

# Unfunded and Unsafe: How US Aid Cuts Are Threatening Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response in Humanitarian Crises

## GBV Sector Funding at a Crossroads

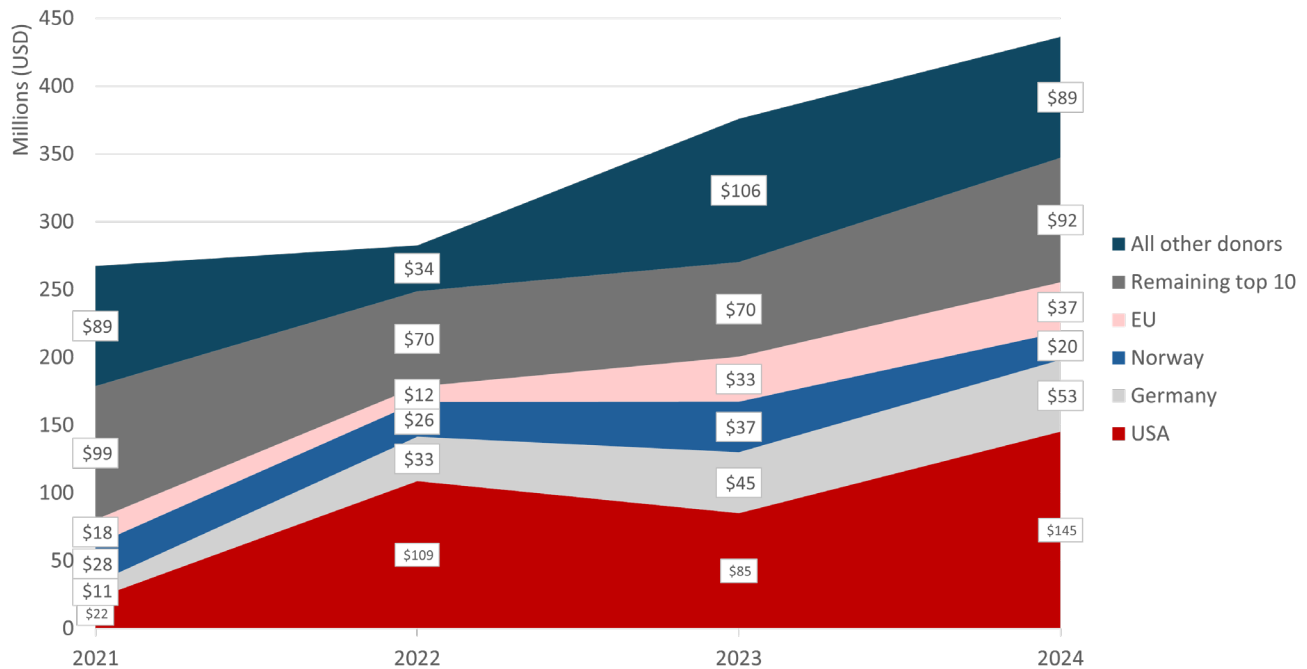
The recent abrupt termination of foreign assistance funding by the United States has underscored the tenuous and unpredictable nature of the humanitarian landscape. These actions have severe consequences for conflict- and displacement-affected communities and risk undermining global progress in safeguarding the rights and protection of women and girls.<sup>1</sup> **The Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) is undertaking an analysis of how US foreign aid cuts and policy changes disproportionately impact women and girls;** the humanitarian funding dynamic is a critical piece of this puzzle.

The humanitarian system has long been dependent on a small group of donors—most notably the US, which contributed 43 percent of all public humanitarian funding in 2023.<sup>2</sup> The gender-based violence (GBV) sector is no exception. **The US has historically been the single largest donor for the GBV sector,** creating a fragile foundation for programs and services that are already underfunded and often deprioritized. The GBV sector's reliance on the US for funding offers a clear example of how recent actions are particularly detrimental for women and girls.

