



Latin America and the Caribbean Learning and Rapid Response (LACLEARN)

SURVIVOR-CENTERED STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE ACCOUNTABILITY IN EL SALVADOR, GUATEMALA, HONDURAS, AND MEXICO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IMPUNITY REGIONAL STUDY

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Survivor-centered Strategies to Improve Gender-based Violence Accountability in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico

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ACRONYMS

ADS	Automated Directive System
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CICIES	International Commission Against Impunity in El Salvador
CICIG	International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala
COVID-19	Coronavirus Infectious Disease 2019
CPI	Corruption Perception Index
CSO	Civil Society Organization
GBV	Gender-based Violence
IACHR	Inter-American Court of Human Rights
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
LACLEARN	Latin America and Caribbean Learning and Rapid Response
LAPOP	Latin America Public Opinion Project
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual Plus
MACCIH	Mission to Support the Fight Against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras
MS-13	<i>Mara Salvatrucha</i>
OAS	Organization of American States
PCM	<i>Presidente en Consejo de Ministros</i>
PEA	Political Economy Analysis
REDNADS	<i>Red Nacional (de organizaciones LGBTIQ+ Guatemala)</i>
SOGIESC	Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression and Sex Characteristics
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAW	Violence Against Women
V-DEM	Varieties of Democracy (Index)
VoIP	Voice Over Internet Protocol

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gender-based Violence (GBV) persists as an entrenched, yet preventable, pattern of systemic human rights violations and a global public health pandemic. GBV includes not only sexual violence but also physical, psychological, and economic violence. GBV can be technology enabled and politically motivated. Multiple forms often co-occur on a continuum up to lethal violence. GBV thrives in contexts of social, economic, legal, and political gender inequality. In Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), the COVID-19 pandemic, economic crisis, democratic backsliding, labor and sex trafficking, corruption, gangs, armed groups, organized crime networks, armed conflict, and environmental disasters exacerbate these conditions.

Using a political economy analytical approach, the GBV Impunity Regional Study (2021–2023) investigates the social, economic, legal, and political barriers to, and survivor-centered¹ recommendations for, increasing GBV accountability in LAC. Examining eight countries, the study investigates a main research question:

“What would constitute meaningful GBV accountability according to diverse survivors in LAC?”

This report focuses on case studies in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico that investigate factors driving GBV impunity and solutions to address it. The report synthesizes findings and recommendations across these four case studies based on qualitative, in-depth individual interviews with 106 GBV survivors,² as well as government institutional and civil society organization (CSO) staff who provide direct services to survivors.

Country case studies explore multiple forms of GBV. They pay special attention to GBV perpetrated against underserved groups, such as indigenous women, Afro-descendent women, transgender women, and gay men. In line with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) definition, this study defines GBV as encompassing any harmful act or threat against an individual or group based on biological sex, gender, gender orientation or expression, sex characteristics, sexual orientation, and/or lack of adherence to socially accepted conceptualizations of femininity and masculinity.

The research teams analyzed interview transcripts from the four case studies and reviewed available secondary statistics and documentary evidence to generate actionable recommendations for USAID. The goal is to guide strategic USAID investments in programs to promote inclusive GBV accountability through improved GBV survivor-centered protection and recovery support services, justice services, and prevention initiatives in the countries of northern Central America and Mexico. This study privileges the voices of diverse GBV survivors and their experiences and analyses of GBV impunity and accountability. Centering the study on diverse GBV survivor groups enables a more comprehensive understanding of the intersectional patterns of GBV and vulnerabilities to GBV within and across

¹ See Annex 2 for a glossary of key terms, including “survivor-centered.”

² This study uses the term “survivor” to center the agency and resilience of GBV survivors. We recognize also that some survivors prefer to use the term “victim”—for example, to reflect their legal status as a crime victim in court proceedings. Some GBV survivor advocacy and activist groups also at times prefer “victim” to highlight factually and legally that what perpetrators did to them constitutes one or more crimes under criminal law and that crime victims have the right to compensation, restitution, reparations, and justice.

different groups. Researchers who work closely with survivors and service providers in affected communities led each case study.

USAID’s Core Principles for GBV Programming acknowledge that a survivor-centered approach, such as the one on which this study relies to identify pathways to accountability, is the “hallmark of quality GBV programming.” USAID’s principles assert that centering survivors’ experiences and perspectives maximizes the quality of GBV programming by ensuring that it is designed to meet survivors’ specific needs while promoting their dignity, rights, agency, and empowerment. The study also emphasizes trauma-informed research methods and programming recommendations. Acknowledging the trauma that GBV survivors experience reduces revictimization and provides a sense of regained control and healing.³

KEY FINDINGS

Northern Central America and Mexico include some of the highest rates of GBV reported in the world. Many cases of GBV are not reported, and very few cases result in legal punishment.

In 2020, rates of femicide—violent, gender-based deaths of women—in northern Central American countries and Mexico were already among the world’s highest.⁴ Femicide rates and those of other types of GBV likely increased between 2021 and 2023, as the COVID-19 pandemic worsened the complex conditions within which GBV persists.

In El Salvador and Mexico, the United Nations (UN) Women Global Database on Violence Against Women (VAW) estimates that two-thirds of cisgender women 15 years old or older have experienced at least one kind of violence in their lifetime. However, these are likely underestimates because many survivors do not disclose GBV in face-to-face surveys, and few report incidents to the police or seek formal justice. Survivors often remain silent to protect themselves from potential retaliation and further harm. Consequently, the problem is widely underestimated in both available crime statistics and also available epidemiological prevalence estimates. The UN estimates that 98 percent of VAW in LAC each year goes unpunished, resulting in legal impunity. This estimate considers both cases where survivors do not report GBV to the police, and cases where survivors do report to the police, but their cases are not investigated, are not brought to trial, or do not result in convictions.⁵

³ USAID. 2021. Foundational Elements for Gender-based Violence Programming in Development. USAID’s Collective Action to Reduce Gender-based Violence (CARE-GBV). Accessed on June 9, 2023. https://makingcents.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/2_Core-Principles_508c.pdf.

⁴ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). 2021. The Pandemic in the Shadows: Femicides or Femicides in 2020 in Latin America and the Caribbean. on June 13, 2023. https://oig.cepal.org/sites/default/files/21-00792_folleto_the_pandemic_in_the_shadows_web_0.pdf.

⁵ Equal Measures. 2030 Data Hub: Latin America and the Caribbean. Accessed December 16, 2020. <https://www.equalmeasures2030.org/datahub/2019-sdg-gender-index/region/latin-america-and-the-caribbean/>.

