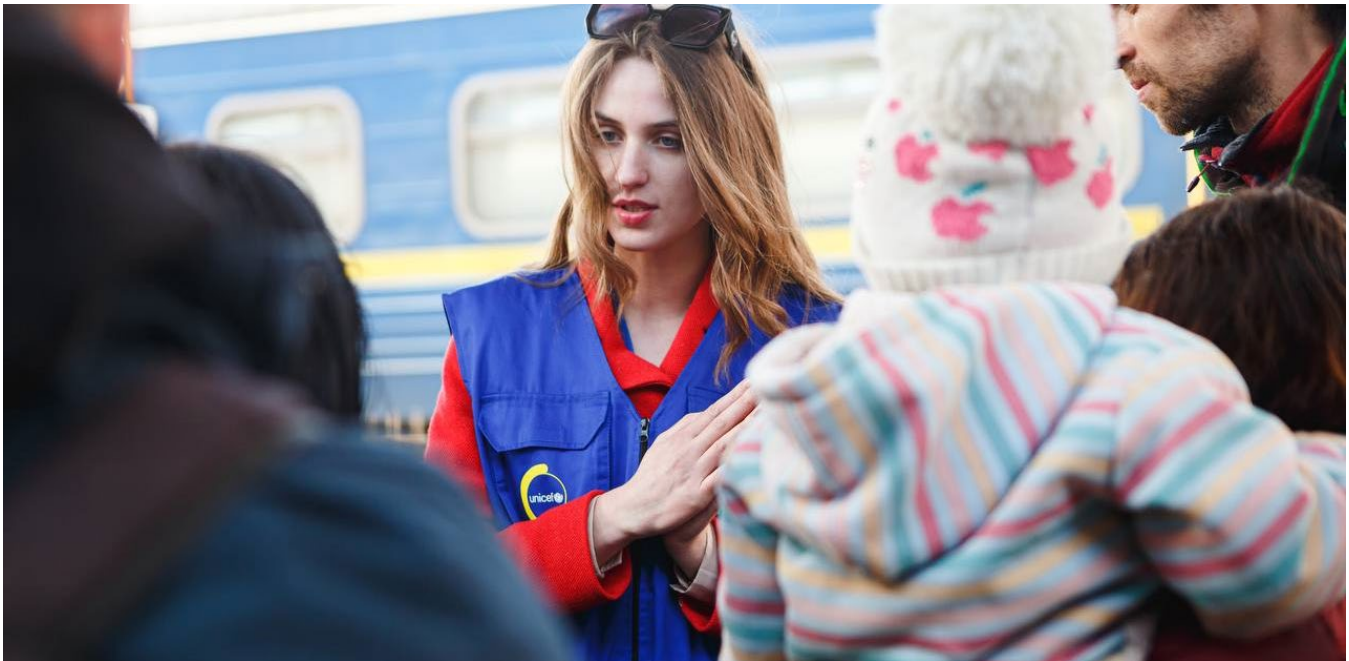


BUREAU FOR HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE



Protection

OVERVIEW

USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (USAID/BHA) addresses and responds to protection needs that arise during humanitarian crises, and seeks to prevent, mitigate, and respond to violence, exploitation, and abuse of affected populations, prioritizing the most vulnerable.

Life-threatening protection violations—including child abuse, forced or child marriage, intentional targeting of civilians during fighting, forced recruitment into armed groups, intimate partner violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), and widespread psychological distress—often increase during humanitarian crises. USAID/BHA supports child protection; gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response; housing, land, and property rights; and psychosocial support (PSS), working through partners to bolster social services, protective environments, and community-led efforts to support those most at risk of abuse, exploitation, and violence.

USAID/BHA Protection
Funding in FY 2022

\$372,071,162

At the global level, USAID/BHA technical specialists work to solve new and persistent challenges with innovative technical approaches and tools to improve emergency protection services. In FY 2022, USAID/BHA nongovernmental organization (NGO) and UN partners supported more than 220 protection programs in more than 40 countries and helped global programming address technical and coordination gaps worldwide.

Scaling Up Protection Support to Conflict-Affected Populations in Ukraine

Women and girls fleeing violence disproportionately face GBV-related risks—including human trafficking and SEA—within conflict-affected countries and after crossing borders. Affected populations often experience widespread distress, grief, and risk of other abuse or harm, as displacement frequently results in the loss of family and community safety networks.

In collaboration with the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (State/PRM), USAID/BHA has committed to address GBV and other protection needs at the onset of and throughout any disaster through the Safe from the Start ReVIsioned initiative. USAID/BHA demonstrated this commitment following the Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, deploying protection advisors to Rzeszów, Poland, as part of USAID’s Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART). The protection advisors guided the DART to support a system-wide scale-up of protection services and coordination, including social work and PSS services, as well as safe spaces and transit for vulnerable groups such as children; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex people; older people; persons with disabilities; and women. With USAID/BHA’s significant investment in protection funding, humanitarian actors strengthened Ukraine’s existing capacity in emergency social work for children, GBV response and prevention interventions, trafficking risk mitigation and response efforts, and safety planning for those most at risk of protection violations. Additionally, USAID/BHA partners established and worked through community safe spaces, counseling service providers, peer support groups, and professionally staffed hotlines across Ukraine.