GBV is a pervasive and life-threatening issue in humanitarian settings. Conflict, displacement, and the breakdown of protective systems exacerbate risks of violence, particularly for women and girls. Over 60 million forcibly displaced women and girls currently face heightened risks of GBV, with studies indicating that approximately one in five have experienced sexual violence in certain complex emergency settings.<sup>3</sup> The United Nations recently reported a 50 percent increase in conflict-related sexual violence in recent years, with women and girls comprising 95 percent of confirmed survivors.<sup>4</sup>

Needs are increasing, yet GBV funding remains critically insufficient. Since tracking of GBV sector funding began in 2021, US contributions have accounted for over one-quarter of total funding, increasing from US\$22 million in 2021 to \$145.1 million in 2024 (see Figure 1). **At approximately \$361 million over five years, US funding for the GBV sector has been greater than the next top three donors (Germany, Norway, and the EU) combined.** The GBV sector's reliance on the US for funding increased dramatically from 2021 to 2024, and governments such as Canada, Japan, and Australia, which were top GBV sector donors in 2021, lagged behind by 2024. These trends track with donor support for gender equality more broadly. For example, UK foreign aid for gender equality was nearly halved between 2019 and 2022.<sup>5</sup>

**Figure 1: GBV Sector Funding by Donor, 2021–2024**



Data from UN-OCHA Financial Tracking Service (FTS)

Some countries are more vulnerable to the historical reliance on US funding for GBV prevention and response. **In 2024, eight countries had over 80 percent of their tracked GBV funding come from the US:** Ecuador, Zimbabwe, Peru, Jordan, Brazil, Iraq, Madagascar, and Pakistan (see Table 1, page 3).<sup>6</sup> Women and girls in these countries, and others with high dependence on the US for funding, continue to face elevated risks and complex needs for GBV prevention and response. Some of the world’s largest humanitarian crises— Yemen, Mali, Nigeria, Venezuela—have historically received over half of their GBV funding from the US.

With only \$160.6 million secured so far, **the GBV sector is currently facing 92.7 percent unmet need.** While this gap is not entirely due to the US withdrawal of foreign aid, a preliminary analysis of terminated USAID and State Department grants reveals that **nearly \$400 million in funding for GBV programming or services has been terminated since January 2025.** Only two awards that explicitly address GBV in humanitarian settings have been retained, while the supposed “Emergency Humanitarian Waiver” issued by the US is explicit about NOT including any awards related to gender.<sup>7</sup>

**Table 1: Dependency on US funding for GBV sector by country (highest to lowest), 2024**

Extremely dependent US = 90-100%	Highly dependent US = 50-90%	Less dependent US = < 50%	
Dominican Republic Aruba Mexico Costa Rica Chile	Madagascar Panama El Salvador Peru Egypt Ecuador Honduras Nigeria Argentina Guatemala Malawi Zimbabwe Turkey Venezuela Guayana South Sudan Syria	Sudan Chad Pakistan Iraq Cameroon Mozambique Haiti Niger Colombia Yemen Libya CAR Afghanistan Burkina Faso Brazil	Ethiopia Burundi Somalia Palestine Ukraine Myanmar DRC Mali Jordan Bangladesh Hungary Lebanon Kenya Uganda Moldova

*Data from UN-OCHA FTS*

## Deeper Threats to Gender-Responsive Humanitarian Action.

While the humanitarian sector is grappling with the rapid withdrawal of funding across all sectors, women- and girl-serving organizations are undoubtedly bearing the brunt of the impact. A survey recently conducted by OCHA found that **76 percent of organizations with terminated US funding reported reducing lifesaving assistance specifically for women and girls.**<sup>8</sup> A survey of women-led organizations (WLOs) in humanitarian settings conducted by UN Women reveals that half may shut down within six months due to global aid cuts.<sup>9</sup> Closure of these organizations would not only limit the availability of services and programs for women and girls, but also threatens to diminish the inclusion of women's voices in humanitarian action.