Survivors experience “impunity” as being ignored and revictimized after they survive GBV, including by government institutions that fail to uphold their basic human rights. “Accountability” would require, at minimum, transparent, non-discriminatory, and high-quality post-GBV protection and recovery support services.

Survivors repeatedly describe “being ignored,” by State institutions responsible for providing direct services for GBV protection, recovery support, justice, and prevention programs. They report that they are often treated as though they were culpable for their own victimization. Many diverse survivors view law enforcement and justice sector indifference as an extension of structural discrimination they have faced historically. Survivors also feel ignored and revictimized within their families and communities, where social norms and stigma often minimize GBV-related crimes and result in blaming survivors for their experiences. Women, LGBTQIA+, Afro-descendant, Indigenous, and migrant people often feel the most “ignored.” Compounded discrimination based on survivors’ multiple intersecting identities further entrenches GBV impunity.

As a woman GBV survivor interviewed in Mexico shared:

“We know perfectly well what impunity is. A failed state, a corrupt and misogynistic system of delivery of justice. For us, impunity is living within our own country as prisoners and not having the guarantees to be able to get out of here.”

Survivors’ visions of what would constitute GBV accountability include practical government transparency and accountability mechanisms that track the number and sociodemographic characteristics—including sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), indigenous identities, and migration status—of GBV survivors that government service providers serve. Survivors envision these transparency and accountability measures as part of routine data collection that also asks survivors to rate whether they experienced service delivery through state institutions as actively inclusive or discriminatory, and sufficient or insufficient to meet their protection, recovery support, and justice needs and rights.

Survivors, especially those most socioeconomically marginalized, describe negative experiences and little trust in interacting with law enforcement and justice institutions. They often do not seek a response through these as a result. Discrimination and inequality reduce survivors’ access to and benefits from an already limited set of justice, protection, and recovery support services.

Across all four countries, survivors reported that seeking accountability through legal and justice institutions has prohibitive direct and indirect costs. Important indirect costs relate to time away from work and/or caregiving for dependents. In addition, legal processes are prohibitively lengthy and require survivors to repeatedly give their accounts with limited or no confidentiality. Survivors can be exposed to retaliatory attacks, up to lethal violence, against themselves, their dependents, and their property when seeking a police or judicial response. Many of these factors, aside from constraining survivors’ ability to seek justice and accountability in the first place, also expose them to deepened traumatic stress

and social stigma. As a result, most survivors do not seek a police or justice response. Many resort to silence for self-preservation and protection of their loved ones, homes, and livelihoods.

Diverse low-income survivors face intersecting forms of discrimination that compound GBV impunity based on socioeconomic status, SOGIESC, race, ethnicity, and disabilities. This makes justice, protection, and recovery support services that already have limited availability even less accessible and beneficial to them. Urban, low-income transgender women seeking protection and recovery support services reported experiencing neglect and re-victimization when trying to seek police protection or justice. GBV survivors from underserved communities often must repeat their account of GBV in a series of offices as part of a legal process or in accessing services. Their case reports often are not stored confidentially, not investigated, or not submitted to prosecutors' office according to established procedures, or they go missing. Indigenous women living in remote rural areas face added challenges of discrimination and structural exclusion when seeking post-GBV care, protection, or justice services in distant towns and cities. For example, Garifuna land rights defenders in Honduras reported intimidation by police when attempting to report GBV cases and ended up withdrawing their report.

Socioeconomic, legal, and political gender inequities in complex, low-resource contexts deepen survivors' experiences of impunity. In northern Central America and Mexico, gang control of communities and social acceptance of GBV are particularly acute barriers to accountability.

Socioeconomic, legal, and political inequalities interact with trends in democratic erosion, corruption, organized crime, gang control, and forced out-migration to sustain impunity and prevent diverse survivors from accessing critical services or justice.

Gang control of communities creates particularly significant obstacles for survivors seeking GBV protection and support services. Survivors and service providers attribute this to the complex security dynamics generated in gang-related GBV associated with commercial activities. This includes gang coercion of community members into the drug and sex trades. In gang-controlled areas, gangs decide where GBV is permitted to occur, or even encouraged, and shield perpetrators from investigations and punishment. By controlling where GBV is allowed, gangs can coerce community members according to their needs. In this context, it is unsafe for CSOs to provide post-GBV services and prevention programming that may conflict with the gangs' objectives.

Gang control and violence also exacerbate socioeconomic vulnerabilities in communities and broader national contexts. Survivors and service providers described how governments are reducing funding for GBV survivor services while cracking down on civil society actors, activists, and rights defenders. The combination of extreme violence, socioeconomic vulnerabilities, and declining government support for GBV service providers leaves survivors with limited or no access to protection, recovery support, justice services, or prevention initiatives.

Societal acceptance of GBV impunity compounded through institutional discrimination and service gaps further perpetuates GBV impunity against women, LGBTQIA+, Indigenous, Afro-descendant, migrant, and stateless survivors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We present two levels of recommendations. The first is for USAID regional programs and country Missions operating in northern Central America and Mexico and relates to promoting GBV accountability along three strategic intervention pathways. The second is for the LAC Bureau and technical advisors in Washington D.C., who are well placed to strengthen funding and technical support for holistic, cross-sectoral integration of GBV accountability initiatives across the region.

Recommendations presented in this report align with and advance the key pillars, results framework, and foreign assistance reporting indicators of the [United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to GBV Globally 2022](#). They further contribute to LAC Bureau implementation of USAID's newly launched [2023 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy](#). Although all these recommendations would help improve GBV accountability, it is not necessary to pursue all of them to achieve meaningful improvements. Implementing even one recommendation will help USAID improve accountability and advance its policy goals. Greater improvements are possible as more recommendations are implemented, particularly when strategically coordinated.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR USAID MISSIONS AND REGIONAL PROGRAMS IN NORTHERN CENTRAL AMERICA AND MEXICO

This report recommends that USAID Missions and regional programs in northern Central America and Mexico implement strategic investments to improve GBV accountability within each of three strategic intervention pathways.

