance understandings of the implicit and explicit drivers of violence and “what works” to prevent GBV, including integrating resources for impact evaluations of existing interventions.
    - Collect data around GBV prevalence and mitigation in cross-sectoral themes including, in the world of work, education, sexual and reproductive health, community-based interventions, infrastructure and climate mitigation, and others.
    - Advance research and learning initiatives that improve data collection and learning in GBV programming.
    - Require that all data collection efforts be intersectional and focused on expanding the research and evidence base to find solutions to prevent GBV using participatory and trauma-informed methods.
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- **Apply an Intersectional Gender and Power Lens:** GBV is experienced in combination with and exacerbated by other forms of structural inequality and discrimination. Prevention and response requires a deeper examination of how these different forms of power inequalities is critical to developing long term, contextualized, sustainable and impactful redress for GBV. As such, the Strategy should:
    - Mandate and include resources for gender and power analysis across agencies as part of named operating and/or administrative expenses;
    - Ensure that a gender analysis and the engagement of impacted people, including women and girls, informs each stage of the cycle and include, the drivers of violence, power differentials and hierarchies;
    - Ensure that any gender analysis and resulting policies, strategies and programming are locally-informed, locally-owned and locally-driven and that experts are fairly compensated for their expertise.
    - Create a focused effort to address power differentials and gender inequality, which are the root causes of GBV.

- **Prioritize Underserved Populations:** The current strategy recognizes that some populations, like women and girls, experience GBV disproportionately; however, it fails to adequately highlight the vulnerability and high levels of GBV that LGBTQI+ people, women and girls with disabilities, internally displaced, migrant, disaster-affected and Indigenous women and girls experience. As such, the Strategy should:
  - Ensure explicit mention and focus on traditionally underserved populations, and those disproportionately impacted by GBV, including but not limited to LGBTQI+ people, women and girls with disabilities, and Indigenous women and girls.
  - Ensure that policies and protocols do not exclusively serve cis-gendered women and girls.
  - Ensure prioritization of programming that addresses comprehensive and accessible support/services and that is responsive to age and disability
  - Ensure that all GBV programming and measures take into account the specific historical and cultural realities of Indigenous women; including data gathering, analysis and reporting methods which take into account Indigenous status.
  - Actively engage impacted populations in decision-making and the design and implementation of interventions, including climate-affected and displaced communities.
- **Integrate a lifecycle approach to Ending GBV:** While violence affects women and girls of all ages, the changing nature of their relationships and environments across the lifespan exposes them to differing forms of violence, which need focused attention. Gender- and age- barriers intersect to create specific GBV risks depending on their age and phase of life. As such, the Strategy should:
  - Ensure foreign assistance programs take a lifecycle approach to understanding the specific actions needed to advance gender equality and women's and girls' rights across their lifespan by applying a gender and age lens across all U.S. foreign policy and assistance.
- **Address Impacts of GBV in Emergencies** - Women and girls in emergencies disproportionately experience GBV and regularly lack services or support such as appropriate health care and psychosocial support, shelter, and safe spaces. As such, the Strategy should:
  - Incorporate IASC and RTAP guidelines, leaving room for development and adoption of new standards, protocols, and accountability mechanisms, including for preventing gender-based exploitation by humanitarian personnel;
  - Integrate newer approaches to addressing GBV in emergencies, such as the use of cash and voucher assistance as a protection mechanism for survivors or those at risk.
  - Improve mechanisms to identify and mitigate GBV risk within humanitarian responses, DRR, climate adaptation and resilience building
  - Strengthen GBV referral pathways to ensure GBV survivors receive a comprehensive package of support.
  - Improve training for providers of international development assistance during the onset and subsequent phases of a humanitarian crisis, so that such providers are equipped to continue gender-informed relief, recovery, and reconstruction work
  - Strengthen programming and response to ensure the inclusion of women and girls with disabilities, as they are disproportionately at risk during humanitarian emergencies.
- **Uphold Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights:** In order to address GBV, it is imperative that the Strategy recognize that many forms of GBV, including sexual violence,

harassment and intimate partner violence, are often violations of bodily autonomy and may lead to negative sexual and reproductive health outcomes. This includes a recognition of reproductive coercion as a form of violence. As such, the Strategy should:

- Ensure the provision of quality and timely comprehensive reproductive health services, including post-exposure prophylaxis for HIV and other STI's, emergency contraception and reproductive health services (to the full extent allowable under the law).
- Promote age-appropriate comprehensive sexuality education, for both those in and out of school that informs people of their sexual and reproductive rights and builds an understanding of consent and healthy relationships.
- Explicitly mention and define reproductive coercion within the parameters of activities that constitute violations. Coercive activities include, but are not limited to: use of incentives or disincentives to lower or raise fertility; use of incentives or targets for uptake of specific contraceptive methods; withholding of information on reproductive health options; forced sterilization; forced abortion; and forced pregnancy.

- **Improve Women’s Economic Empowerment by Addressing GBV:** Before women can achieve economic advancement, GBV and its drivers must be addressed – from discriminatory social norms to weak and poor implementation of laws to poor collection of data. GBV prevents women from maintaining their livelihoods, accessing education which leads to limited future income, and allows for fewer economic opportunities when sexual harassment is prevalent in the workplace without accountability. Economic strain at home can also lead to negative coping strategies that increase the risk for GBV, including sex for survival, sexual exploitation, and child marriage. As such, the GBV strategy should:
  - Conduct and integrate an intersectional gender analysis and address GBV in U.S. government programs and policies, including COVID response and economic recovery plans. All intersectional gender analyses should be assessed for “do no harm” principles, including by addressing men’s social norms around money and work.
  - Ensure accountability in the workplace, including by incorporating core tenets of International Labor Organization Convention 190 and 189 into trade and international assistance programming, strategies, policies, and action plans and raise them through all relevant diplomatic channels.
  - Ensure that U.S. efforts to advance women’s economic empowerment incorporate measures to address GBV as a key barrier to WEE and as a critical component of establishing an enabling environment.
  - Explicitly address accountability for sexual harassment and assault in school settings through USG programs and policies that aim to address women’s economic empowerment.
- **Apply a GBV and Climate Change Lens:** As the climate crisis compounds and exacerbates GBV, the imperative to support integrated, holistic, gender-just solutions cannot be overstated. GBV cannot end in a world without climate justice. As such, the Strategy should:
  - Call to appoint a [national gender and climate lead](#) to ensure principles of intersectional gender justice are considered and applied in all climate action, including gender focal point within the UNFCCC;
  - Protect environmental and human rights defenders, as [GBV is a tool wielded](#) to intimidate and threaten those organizing for the health of their communities and the planet.
  - Prioritize [direct access to funds for gender-just climate solutions](#), particularly for women’s organizations, gender-related groups, and women at the grassroots level.