




Strategic Recommendations to Improve Accountability for Gender-based Violence (GBV) in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)

LAC faces alarmingly high rates of GBV and impunity among perpetrators, as highlighted by LACLEARN’s [GBV Impunity Regional Study](#) (2021-2024) herein. GBV impunity further intersects with United States Government foreign assistance, diplomatic, and security priorities, in line with the [2022 U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to GBV Globally](#). Considering these trends, this brief provides survivor-centered recommendations for state actors to improve GBV accountability across LAC. Eight country reports linked further below provide additional insights for Colombia, Dominican Republic (DR), El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, and Peru.


WHAT IS GBV IMPUNITY?

GBV: GBV is defined as any harmful threat or act directed at an individual or group based on actual or perceived sex, gender, gender identity or expression, sex characteristics, sexual orientation, and/or lack of adherence to varying socially constructed norms around masculinity and femininity.



- U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to GBV Globally (2022)

GBV includes cases of sexual, physical, emotional, economic, political, and cultural violence. The [United Nations \(UN\) Women Global Database on Violence Against Women \(VAW\)](#) highlights relatively high, unabated rates of VAW in LAC. Over two-thirds of cisgender women in countries such as El Salvador and Mexico experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetimes. Due to their unequal status in society, GBV disproportionately affects women, girls, and other marginalized populations including Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex (LGBTQI+), Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and migrant individuals. Further, GBV thrives in contexts of gender inequality, corruption, and impunity; the UN estimates approximately 98 percent of VAW in LAC goes unpunished each year.



GBV Impunity: GBV survivors who participated in the LACLEARN study defined impunity as being "ignored" and/or "revictimized" after they survive GBV, including by state institutions that fail to uphold their basic human rights. Survivors described often facing discrimination, neglect, and retraumatization when seeking law enforcement protection, healthcare, or judicial services. Many perpetrators remain unsentenced judicially and unsanctioned socially, leaving survivors without adequate protection or justice.

Entrenched GBV impunity undermines household and community stability, public safety, and health, as well as democracy, human rights, and governance more broadly. Further, impunity persists in the absence of sustained state investment to strengthen GBV responses and accountability at the institutional level. These trends underscore the urgent need for increased investment in comprehensive, locally-led, and inclusive solutions, as outlined further below.



GBV AND IMPUNITY IN LAC: AT A GLANCE

Key trends in GBV and impunity are highlighted below at the country level. Altogether, evidence highlights the varied threats that GBV and impunity pose to household, community, and broader well-being, safety, and stability. Striking statistics reflect the harmful effects of GBV and impunity

on survivors and society, thereby placing the onus on states to take strategic action towards survivor-centered solutions to GBV impunity.

Northern Central America and Mexico



GBV rates in northern Central American countries are among the world's highest, according to sources such as the Economic Commission for LAC (ECLAC) and the UN Women Global Database on VAW. Local civil society organization (CSO) reporting suggests that **marginalized populations (e.g., LGBTQI+, Indigenous, Afro-descendant) suffer alarming rates of violence compared to overall figures.**

El Salvador: Exclusionary gender norms combined with increased human rights violations have perpetuated femicide and transfemicide, while transgender women face disproportionate risk.

- An estimated two-thirds of cisgender women aged 15 or older have experienced at least one form of violence in their lifetime, per the UN Women Global Database on VAW.
- Among over 600 documented killings of LGBTQI+ individuals over 1992-2020, only three cases were prosecuted, according to local CSO *Comcavis Trans*.

Guatemala: Reports from CSOs demonstrate alarming rates of transfemicide, murders of gay men, cases of torture, illegal or arbitrary detentions, and sexual violence targeting LGBTQI+ people.

- According to a 2020 *Visible* study, 62 percent of transgender and 35 percent of LGBTQI+ survey respondents reported surviving multiple forms of GBV.
- About one in five cisgender women aged 15-49 experienced physical violence in 2015, per the UN Women Global Database on VAW.

Honduras: Transgender and Garifuna women are disproportionately affected by GBV, as perpetuated by intersecting structural inequalities. Moreover, Garifuna women as environmental and land rights defenders, and transgender women as LGBTQI+ defenders, face discrimination and intimidation.