Strategic intervention pathways to improve GBV accountability		
1. GBV survivor-centered protection and recovery support services	2. GBV survivor-centered holistic justice response services	3. GBV survivor-centered prevention initiatives

In the near-term, it is most urgent for USAID to prioritize strategies and investments focused on GBV survivor-centered protection and recovery. This reflects the extremely violent contexts in these countries, where structurally marginalized populations and survivors express immediate and urgent need for protection and recovery support services in the aftermath of experiencing GBV. Most of those who have survived incidents of GBV never pursue accountability through the formal legal system. Strengthening survivor-centered initiatives for holistic justice response and prevention is equally important for transforming GBV impunity in the long-term, but these initiatives cannot bring about immediate, tangible change for diverse survivors who need protection and recovery support assistance now. We present below several strategic investments to drive action in each of the three intervention pathways.

Intervention pathway 1: GBV survivor-centered protection and recovery support services
Strategy 1: Expand and improve shelters with safe, inclusive spaces and safe, affordable housing assistance for diverse GBV survivors and their dependents.
Strategy 2: Improve and evaluate standard operating procedures in the health sector and health-judiciary coordination for investigating GBV crimes, including femicide and transfemicide.

Strategy 3: Improve and evaluate government-provided GBV protection and recovery support services.

Strategy 4: Increase CSO resourcing to expand inclusive, locally led, survivor-centered GBV recovery support services.

Intervention pathway 2: GBV survivor-centered justice services

Strategy 5: Resource and strengthen State implementation of Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) rulings and advocate for institutionalizing State application and monitoring of the Belém do Pará Convention and the Latin America Model Protocol.

Strategy 6: Advocate for and monitor reform of legal frameworks, support development of national gender diversity and Indigenous identity laws, and improve and evaluate ongoing staff training in justice institutions on law implementation.

Strategy 7: Advocate for direct participation of gender diverse, Indigenous, and Afro-descendant groups, among other structurally excluded GBV survivor groups, in legal and policy reform and in public decision-making processes.

Strategy 8: Support development of and GBV survivor access to restitution, reparations, and recovery assistance services, including free legal aid, to which law enforcement and courts can refer survivors.

Strategy 9: Improve equity through increasing the amount of resources distributed to improve technical, financial, and human resources across the judicial system to reach underserved and structurally excluded GBV survivors.

Strategy 10: Bolster resources and alliances among civil society and community groups serving diverse GBV survivors to raise awareness of their legal rights.

Strategy 11: Improve the capacity of law enforcement personnel to engage in a survivor-centered, trauma-informed, and interculturally appropriate way with GBV survivors of diverse backgrounds.

Strategy 12: Support CSOs and grassroots groups in establishing community-based mediation processes that build on local, indigenous, and ancestral processes, while ensuring that processes remain survivor-centered and trauma-informed and address inequitable power dynamics to ensure no further harm to survivors.

Intervention pathway 3: GBV survivor-centered prevention initiatives

Strategy 13: Identify and assess social, economic, physical, geospatial, legal, and political risk factors that perpetuate the structural exclusion of and normative discrimination against marginalized GBV survivor groups.

Strategy 14: Invest in community-based and institutional social norm change interventions combined with local, social media, and mass media campaigns to facilitate dialogues that analyze and promote survivor-centered conflict resolution, anger management, gender equality and GBV accountability at a community level drawing from, or transforming from within, community customs and practices.

Strategy 15: Support diverse and inclusive GBV prevention awareness-raising, public education, and training in schools, community youth groups, and community spaces that promote positive, non-violent masculinities.

Strategy 16: Engage convicted offenders and other likely perpetrators of GBV in programs to prevent recidivism, re-offense, and persistent patterns of GBV.

Strategy 17: Expand the evidence base to inform GBV prevention through resourcing crime data monitoring and reporting systems, GBV research, and evaluations of GBV projects and activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE LAC BUREAU

Acknowledging that Missions and regional programs will directly fund and oversee most GBV initiatives, the LAC Bureau has an important role to support the development and integration of survivor-centered GBV accountability initiatives in programming across the region. This will require coordination within

and across the LAC Bureau and other Washington D.C.-based operating units. It will also require allocating sufficient funding, technical resources, and senior GBV technical personnel with relevant sectoral expertise to strengthen organizational capacity for operationalizing GBV accountability initiatives throughout the USAID Program Cycle. Specific recommendations for the LAC Bureau include:

Recommendations for the LAC Bureau	
A.	Coordinate with USAID’s Office of Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment to develop terms of reference to engage and recruit a team of Senior GBV Technical Advisors. The GBV advisors must have sufficient seniority and sector expertise to strengthen and increase LAC Bureau and Mission institutional capacities to integrate gender equality, women’s empowerment, and GBV accountability into the various sectoral programs that interact with GBV perpetrators and survivors across the region.
B.	Develop a USAID LAC Bureau GBV Prevention and Response Implementation Plan. This should operationalize the <u>United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to GBV Globally 2022</u> with funding and technical resources and accountability mechanisms to make meaningful and measurable progress toward achieving the Strategy’s objectives.
C.	Translate the Implementation Plan into sector-specific guidance for integrating GBV accountability strategies throughout the Program Cycle. Senior GBV Technical Advisors in the LAC Bureau and other D.C.-based operating units should support developing this guidance.
D.	Allocate sustained funding, senior GBV technical advisors and materials, training, and training evaluation to increase staff technical performance on GBV integration in USAID country offices. Mobilize resources to operationalize integration of survivor-centered GBV protection and recovery support services, justice, and prevention activities to strengthen GBV accountability throughout the USAID Program Cycle.
E.	Commission research and toolkits for integrating survivor-centered GBV prevention and response in intersecting sectoral programming. Focus these efforts where the evidence base and practical guidance for a specific sector are currently lacking.
F.	Pair senior GBV technical advisors with sectoral technical advisors to develop specific requests for proposals (RfPs) to translate the Implementation Plan into targeted sectoral projects. The RfPs should call for implementing partners to compete for awards proposing strategies, project designs, and evaluations that incorporate recommendations in this report and advance the <u>United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to GBV Globally 2022</u> . An example of such an RfP includes USAID/Guatemala’s 2023 “Gender-based Violence Prevention and Response Activity.”
G.	Implement, monitor, evaluate, and adaptively manage the Implementation Plan. Ensure the plan includes standard indicators on which activities, programs, and Missions must report. Commission an evaluation of progress every three to five years against the plan and regular evaluations of staff performance to operationalize integration of GBV protection and recovery support services, justice, and prevention activities to strengthen GBV accountability within and across sectoral initiatives.

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Impunity Regional Study⁶ (2021–2023), implemented under the Latin America and Caribbean Learning and Rapid Response (LACLEARN) task order, generates findings on the state of GBV impunity and survivor-centered recommendations for promoting accountability throughout the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region. The study combines eight country case studies with cross-country regional synthesis reports. NORC at the University of Chicago, with consortium partners Making Cents International and Development Professionals Inc., leads the regional study and supports expert research teams who lead the case studies in each country. The GBV Impunity Regional Study’s purpose is to investigate the main research question:

“What constitutes GBV accountability according to diverse survivors in the LAC region?”