Examining GBV funding tracked through OCHA's Financial Tracking Service (FTS) and terminated USAID awards offers only a partial view. US government support for the unique needs of women and girls goes far beyond what is captured in humanitarian funding databases or awards explicitly mentioning GBV. USAID, the State Department, and other federal agencies have also historically funded critical research, local and women-led organizations, and sexual and reproductive health services that contribute to GBV prevention and response. **The withdrawal of US funding reverses decades of progress and sends a dangerous signal that the US—and possibly other donors—see the rights and safety of women and girls as negotiable.** At a time when displacement is at record highs and conflicts are escalating globally, cutting GBV funding undermines the entire humanitarian response and abandons those who are already among the most at risk.

## The Way Forward

The current funding situation calls for concerted efforts to ensure that the gains made in protecting women and girls in the last decades do not backslide. As WRC and our peer organizations embark in this unprecedented era, we invite our partners, allies, donors and the broader humanitarian community to join us and stand firm in our shared commitments:

- 1. GBV prevention and response are lifesaving.** The humanitarian community must not allow US policy decisions to impact humanitarian commitments. Should there be a restructuring of GBV coordination mechanisms, GBV programming and services are at an even greater risk of becoming underfunded and deprioritized. We must stand strong and advocate for dedicated funding of core GBV services, including mechanisms for coordination, monitoring, and oversight.
- 2. This is not simply a US or government donor issue.** GBV prevention and response have always been critically underfunded. Other government donors are also backsliding and are likely to follow trends. This is a moment for our community of practice to advocate strongly for private philanthropists and foundations to step up and fill the gap in funding. Vast sums of money that have been pledged by wealthy donors are sitting in private foundations' investment accounts, while women and girls are being denied lifesaving care.
- 3. Strategize on doing differently with less.** While we call on donors to take action, we must do more than simply ask for more money. While we continue to urge donors to act, we also have a responsibility to be strategic. We call on our community of practice to bring forward and elevate the strongest evidence of what works best in preventing and responding to GBV in humanitarian settings.
- 4. We need to completely rewire our thinking as we rebuild the humanitarian system.** This is an opportunity for a reset, but it requires a complete rethinking of how we fund GBV prevention and response. **This is a moment for international organizations to step back to make space for those who should be making the decisions: local WLOs.** At the same time, as funding cuts have dramatically impacted WLOs, international organizations have a responsibility to provide support as much as is needed, through evidence generation, resource generation, global advocacy, and any other support WLOs may ask of us.
- 5. Monitoring harms will allow us to effectively mitigate them.** Without evidence on how aid cuts and policy changes impact women and girls, we risk backsliding even further. It is critical to document harms, not only to avoid repeating history in the future, but also to come up with actionable solutions.

To ensure accountability to women and girls, WRC is launching a deeper investigation into how current and proposed US policy and funding shifts are harming displaced women and girls. In the coming months, we will publish further analyses focused on:

- Implications for the “humanitarian reset”
- Impact on the availability of life-saving services for women and girls in Central America, Sudan, Honduras, Democratic Republic of Congo, and Gaza

- Loss of funding for women-led and community-based organizations
- Erosion of gender expertise within the humanitarian sector
- Risks of erasure of evidence, tools, and guidance for gender-transformative humanitarian action

## Conclusion

The erosion of support for GBV prevention and response is not just a fiscal issue; it is a political signal with far-reaching implications. At a time when the risks to women and girls in crisis settings are escalating, the costs of inaction are already being felt in shuttered services, silenced voices, and lives at risk. We must adapt boldly to ensure that women and girls remain at the center of humanitarian response. For displaced women and girls, this is not just a matter of policy—it is a matter of safety, dignity, and survival.

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This brief was written by Julianne Deitch, associate director, research,

For further information, contact Julianne Deitch, [JulianneD@wrcommission.org](mailto:JulianneD@wrcommission.org).

### Women's Refugee Commission

The Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) improves the lives and protects the rights of women, children, youth, and other people who are often overlooked, undervalued, and underserved in humanitarian responses to crises and displacement. We work in partnership with displaced communities to research their needs, identify solutions, and advocate for gender-transformative and sustained improvement in humanitarian, development, and displacement policy and practice. Since our founding in 1989, we have been a leading expert on the needs of refugee women, children, and youth and the policies that can protect and empower them. [womensrefugeecommission.org](http://womensrefugeecommission.org).

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## Endnotes

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