- Local CSO *Catrachas* documented 373 violent deaths among LGBTQI+ people between 2009-2020, of which 111 were transfemicides.
- In 2020, Honduras reported the highest rate of femicide in the region according to the Gender Equality Observatory for LAC. In addition, the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights in Honduras estimated that between 2006-2020, 90 percent of violent deaths of women remain unresolved.

Mexico: High levels of GBV persist, particularly for femicide and transfemicide. CSO reporting suggests that transgender women are the most affected group within the LGBTQI+ community. Reporting, investigations, and convictions for femicide (among other forms of GBV) remain low.

- Since 2018, an average of 10 women are killed daily, representing the highest reported overall prevalence of VAW in Latin America. An estimated two-thirds of cisgender women aged 15 or older have experienced at least one form of violence in their lifetime, per the UN Women Global Database on VAW.
- One study indicates that approximately 5 out of 10 cases of femicide remain unsolved, while CSO monitoring data reflects an even worse situation.

Caribbean



Two country cases reflect the **disproportionate risks faced by Haitian migrant women** (in the DR) as well as cisgender women and LGBTQI+ in **gang-controlled**

contexts (in Jamaica). These countries also reflect **relatively high prevalence of GBV** in the form of femicide.

DR: Marginalized populations such as Haitian migrants and women of Haitian descent are disproportionately affected, while the DR faces a relatively high prevalence of GBV in general. For these women, widespread discrimination, legal and linguistic barriers, as well as challenging living and working conditions exacerbate their vulnerabilities to GBV in the DR.

- In 2021, the DR reported the fifth highest femicide rate in all of LAC. Over half of women in the DR have experienced one or more forms of GBV in their lifetime, according to ECLAC.
- Though official estimates of GBV against Haitian women in the DR are not available, one study documented a significantly higher prevalence of lifetime violence victimization among stateless individuals (particularly women) in the DR compared to the general population.

Jamaica: Alarming rates of intimate-partner violence and fatal VAW in gang-controlled contexts underscore the need to address societal normalization of violence and gender inequalities.

- Jamaica has one of the highest rates of femicides globally, according to the Gender, Institutions, and Development Database (2019). In 2020, 39 percent of women aged 15-64 had experienced at least one type of intimate-partner violence, according to UN Women.
- 87 percent of recorded murder victims in Jamaica between 2012-2018 were men. Femicide is likely under-recorded, particularly in gang-related incidents.

South America



Two country cases (Colombia and Peru) reflect trends in **conflict-related GBV**, which disproportionately affects marginalized groups (e.g., Afro-descendant women, migrant women, trafficking victims).

Colombia: Conflict-related GBV has disproportionately affected women, particularly those from minority groups (e.g., Afro-descendant, Indigenous, Venezuelan) or who are internally displaced. Colombia ranks fourth globally in internally displaced people.

- Over 35,178 cases of GBV were documented in Colombia's 62-year armed conflict (1954-2016), of which nearly 90 percent of victims were women.
- Of 1,881 GBV cases (2019-2021), only 677 underwent criminal prosecution, resulting in 378 arrests and 140 convictions, according to the Observatory of Femicides in Colombia.

Peru: Widespread labor and sex trafficking exacerbate GBV impunity, disproportionately impacting Indigenous and migrant women.

- Over half of women aged 15-49 had experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetime, while this prevalence was slightly higher for women of Indigenous origins, according to the 2022 Demographic and Family Health Survey. Meanwhile, femicides have doubled since 2015.
- Official reported cases of trafficking increased dramatically from 2012 to 2022, while young women face disproportionate risks of being trafficked.

The lack of inclusive legal frameworks, along with judicial sector discrimination, impose substantial barriers to GBV accountability for women and marginalized populations across countries. Official disaggregated data on crimes against them are typically unavailable, which further impedes efforts to address impunity.

SURVIVOR-CENTERED SOLUTIONS



Survivor-centered solutions recognize the priorities, rights, and needs of survivors, even when they are not necessarily aligned with donor priorities. For example, donors often center their definition of GBV impunity around the absence of judicial prosecution of perpetrators, and may focus their responses accordingly. However, GBV survivors define impunity as the state “ignoring” cases of GBV against them and institutions failing to uphold their rights to support and/or justice. As such, survivors underscore the need to address both GBV impunity among perpetrators and the lack of accountability to survivors across legal, economic, and political systems.