In response to this question, the study recommends key strategies for USAID to promote GBV accountability in the LAC region. We organize these strategies into three mutually reinforcing, intervention pathways, as summarized below.

Intervention pathways to improve GBV accountability		
1. GBV survivor-centered protection and recovery support services	2. GBV survivor-centered justice	3. GBV survivor-centered prevention

Following the completion of case studies in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico, this report presents a synthesis of the case study findings and provides recommendations to inform USAID efforts to increase accountability for GBV in northern Central America and Mexico.

The GBV Impunity Regional Study methodological approach centers on survivors’ and service providers’ lived experiences of GBV impunity and recommendations for how to increase accountability. The case studies focus on underserved and historically excluded survivor groups. The sample of interview participants includes survivors and staff members of government institutions and civil society organizations (CSOs) who provide services to survivors. Many CSO and government service provider staff are also GBV survivors themselves.

The case study teams conducted a total of 106 interviews to investigate the structural barriers, enabling contexts, and social norms that perpetuate impunity for GBV survivors from marginalized and excluded populations. The case studies included survivors from gang-affected, LGBTQIA+, Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and migrant communities. Table 1 outlines each case study’s focus—specifically, the types of

⁶ The Gender-based Violence Regional Study forms part of the LACLEARN Task Order under the Analytical Services IV Indefinite Delivery/Indefinite Quantity contract. USAID funds LACLEARN. The USAID LAC Bureau’s Office for Regional Sustainable Development manages LACLEARN. LACLEARN contributes to improving USAID’s Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance (DRG) work in the LAC region through state-of-the-art, gender-informed analytical work, assessments, research, and special studies; results management support; and training that contribute to sector learning in the region and build an evidence base for effective programming.

GBV that persist with impunity and populations affected disproportionately in each country. For more information on the study design, conceptual approach, methods, and sample, refer to Annex I.

Table 1: GBV Impunity Regional Study countries, focus types of GBV, and focus populations (2021 to 2023)

COUNTRY	FOCUS TYPE(S) OF GBV	FOCUS POPULATION(S)
1. Jamaica	Sexual violence in gang contexts (partner and non-partner)	Women and men of diverse gender identities living in gang-controlled contexts
2. Guatemala	Transfemicide and homicide of gay men (non-partner)	Transgender women, lesbian women, gay men, including Indigenous
3. Honduras	Sexual violence, transfemicide, and femicide (non-partner)	Transgender women and Garifuna women
4. Mexico	Femicide and transfemicide (partner and non-partner)	Transgender and cisgender women
5. El Salvador	Transfemicide and femicide (non-partner)	Transgender and cisgender women
6. Dominican Republic	Sexual exploitation (non-partner)	Women of a Haitian migrant background
7. Peru	Sex trafficking	Low-income and geographically excluded women (cisgender and transgender inclusive)
8. Colombia	Sexual exploitation in migration contexts (non-partner)	Venezuelan and internally displaced migrant women of diverse gender identities

Note: This table presents the countries in order of case study implementation between 2021 and 2023.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS REPORT

This report pursues two main objectives:

1. Provide a political economy analysis (PEA) and survivor-centered analytical lens through which to understand GBV impunity in northern Central America and Mexico; and
2. Offer recommendations to the USAID LAC Bureau, other USAID operating units based in Washington D.C., and USAID Missions and regional programs located in northern Central America and Mexico on how to address GBV impunity, considering its multi-sectoral, structural, and systemic characteristics.

We pursue these objectives by synthesizing findings and recommendations from four country case studies completed in northern Central America and Mexico.⁷ The findings will further inform a regional study report later this year (2023) that will synthesize insights and recommendations for USAID from across all eight GBV impunity country case studies in the LAC region.

KEY TERMS: GBV AND IMPUNITY

International and USAID definitions of GBV recognize that it is rooted in structural gender inequalities, inequitable gender norms, and both State and non-State actors’ abuses of power, decision-making over public and private resources, and powerful networks. The GBV Impunity Regional Study defines “GBV”

⁷ USAID personnel who wish to review the case study reports may do so by searching for them on the Development Experience Clearinghouse (<https://dec.usaid.gov/dec/home/Default.aspx>).

holistically in accordance with the updated, 2022 United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to GBV Globally, as follows:

Figure 1: GBV definition according to the 2022 United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to GBV Globally

Gender-Based Violence is 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 socially constructed norms around masculinity and femininity. Although individuals of all gender identities experience gender-based violence, women, girls, and gender non-conforming individuals face a disproportionate risk of gender-based violence across every context due to their unequal status in society.

Gender-based violence is a human rights abuse, a form of discrimination, a manifestation of unequal power, and a public health crisis in the United States and globally. Gender-based violence is rooted in structural gender inequalities, patriarchy, and power imbalances. It has direct and indirect costs to individuals; families; communities; economies; global public health; development; and human, national, and regional security. Gender-based violence is a systemic global problem: it occurs in every country and level of society. It happens in public and private settings, including the home, work environments, transit, educational settings, and schools; criminal justice settings, including correctional facilities; the military and security sector; and digital and online spaces. Members of some populations face overlapping forms of discrimination that put them at an even higher risk of experiencing gender-based violence, including indigenous peoples; historically marginalized racial and ethnic populations; religious minority populations; LGBTQI+ persons; persons with disabilities; older persons and widows; children and youth; low wage and informal sector workers; migrants, refugees, and internally displaced peoples' and persons in fragile and conflict-affected states.

Source: United States Government. 2022. *United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to GBV Globally*.

The methodology of the GBV Impunity Regional Study adopts a comprehensive approach in defining “impunity” for GBV, which goes beyond legal and judicial definitions. The study takes into account the experiences and perspectives of GBV survivors and service providers, who explained how impunity involves both formal institutional and structural lack of accountability, as well as informal social acceptance and normalization of GBV in society. The study team recognizes that GBV survivors’ views may be heard from among those explicitly or publicly self-identified, as well as from those not publicly self-identified as survivors, within and across diverse survivor groups, CSO staff, and government institution staff who participated in interviews. The study team further recognizes the importance of capturing a range of survivor experiences and perspectives and is committed to centering the voices of survivors in the study findings and recommendations.

