



Girls Leadership, Engagement, Agency, and Development Act (Girls LEAD Act) (H.R. 1661/ S. 634)

The Problem: Globally, the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have pushed nearly 743 million girls out of school, on top of the approximately 132,000,000 adolescent girls between the age of 6 and 17 who are already not enrolled in school. In addition, the secondary consequences of COVID-19 are projected to put an additional 2.5 million girls at risk of child marriage between 2020 and 2025, in addition to the 12,000,000 adolescent girls under 18 who will marry annually.

Moreover, women are largely underrepresented at all levels of public sector decision-making despite comprising more than 50% of the world's population. At the current rate, it will take more than 100 years to achieve gender parity in political participation. Promoting adolescent girls and women's education and pathway to political leadership will decrease the likelihood of child marriages, violence against women and promote the creation and maintenance of democratic societies.

- Only 24.5% of all national parliamentarians are women leaders.
- **Women's political participation promotes democracy** by providing greater responsiveness to citizen needs and cooperation between party and ethnic lines.
- Research indicates that including women in the early stages of peace negotiations **decreases corruption, enhances stability and promotes higher living standards** in sectors like education and healthcare.
- For **each year of continued secondary education**, the likelihood of marrying before the age of 18 among adolescent girls will decrease by 5%.

The Solution: The bipartisan Girls LEAD Act will implement the following measures to **increase adolescent girls' participation in democracy, human rights and governance** in the following ways:

- Establish a specific implementation plan to **identify and address barriers to girls' and women's civil engagement and political participation** in U.S. foreign assistance initiatives.
- Support **girl-led and girl-focused civil society organizations** with funding and technical assistance.
- Ensure that all foreign programs **engage participants under the age of 18**, and integrate metrics, benchmarks and monitoring capabilities to ensure accountability and effectiveness.

Endorsing Organizations: The following NGOs have endorsed this legislation - *ChildFund International, Save the Children, National Association Social Workers, International Action Network for Gender Equity & Law (IANGEL), Kakenya's Dream, Church World Service, Futures Without Violence, Global Campaign for Education – US, The Hunger Project, and The Borgen Project.*

Supporters: The Girls LEAD Act was introduced by Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME) in the Senate alongside Sen. Ben Cardin (D-MD). Other original bill sponsors include Sen. Dan Sullivan (R-AK) and Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-MD). The companion bill was also introduced by Rep. David Trone (MD-06) and Cathy McMorris Rodgers (WA-05) in the House.