Diverse GBV survivors¹ who participated in the LACLEARN study call for protection and recovery support, justice, and the dismantling of structures and socioeconomic inequalities perpetuating GBV and impunity in LAC. They underscore the complex links between GBV accountability, imperatives to address weak and corrupt law enforcement and judicial response, and multifaceted human rights – advocating for a comprehensive approach to social accountability via public policies, programs, and services that promote the creation of socioeconomically stable, healthy, and safe communities.

More specifically, they call for:



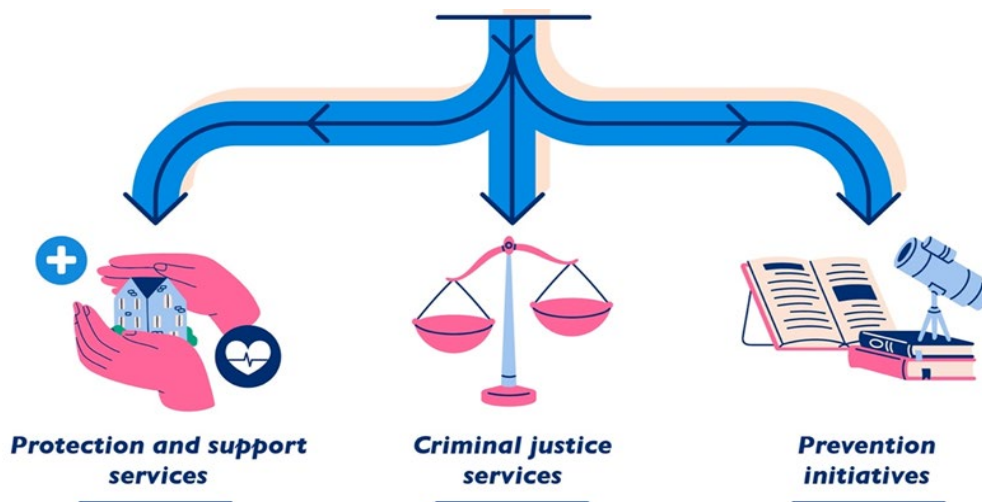
- Survivor-centered judicial processes, with thorough GBV investigation and prosecution on par with international standards set forth in available technical guidance documents.
- Free legal aid, restitution, and comprehensive support services, including medical and psychosocial support services, shelter, food, and economic empowerment, such as job training for increased economic stability.
- State responsibility to implement survivor-centered, trauma-informed protocols in protection and criminal justice services – advocating for a multifaceted, resource-supported, and sustained approach to GBV accountability.
- Transparency in the justice system and public visibility of GBV case processes and outcomes, urging the state to be accountable to all survivors and facilitate meaningful change for justice.

RECOMMENDED STATE ACTION TO STRENGTHEN GBV ACCOUNTABILITY

Three strategic pathways are proposed for policymakers and other state actors to improve GBV accountability: protection and recovery support services; criminal justice services; and prevention initiatives.



¹ Across country case studies, survivor respondents included cisgender women and other marginalized populations including LGBTQI+ individuals, Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and migrant individuals, among others.



The recommendations herein are applicable and adaptable across LAC (and among diverse groups of survivors) as they respond to common issues, while each country report presents context-specific recommendations. Each pathway underscores the state's responsibility to fund, implement, and monitor inclusive, safe, and quality services and policies.

Recommendations are also rooted in survivor-centered principles and inclusive of marginalized populations. Actions must be informed by dialogue with diverse survivors, particularly from LGBTQI+, Indigenous, Afro-descendant, migrant, and other historically marginalized groups. Services should also be context and language-appropriate to account for diverse backgrounds and accessibility.