In their descriptions of what impunity and accountability mean to them, it becomes clear that GBV survivors often face a lack of accountability across all sectors responsible for serving their post-GBV protection, recovery support, and justice needs. Sectors that engage with survivors include health services, law enforcement, legal aid, shelter, economic recovery, and other services provided by governments or civil society that are essential to protection and recovery and access to justice. In other words, survivors are often not able to access the support they need, as sectoral services are often not

designed, implemented, or evaluated to ensure that they meet survivors' needs holistically. Failing to meet GBV survivors' protection and recovery support, and justice needs perpetuates the systemic discrimination that allows GBV impunity to continue.

Annex 2 provides a glossary of key concepts and terms used throughout this report and the GBV Impunity Regional Study more broadly.

GBV PREVALENCE AND UNDER-REPORTING IN EL SALVADOR, GUATEMALA, HONDURAS, AND MEXICO

In this section, we present publicly available statistics on violence against women (VAW). We also include evidence from limited sources on the prevalence of GBV against LGBTQIA+ individuals, which are not usually covered by publicly available statistics. Additionally, we provide an overview of country-specific GBV-related crime reports and court statistics that highlight under-reporting and a lack of justice for diverse survivors.

Most available prevalence estimates of GBV concern VAW broadly defined—but specifically meaning cisgender women. The United Nations (UN) Women Global Database on VAW compiles the most recent national statistics on VAW prevalence. In Figure 2, we present a snapshot of the most recent national survey statistics capturing prevalence by VAW type (psychological/emotional, physical, or sexual) for El Salvador,⁸ Guatemala⁹, Honduras,¹⁰ and Mexico.¹¹ We see similar VAW prevalence estimates in El Salvador and Mexico, two countries in which available national prevalence data estimates lifetime experiences of women ages 15 years and older. In El Salvador and Mexico, which also provide prevalence estimates for different types of violence, over two-thirds of cisgender women have experienced at least one form of violence in their lifetime. On the other hand, Guatemala and Honduras report estimates of VAW that women experienced between 15–49 years of age. About one in five cisgender women in Guatemala and Honduras experienced physical violence in that age range. Estimates of lifetime violence would presumably be higher.

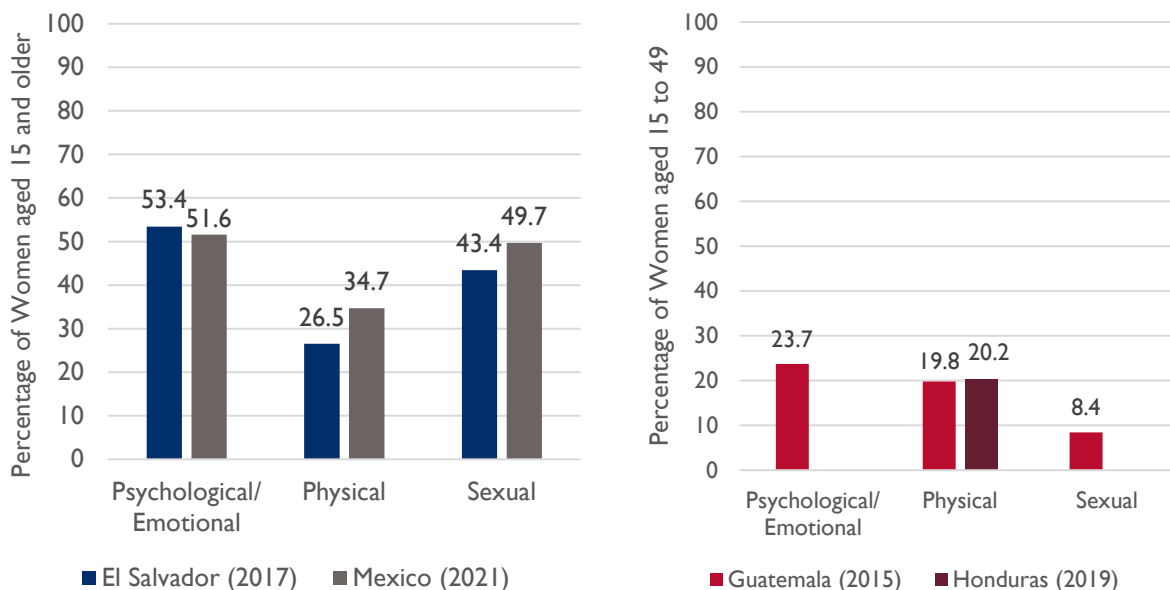
⁸ Dirección General de Estadística y Censos. 2017. Encuesta Nacional de Violencia Contra las Mujeres 2017 (p. 100). Gobierno de la República de El Salvador Ministerio de Economía. <https://oig.cepal.org/es/documentos/encuesta-nacional-violencia-mujeres-salvador-2017>.

⁹ Ministerio de Salud Pública y Asistencia Social. 2017. Encuesta Nacional de Salud Materno Infantil 2014-2015. Guatemala Instituto Nacional de Estadística. <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR318/FR318.pdf>.

¹⁰ Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas. 2021. Encuesta Nacional De Demografía Y Salud / Encuesta De Indicadores Múltiples Por Conglomerados (ENDESA/MICS2019). Accessed December 29, 2022. <https://www.ine.gob.hn/V3/imag-doc/2021/10/Informe-ENDESA-MICS-2019.pdf>.

¹¹ INEGI. 2021. Preliminary Presentation of Presentación Encuesta Nacional sobre la Dinámica de las Relaciones en los Hogares (ENDIREH) 2021. https://www.inegi.org.mx/contenidos/programas/endireh/2021/doc/endireh2021_presentacion_ejecutiva.pdf.

Figure 2: Self-reported prevalence estimates of VAW (ages 15+ for El Salvador and Mexico, ages 15 to 49 for Guatemala and Honduras)



Source: UN Women Global Database on Violence Against Women

Notes: Data from Guatemala is for “ever-partnered” women. Data from Guatemala and Honduras is limited to women aged 15–49 years and who experienced VAW within this age range. There were no available, nationally representative statistics found estimating prevalence ages 15–49 of psychological/emotional or sexual violence against women in Honduras.¹²

In 2020, before the COVID-19 pandemic, rates of femicide—violent, gender-based deaths of women—in northern Central American countries and Mexico were already among the world’s highest. Honduras had a rate of 4.7 per 100,000 women, while Guatemala had a rate of 1.3.¹³ It is likely that femicide rates, among those of other types of GBV, increased between 2021 and 2023 due to the pandemic worsening the conditions within which GBV persists. Available data from the International Rescue Committee and partners showed significant increases in reports of GBV and requests for information and essential support services across Latin America in the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁴

PREVALENCE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITIES IN EL SALVADOR

National epidemiological prevalence and incidence estimates of femicides against transgender women—transfemicides—among other forms of GBV against members of LGBTQIA+ communities in El Salvador remain under-researched. Further, homicide crime statistics are not disaggregated to evaluate how many women and LGBTQIA+ people are killed based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC). Still, Comcavis Trans, a CSO working to help trans women who have suffered violence and forced displacement in El Salvador, recorded at least 600 killings

¹² UN Women. “Honduras: Prevalence Data on Different Forms of Violence Against Women,” Global Database on Violence Against Women. Accessed December 29, 2022. <https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/es/countries/americas/honduras?typeofmeasure=ddab7517185e4381a415e4f7f098448b#1>.

