

# POLICY BRIEF

How can communities be empowered to steer sustained compliance to protection of Adolescent Girls against Gender Based Violence (GBV)? Guide to Action



Female learners in Dufile Primary School located in Moyo reading a poster encouraging them to value their education



Female learners reading their notes during their break time at Pagirinya Secondary School located in Adjumani

## BACKGROUND

Adolescent girls are prone to risks of gender-based violence in refugee settings given the intersectionality of gender, age, living arrangements and the numerous risk factors posed in emergencies. Despite their vulnerability, the current child protection and gender-based violence prevention policies do not cater for the needs of adolescent girls. This sub-population is at risk and in the commemoration of 16 days of activism, Windle International Uganda (WIU) and partners present a guide to action with lessons drawn from the AGENCI project in Uganda.

Adolescent Girls' Education in Crisis Initiative (AGENCI) is a consortium project being implemented by Windle International Uganda (WIU) in partnership with the World University Service of Canada (WUSC) and the Aga Khan Foundation Canada (AKFC). The project is implemented in Uganda, South Sudan, and Syria funded by Global Affairs Canada (GAC).

## WHAT DOES EVIDENCE SAY ON ADOLESCENTS GIRLS AND GBV?

1. Adolescent girls are at an increased risk of sexual violence, abuse, exploitation, and forced or early marriage across humanitarian contexts. [1]
2. In some areas affected by conflict, adolescent girls and young women are perceived as responsible for their own safety and considered as burdens and threats to family honor should they become victims of violence or pregnant prior to marriage, according to a new study. [2]
3. One systematic review found that approximately one in five refugees or displaced women in complex humanitarian settings experienced sexual violence, though this is likely an underestimation of the true prevalence given the many barriers to survivors' disclosure of GBV. [3]
4. Successful efforts to prevent gender-based violence in humanitarian settings must address a wide range of issues, from discriminatory laws to explicit community support for violence, and yet, at the core of these efforts is reducing oppressive gender and social norms. [4]

[1] [HTTPS://PUBMED.NCBI.NLM.NIH.GOV/29334024/](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29334024/)

[2] [HTTPS://WWW.SCIENCEDAILY.COM/RELEASES/2018/03/180301103712.HTM](https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/03/180301103712.htm)

[3] [HTTPS://CONFLICTANDHEALTH.BIOMEDCENTRAL.COM/ARTICLES/10.1186/S13031-019-0189-X](https://conflictandhealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s13031-019-0189-x)

[4] [HTTPS://WWW.SCIENCEDIRECT.COM/SCIENCE/ARTICLE/ABS/PII/S2352464220302455](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S2352464220302455)

## WHAT HAS BEEN DONE?

In the past few years, prominent initiatives, organizations, and working groups have started to highlight the targeted needs and issues facing adolescent girls and have developed programmatic responses such as safe spaces for adolescent girls to protect and empower girls and reduce their vulnerabilities to violence or exploitation. And it is from this backdrop that AGENCI project sources its goal to enhance the empowerment of adolescent girls and female youth pursuing educational pathways in crisis-affected areas.

Through AGENCI project adolescent girls are consequently, empowered to attain their full potential. Resilience is built through in and out of school life skills interventions and empowerment program like Work Based Learning (WBL), and achieving quality education and skills to have successful lives. This project has not only focused on the adolescent girls, but their social networks are empowered to improve protection of the sub-population. This has been achieved through strategic community partnerships, Social Behavioral Change Communication – murals for advocacy, and inclusive Life Skills curricula have been designed to effect change. These approaches have increased awareness on adolescent girls' protection and several positive changes towards protection are foreseen where WIU and partners will be learning and sharing lessons.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMANITARIAN PRACTITIONERS AND POLICY MAKERS – INFORMED BY LEARNINGS FROM THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AGENCI PROJECT.

1. As an immediate solution, Adolescent girls that are out of school in refugee and host communities should be provided with unconditional cash grants, to support their entrepreneurial ventures and reduce on their victimization caused by lack of Finances.
2. There is need to address underlying barriers to compliance to protection guidelines. Awareness and/or SBCC cannot be a stand-alone intervention as root causes are more complex and multi-sectoral in nature.
3. Like AGENCI, leverage the support of local leaders: - LCs, religious, cultural leaders, and local structures such as Refugee Welfare Committees (RWCs), Water User Committees (WUCs), and Village Health Teams (VHTs) to increase local acceptance of the GBV preventive measures. Train and equip them in basic GBV prevention and mitigation and their roles.
4. Revitalize behavior change communication to refugee and host communities, with emphasis on taking individual responsibility to prevent increase of GBV and mitigate its effects.
5. Avail, support and allow for livelihood interventions for adolescent girls and other vulnerable communities to combat Gender Based Violence (GBV).

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