Protection and Recovery Support Services:



Survivor-Centered Recovery Support:

- Increase investment in material recovery support (e.g., clothing, food, clean water, health care, shelter) and economic strengthening services for diverse GBV survivors.
- Support capacities to deliver survivor-centered, trauma-informed mental health programs serving diverse GBV survivors in both urban and rural areas.
- Establish state-funded shelters and safe houses that are accessible, inclusive, and adapted to the distinct needs of diverse GBV survivors in both urban and rural areas.
- Implement Standard Operating Procedures for inclusive GBV response among health clinics and law enforcement; see [UN Population Fund \(2017\)](#) and [GBV Area of Responsibility \(2023\)](#) guidance for reference.

Inclusion and Non-discrimination in Public Services:

- Ensure legal rights orientation is accessible to diverse GBV survivors (e.g., migrants, linguistic minorities) by resourcing and mandating translation as appropriate.
- Evaluate the inclusion of public services for diverse GBV survivors; create anonymous reporting and monitoring mechanisms to obtain feedback on quality of services.
- Facilitate state dialogue with CSO service providers and diverse GBV survivors to inform the design, implementation, and evaluation of policies, programs, and services.

Criminal Justice Response Services:



Transformative Practices:

- Fund the training and performance evaluation of criminal justice staff (e.g., law enforcement, prosecutors, public defenders) in delivering survivor-centered GBV response, including implementation of the *Latin America Protocol for investigation of gender-motivated killings*.
- Coordinate service provision among government, community-based, and humanitarian organizations to strengthen GBV referral networks.
- Increase survivor access to protective accompaniment throughout legal proceedings and free legal aid including court representation.
- Harmonize national law with international legal and procedural frameworks governing GBV law enforcement and judicial response. This includes integrating and monitoring implementation of key instruments, referenced below. In addition, Indigenous, Afro-descendent, LGBTQI+, and migrant community leaders should be integrated as decision-makers in legal reform processes.

Technical guidance is readily available for state-led capacity building efforts in support of criminal justice actors, such as survivor-centered investigation and prosecution of GBV crimes. International instruments which provide such guidance include:

- [Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of VAW \(Belém do Pará\)](#)
- [Latin America Protocol for the investigation of gender-related killings of women](#)

Prevention Initiatives:



Holistic Prevention Programs:

- Develop a *National Plan of Action to prevent GBV*, if one does not yet exist, including investments in formal education and vocational training for survivors.
- Increase resources for the design, implementation, and monitoring of survivor-centered GBV prevention programs led by marginalized community leaders.
- Implement transformative [social norm change](#) programs at national and community levels, including the engagement of male community members, public service staff, and whole-of-society collaboration to foster solidarity for GBV justice and gender equity.
- Promote GBV prevention public education messaging in mass and social media, as well as in accessible formats and languages.

Data Collection and Monitoring:

- Improve data collection and monitoring of GBV against marginalized communities, including disaggregation of key data points. Data must be gathered ethically and safely, using survivor-centered practices and rigorous methodologies, whether state or CSO-led.

Technical guidance for GBV prevention and response program design is also available for multiple sectors, for example, USAID's [GBV Foundational Elements](#).

ABOUT LACLEARN'S GBV IMPUNITY REGIONAL STUDY

LACLEARN's [GBV Impunity Regional Study](#) (2021-2024) utilized a political economy approach to investigate factors driving GBV impunity, barriers to GBV accountability, and survivor-centered solutions across LAC. Findings and recommendations are based on an extensive desk review and key informant interviews (KIIs) with over 230 diverse GBV survivors, local CSOs, and government service providers. Research methods prioritized the safety and respect of both subjects and researchers, who also come from affected communities. For additional detail, available country reporting is referenced below.



LACLEARN GBV Impunity Regional Study – Available Reporting

Northern Central America and Mexico:

- El Salvador Case Study: [Summary](#) | [Full Report](#)
- Guatemala Case Study (SBU): [Summary](#) | [Full Report](#)
- Honduras Case Study: [Summary](#) | [Full Report](#)
- Mexico Case Study: [Summary](#) | [Full Report](#)
- Northern Central America and Mexico Synthesis: [Summary](#) | [Full Report](#)

South America:

- Colombia Case Study: [Summary](#) | [Full Report](#)
- Peru Case Study: [Summary](#) | [Full Report](#)

Caribbean:

- DR Case Study: [Summary](#) | [Full Report](#)
- Jamaica Case Study: [Summary](#) | [Full Report](#)