¹³ ECLAC. 2021. The Pandemic in the Shadows: Femicides or Feminicides in 2020 in Latin America and the Caribbean. ECLAC, Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, United Nations Secretary-General’s Campaign, Unite to End Violence Against Women. https://oig.cepal.org/sites/default/files/21-00792_folleto_the_pandemic_in_the_shadows_web_0.pdf.

¹⁴ International Rescue Committee. 2020. IRC Data Shows an Increase in Reports of Gender-based Violence Across Latin America. Press Release. <https://www.rescue.org/press-release/irc-data-shows-increase-reports-gender-based-violence-across-latin-america>.

of LGBTQIA+ people in El Salvador during the period 1992–2020.¹⁵ Of these, only three cases have been prosecuted—those of the killings of Camila Díaz, Anahy Miranda, and Tita Andrade.¹⁶ According to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR), the life expectancy of a transgender woman in El Salvador is only 33 years, less than half of the 74-year life expectancy of El Salvador’s general population, according to the World Health Organization.

PREVALENCE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITIES IN GUATEMALA

Although Guatemala has effectively analyzed crime data to improve classification of crimes and inform prevention efforts based on this classification, public statistics still do not classify murders based on SOGIESC. This leads to an absence of public statistics regarding GBV experienced by LGBTQIA+ survivors and constrains their ability to seek justice. In 2020, Visibles, a Guatemalan CSO, conducted an online survey of 290 LGBTQIA+ participants, finding that 35 percent reported experiencing violence and discrimination in the last year, which increased to 62 percent among transgender survey respondents.¹⁷ Guatemalan CSOs Lambda and Red Nacional (REDNADS) also document violent deaths of LGBTQIA+ people in Guatemala, reporting at least five deaths in the first four weeks of 2021.¹⁸

PREVALENCE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITIES IN HONDURAS

Socioeconomically and politically stigmatized transgender women, rights defenders, and movement activists face high rates of GBV and impunity in Honduras. The lesbian, feminist collective and CSO Cattrachas advocates for the human rights of LGBTQIA+ people by compiling data on human rights violations against LGBTQIA+ individuals. Cattrachas documented 373 violent deaths among LGBTQIA+ people in Honduras between June 2009 and March 2020, of which 111 were transfemicides.^{19,20}

PREVALENCE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITIES IN MEXICO

According to the National Observatory of Hate Crimes against LGBT People, in 2021 there were 32 transfemicides reported in Mexico.²¹ The absence of gender identity disaggregated data makes it challenging to obtain accurate estimates of transfemicide statistics, or prevalence and incidence rates. Nonetheless, data that various CSOs have analyzed suggest that transgender women are the most affected group within the LGBTQIA+ community, with transfemicide accounting for 45 percent of the 209 homicides classified as hate crimes committed against LGBTQIA+ people 2014–2020.²²

UNDERREPORTING OF GBV CRIME AND NEAR ABSENCE OF JUSTICE

Crime and court statistics in northern Central America and Mexico are limited and inconsistent, and legal definitions for sexual violence and femicide often do not comply with international legal standards.

¹⁵ Amnesty International. August 12 2020. COVID-19 Is Making Life Even Harder for Trans Women In El Salvador. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/08/trans-women-el-salvador-death-sentence-coronavirus/>.

¹⁶ Loydi Loana Guardado Ayala. 2020. Paran de Matarnos. ASPIDH Asociación para Impulsar el Desarrollo Humano y Terra Nuova. Accessed December 29, 2022. https://aspidhsv.org/?page_id=607.

¹⁷ López, T & Bartes, M (2020). Realidades Compartidas: experiencias de violencia y exclusión de las personas LGBTQ+. Visibles. https://visibles.gt/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Realidades_Compartidas.pdf.

¹⁸ Lambda, REDNADS. February 2021. Observatorio de Derechos Humanos y violencias por orientación sexual e identidad de género. Twitter account. Accessed December 29, 2022. <https://mobile.twitter.com/observatoriolam>.

¹⁹ Cattrachas. 2021. Informe Sobre Muertes Violentas de personas LGTTBI Cattrachas 2009-2020. Cattrachas. <https://www.cattrachas.org/sistemas?lightbox=dataltm-kphb9bmb3>.

²⁰ Calderón, Catherine. 2020. Encerradas y sin derechos: así viven la pandemia las mujeres trans en Honduras. <https://contracorriente.red/2020/07/07/encerradas-y-sin-derechos-asi-viven-la-pandemia-las-mujeres-trans-en-honduras/>.

²¹ Flores, A. 2021. Transfemicidios en México 2021: Las nombramos y exigimos justicia. <https://www.homosensual.com/lgbt/trans/transfemicidios-en-mexico-2021-las-nombramos-y-exigimos-justicia/>.

²² Flores, A. 2021. Transfemicidios en México 2021: Las nombramos y exigimos justicia. <https://www.homosensual.com/lgbt/trans/transfemicidios-en-mexico-2021-las-nombramos-y-exigimos-justicia/>.

This lack of reporting perpetuates impunity for survivors of GBV, as without a report, there can be no charge filed by law enforcement. Even if a charge is filed, misclassification or lack of investigation can result in an unsolved case, leaving survivors without justice, protection, or recovery support services. This cascade of underreporting, lack of investigation, and absence of restitution or reparations perpetuates GBV impunity. Quote 1 highlights how impunity sends a societal message that the State tolerates GBV:

Quote 1: Government institution staff member, Honduras

“The issue is that if there is no sentence, if they [perpetrators] go unpunished, eh, or decisions are made that are not attached to international standards for the protection of women’s rights, there is a message to society, and that message is that in this country you can rape women, you can commit femicides, you can commit domestic violence or any gender-based violence, and that is tolerated by the State. That is very serious.”

