

Investing in Girls Builds a Stronger Future

Building a More Inclusive Future Starts in Childhood

Every child deserves to grow up healthy, educated and safe – with an equal chance to reach their potential. But gender inequalities, starting in childhood, are limiting the lifelong potential of children around the world, and are disproportionately affecting girls.

From the moment they're born, girls and boys face unequal expectations and access to resources and opportunities, with lifelong consequences – in their homes, schools and communities. A girl is more likely to be denied health care, kept out of school, forced to marry and subjected to violence – her voice undervalued or unheard.

When girls are empowered to lead their own lives, speak their minds and determine their futures, everyone benefits. Gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment are intricately linked to healthy democracies, sustainable development and global stability. The inclusion of girls' voices has a huge impact in how their concerns and experiences are integrated into the policies that affect them. Supporting girls' participation in civic and political spaces is key to ensuring resilient and sustainable communities.

Girls who participate actively in their community from early on are more likely to become engaged citizens and voters, with higher levels of ambition for future leadership positions in both politics and business. Their safe, meaningful and appropriate participation is key to creating democratic societies with informed and engaged citizens.

Addressing the Gap in Girls' Civic Participation

Girls have a fundamental right to be heard in the decisions that impact their lives. And girls can be an essential contribution to civic and political discussions at every level – from local schoolboards to national-level policy-making.

Yet, around the world, girls continue to be excluded from decisions affecting them – their needs invisible and their voices unheard. Women and girls still face barriers to participating in government and political spaces – from gender-based violence to harmful norms around how women and girls should look and behave in public spaces. At the current rate of progress, it will take more than **95 years to achieve gender parity** in political participation.

By the Numbers: Girls' Dreams Denied

- Approximately **132 million girls** between the age of 6 and 17 are out of school.
- Girls are two times more likely than boys to never set foot in a classroom.
- Despite global progress, **12 million** adolescent girls under 18 will marry annually.
- Globally, every 10 minutes, an adolescent girl dies as a result of violence.
- Women make up more than 50 percent of the world's population but are underrepresented at *all* levels of government around the world. At the current rate of progress, it will take more than **95 years** to achieve gender parity in political participation.

The Girls Leadership, Engagement, Agency and Development (LEAD) Act

The Girls LEAD Act (S. 2766) is bipartisan legislation that recognizes and promotes girls' civic and political leadership as a priority for U.S. foreign assistance efforts – particularly those focused on building strong and inclusive democracies across the globe.

Specifically, the Girls LEAD Act would:

1. **Improve U.S. strategies** by directing the Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to create a joint strategy to strengthen the participation of adolescent girls in democracy, human rights and governance.
2. **Strengthen programing** by directing the Department of State and USAID to implement programming designed to strengthen the civic and political participation of girls and to prioritize funding for these programs.
3. **Require annual reporting** to ensure progress on the new policy and strategy.

How You Can Help

Urge your members of Congress to cosponsor this critical legislation so more girls can achieve their dreams. Visit

[SavetheChildrenActionNetwork.org/Girls](https://www.savethechildren.org/Girls) to take action today!

What Does Girls' Participation Look Like?



Anxhela and Cecilia participated in the Bridge the Gap for Girls Walk in Brooklyn, NY in 2019.

Anxhela, a Save the Children Girl Champion from Albania, is 17 and passionate about ensuring that girls can get an education and speak up for their rights. At the age of 13, she joined a child-led group that advocates for children's issues, which has allowed her to develop her communication, self-confidence and teamwork skills. She and her peers successfully lobbied the Parliament of Albania to appoint the first ever Commissioner of Child Rights Protection and Promotion Section.

Anxhela's dream is to complete her education and become an advocate for children and girls.

Cecilia, a Save the Children Girl Champion from Malawi, is 16 and advocates on education and health issues so that girls in her community can reach their full potential. At a Day of the African Child event in 2018, she recited a poem she wrote calling for keeping girls in school through support of school infrastructure and the elimination of harmful cultural practices. Cecilia engages with her peers to encourage young girls who dropped out of school due to adolescent pregnancy or child marriage to return to school.

Cecilia's dream is to become a doctor.