USAID/BHA’s protection advisors also identified innovative approaches to support local organizations, recognizing the unique expertise of Ukrainian responders. In FY 2022, USAID/BHA provided its first contribution to the UN Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF), a pooled funding mechanism that supports local women-led organizations in crisis-affected environments. In Ukraine, organizations receiving WPHF funding provided GBV prevention and response services, such as reinforcing women’s peer networks and providing community focal points with tools for immediate survivor support and procedures to help individuals safely access professional health, legal, and PSS services. USAID/BHA’s WPHF investment also helped women-led organizations address access or information barriers that prevented women, girls, and other groups at risk of violence from accessing life-saving assistance.

Reinforcing Protection Standards Amid Escalating Conflict in Burkina Faso

In situations of acute food insecurity and prolonged conflict, women and girls often face an increased risk of forced marriage, violence in the home, or survival sex in exchange for food or other resources. Children are more likely to drop out of school and be forced into marriage; they also face higher risks of abandonment, physical and sexual abuse, and trafficking. Additionally, men and boys face the threat of forced recruitment into armed groups, and women experience increased risk of abuse and exploitation, often while seeking resources to meet basic household needs. Providing life-saving protection services is especially challenging in areas where ongoing conflict restricts relief actors’ access to vulnerable populations.

In FY 2022, communities in Burkina Faso continued to face an increased risk of abuse, exploitation, and violence resulting from food insecurity, limited access to basic services, and insecurity. In response to heightened protection risks, USAID/BHA deployed a protection advisor to Burkina Faso to meet with USAID/BHA staff and humanitarian partners, as well as other donor organizations and key humanitarian clusters—the coordinating bodies for humanitarian activities, comprising UN agencies, NGOs, and other stakeholders—to strengthen USAID/BHA’s protection response and support relief actors’ ability to scale up protection services in the

country. The protection advisor emphasized the need for increased child protection, GBV interventions, and PSS services to meet acute protection needs amid ongoing hostilities, encouraging the Protection Cluster and related sub-clusters to identify strategic priorities and develop guidance for protection actors operating in the country. USAID/BHA programming also helped reinforce global protection best practices, specifically focusing on community-based protection activities complemented by awareness raising, capacity building, and monitoring mechanisms. For example, the USAID/BHA protection advisor worked with humanitarian partners to increase protection services alongside robust monitoring activities to strengthen program effectiveness and quality. In collaboration with USAID/BHA staff in Burkina Faso and one international NGO protection partner, USAID/BHA expanded GBV response services in the country with a focus on mobile and static safe spaces for women and girls.

Developing Guiding Principles on Mental Health Support for GBV Survivors

GBV has serious short- and long-term impacts on survivors' physical and mental health. While the humanitarian community previously maintained robust emergency mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) approaches, there was a gap in nuanced, community-driven MHPSS for GBV survivors. In FY 2022, USAID/BHA supported the Global Women's Institute at George Washington University to address critical knowledge gaps and build consensus on safe and effective MHPSS for GBV survivors and those at risk of GBV, building on existing best practices and the experience of local women's organizations operating across the globe. With USAID/BHA funding, the Global Women's Institute engaged international MHPSS and GBV specialists at the local, regional, and global level to identify areas of agreement, as well as discuss challenging topics with the goal of strengthening accountable and effective humanitarian action. Through this collaboration, the Global Women's Institute helped protection actors develop shared guiding principles and recommendations to improve MHPSS interventions for GBV survivors.

Strengthening MHPSS Interventions Through Global Training

In FY 2022, USAID/BHA partner the UN World Health Organization (WHO) supported MHPSS preparedness and risk reduction, particularly in areas prone to natural hazards. Distress, grief, anxiety, and sadness are widespread among any population living through a crisis. USAID/BHA recognized the need to build MHPSS preparedness into emergency planning, enabling humanitarian actors to respond to the scale and intensity of these needs when a disaster strikes. With USAID/BHA funding, WHO brought together MHPSS experts and disaster risk management (DRM) actors to identify where and how MHPSS should be integrated into DRM approaches. Together, they developed a MHPSS training package and toolkit specifically for DRM actors, which includes a five-day training course focused on solving recurring challenges to MHPSS preparedness. In addition, the UN agency designed an innovative, two-day simulation exercise to strengthen collaboration between humanitarian actors and jointly integrate MHPSS into DRM and preparedness planning. During the global MHPSS training course in 2022, humanitarian actors shared technical guidance and methods to help promote mental health and psychosocial well-being prior to an emergency, as well as reduce risks that contribute to the development of mental health challenges during a disaster.

More information on USAID/BHA sectors can be found at [usaid.gov/humanitarian-assistance/what-we-do/humanitarian-sectors](https://www.usaid.gov/humanitarian-assistance/what-we-do/humanitarian-sectors)