EL SALVADOR

According to the National Survey on Violence Against Women (2017),²³ only an estimated 6 percent of women who experienced some form of violence during their lifetime filed a crime report. An estimated 35.6 percent of women reported they did not seek to file a report because they did not perceive their incidents to be important enough, and 22.7 percent believed their experience of violence would be perceived as “lacking credibility.”

GUATEMALA

In Guatemala, only an estimated 3 percent of all crimes are punished formally.²⁴ Different institutions that studied the topic arrived at similar estimates of impunity for criminal cases of GBV. In 2018, the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) estimated that about 97 percent of crimes involving VAW result in impunity.²⁵ Meanwhile, UN Women estimates that 98 percent of femicides in LAC result in impunity annually.²⁶

HONDURAS

The Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights in Honduras estimated that between 2006 and 2020, approximately 6,266 women died in violent circumstances, and 90 percent of these deaths remain unresolved or not investigated.²⁷ A 2013 revision of the penal code recognized femicide as a crime. However, since 2013, there have only been 15 convictions of femicide, although more than 7,000 cases of homicide or parricide involving women victims were reported to the Attorney General’s office between 2014 and 2018.²⁸ Identity discrimination—evidenced by having no or inaccurately classified legal identity documents—against transgender and Indigenous GBV victims and survivors leads to an inability

²³ Dirección General de Estadística y Censos. 2017. Encuesta Nacional de Violencia Contra las Mujeres 2017 (p. 100). Gobierno de la República de El Salvador Ministerio de Economía.

²⁴ Smith, C. 2020. Addressing the Sex and Gender-Based Violence in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador Fueling the U.S. Border Crisis. Pulte Institute for Global Development, University of Notre Dame. https://pulte.nd.edu/assets/383519/report_sgbv_cory_smith.pdf.

²⁵ Cited in Smith, C. 2020. Addressing the Sex and Gender-Based Violence in Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador Fueling the U.S. Border Crisis.

²⁶ UN Women Americas and the Caribbean. Guatemala. Accessed March 15, 2023. <https://lac.unwomen.org/en/donde-estamos/guatemala>.

²⁷ García, D, González, G, Matamoros, E, & López, C. 2020. Informe Anual: Situación de los Derechos Humanos en Honduras y la Actuación Institucional durante 2020 (p. 283). Comisionado Nacional de los Derechos Humanos.

²⁸ Foro de Mujeres por la Vida. 2018. Femicidios: monitoreo de fuentes oficiales y medios de comunicación escrita. <https://www.forodemujeresporlavida.org/biblioteca/#fb9=11,fb4=1>.

to report and impunity. Environmental rights defenders, Garifuna, and LGBTQIA+ groups are often targeted politically, including through sexual violence or killing as silencing tactics.²⁹ For example, there is no official legal recognition of Garifuna as an Indigenous group in Honduras, and collective rights over their ancestral lands are not recognized or upheld in policy or programs. This further places Garifuna women rights and environmental defenders at risk of GBV up to lethal violence with impunity.^{30,31,32,33}

MEXICO

It is widely recognized that survivors, fearing retaliation, often do not try to make criminal reports of GBV in Mexico and do not have the resources or support to pursue costly justice. Impunity for “offenses against life,” including homicide as well as femicide/feminicide,³⁴ remains very high in Mexico. In 2019, 9 out of 10 cases of intentional homicide (89.6 percent) and 5 out of 10 cases of femicide remained unsolved (51.4 percent), although information could not be obtained from every State of Mexico.³⁵ Monitoring data from CSOs is even less encouraging. Between 2016 and July 2021, official statistics registered 9,997 cases of femicide. Of these, police apprehended perpetrators in 1,074 cases. In the remaining cases, perpetrators remained at large (78.1 percent).³⁶ During this same period, 176 femicide cases resulted in a conviction, translating to 1.8 percent of the total number of cases registered over the five-year period (2016 to 2021).

Taken together, evidence from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico on the prevalence of GBV, under-reporting, and subsequent lack of justice response must be placed in context of historical exclusions of specific survivor groups, including—but not limited to—those among LGBTQIA+, Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and migrant communities.

²⁹ Annual Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Honduras, advanced unedited version distributed 19 March 2018 (A/HRC/37/3/Add.2), para. 10.

³⁰ World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples: Honduras Garifuna. The United Nations Refugee Agency. Accessed December 29, 2022. <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5b9f70157.html>.

³¹ Mallent, Juan Vincent Iborra. The Limits of the Politics of Recognition and the Right to Prior Consultation in Honduras. The Garifuna Case, 2020. Autonomous University of Mexico, Master's thesis. https://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?pid=S0185-26202020000200051&script=sci_arttext.

³² The Case of the Garifuna Community Triunfo de la Cruz vs Honduras, Inter-American Court on Human Rights, 2015. https://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec_305_esp.pdf.

³³ Global Protection Cluster. 2022, September. Protection Analysis Update: Honduras. Accessed December 29, 2022. <https://www.globalprotectioncluster.org/index.php/publications/481/reports/protection-analysis-update/honduras-protection-analysis-update>.

³⁴ The GBV Impunity Regional Study uses the term “femicide,” as this is the standard concept used in English to denote the intentional killing of women or girls on the basis of perceived gender identity within socially conscribed expectations for “feminine” behavior and self-expression in a given context, social group, and point in time. However, it is important to highlight the distinction made between the concept of femicide and femicide/feminicidio in legal terms in Spanish language. In Mexico, for example, it is stipulated under Article 325 of the Mexican Federal Criminal Code that the crime of femicide is committed by anyone who deprives a woman of her life for gender-based reasons. See: https://infosen.senado.gob.mx/sgsp/gaceta/63/3/2018-03-20-1/assets/documentos/PA_PRI_Feminicidio_Codigo_Penal.pdf.

³⁵ Zepeda, G., Jimenez, P. 2020. Impunidad en homicidios dolosos y feminicidios. Reporte 2020. <https://www.impunidadcero.org/articulo.php?id=142&t=impunidad-en-homicidio-doloso-y-feminicidio-reporte-2020>.

³⁶ Los feminicidios en México. 2021. Crowdmap. Accessed December 29, 2022. <https://feminicidiosmx.crowdmap.com/reports/index/?s=1451628000&e=1627793999&z=6&c=15&i=month>.

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS DRIVING GBV IMPUNITY AND IMPACTS ON SURVIVORS

Political economy contextual factors in northern Central America and Mexico worsen GBV impunity and its costly impacts on diverse survivors' recovery and access to justice. Structural contexts vary by country, but similar patterns of GBV impunity persist with consistently more severe socioeconomic impacts on the most excluded survivors, further exacerbated in the COVID-19 pandemic. This section summarizes available evidence on factors driving GBV impunity in northern Central America and Mexico, beginning with structural inequalities in social, economic, and political sectors that historically underpin and shape the severity of GBV impunity risks and impacts for diverse survivors.

Quote 2, from a transgender survivor in Honduras, highlights how structural conditions related to officially enforced COVID-19 lockdowns pushed transgender people into unsafe contexts where law enforcement and security forces disproportionately targeted them and violated their rights:

Quote 2: Transgender woman, GBV survivor, Honduras

“Well, you know, we came to the lockdown, our constitutional rights were suspended, and anyway our companions [transgender women]—faced violence. There were actually killings due to the situation we were facing because [...] the [lack of income support during lockdowns] forced them to go to the streets [to earn money]. And then, in that moment, that was when others [police and military] took advantage and committed violence. I am talking specifically about the military, police agents, because most complaints that we received were because of such persons; they are the human rights perpetrators of our companions when they make arbitrary arrests, only to practically rape them. Because some of them [transgender] are forced to have sex with them [security personnel].”

During the COVID-19 pandemic, some State responses worsened oppressive and unequal conditions that drive GBV impunity in highly violent communities. According to a 2017 study, “The Architecture of Femicide: The State, Inequalities, and Everyday Gender Violence in Honduras,” GBV impunity increases risks of civil insecurity, as it exacerbates socioeconomic and legal gender inequalities and widespread lack of law enforcement and protection against GBV.³⁷ The study highlighted that similar contexts of extreme violence exist in Guatemala, El Salvador, and other countries in the Latin American region, where GBV impunity persists. The study further identifies the State as responsible for direct and indirect social, economic, legal, and political structural inequalities and injustices that together create an enabling environment for femicide, among all forms of GBV.

El Salvador and Honduras are currently in government-declared states of emergency either nationally in the case of El Salvador, or in selected areas in the case of Honduras, due to gang-related crime and violence. Gang-related crime and violence have severe impacts on community members' everyday lives, nevertheless, human rights groups have also documented widespread human rights violations by State security forces in El Salvador and expressed concern that these violations could occur in Honduras. In El Salvador, rights violations have included “arbitrary arrests, enforced disappearances, torture, and other

³⁷ Menjívar, C., & Walsh, S. (2017). The Architecture of Femicide: The State, Inequalities, and Everyday Gender Violence in Honduras. *Latin American Research Review*, 52(2), 221-240. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/latin-american-research-review/article/architecture-of-femicide-the-state-inequalities-and-everyday-gender-violence-in-honduras/7402F6A381FC8BA66F8BEFCA235D6FF5>.

ill-treatment of detainees, and significant due process violations.”³⁸ As a result of the State of Exception in El Salvador, women have lost economic support from husbands and partners who have been rounded up and incarcerated due to suspected engagement in gang-related activities.³⁹ Women also report harassment by security forces now present in and monitoring their communities in the wake of mass incarceration of suspected gang members, and rights defenders.

Service providers and survivors interviewed for our study perceive that there remains a widespread need for GBV prevention, protection, recovery, and justice services even following these states of emergency. However, they report recent, dramatic reductions in their budgets. Publicly reported examples of these budget reductions in El Salvador include reductions to the budgets of the state women’s institute and the celebrated Ciudad Mujer project.⁴⁰⁻⁴¹ Service providers interviewed for our study perceive these budget cuts reflect a belief from policymakers that GBV services are no longer necessary following the crack down on gang activity.

In Honduras, the State of Emergency includes Executive Decree Number Presidente en Consejo de Ministros (PCM) 20-2022, declaring action against gang extortion. With this decree, the Honduran State suspended six constitutional rights, including freedom of movement, the right of association and assembly, and the inviolability of the home. Human rights advocacy groups in the Americas have warned that the State of Emergency increases risks of abuses of authority and could lead to human rights violations. The human rights research and advocacy group, the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), called publicly “for Honduras not to follow in the footsteps of Guatemala and El Salvador, who have governed under states of emergency or national or targeted regimes of exception without ensuring respect for human rights, especially those of the most vulnerable populations such as women and the Garifuna and indigenous peoples.”⁴² The Human Rights Watch (HRW) 2023 World Report highlighted that among the events of 2022 in Honduras, “The justice system’s weak response to corruption, a structural problem in Honduras, and a series of laws hindering prosecutors’ capacity to investigate have enabled impunity for corrupt acts that contribute to human rights violations.” The HRW World Report 2023 further highlighted Honduras’ persistently high rate of femicide and impunity for femicide, according to UN Women.⁴³ Survivors’ perspectives, combined with political economy contextual factors, emphasize how GBV impunity remains embedded in historical and contemporary State and non-State violence and human rights violations. GBV impunity persists as a form of “structural silencing” of diverse survivors.⁴⁴

³⁸ Human Rights Watch. 2022. “We Can Arrest Anyone We Want.” Widespread Human Rights Violations Under El Salvador’s “State of Emergency.” <https://www.hrw.org/report/2022/12/07/we-can-arrest-anyone-we-want/widespread-human-rights-violations-under-el>.

³⁹ Zulver, J. and Méndez, M.J. 2023. El Salvador’s “State of Exception” Makes Women Collateral Damage. May 4, 2023.

<https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/05/04/el-salvador-s-state-of-exception-makes-women-collateral-damage-pub-89686?s=03>.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Segura, E., Girón, G., Flores, L. 2022. Ciudad Mujer: con menos presupuesto, menos servicios y en la sombra. La Prensa Gráfica. <https://www.laprensagrafica.com/elsalvador/Ciudad-Mujer-con-menos-presupuesto-menos-servicios-y---en-la-sombra-20221127-0053.html>, accessed August 3, 2023.

⁴² WOLA. 2022, December 7. Honduras: State of Emergency Puts Human Rights at Risk. Press Release. <https://www.wola.org/2022/12/honduras-state-emergency-human-rights-risk/>.

⁴³ Human Rights Watch. (2023). Honduras: Events of 2022. World Report 2023. Honduras chapter. Accessed 29 June 2023. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/honduras>.

⁴⁴ Scriver, S, Duvvury, H, Ashe, S, Raghavendra, S, O’Donovan, D. 2015, November 20. Conceptualising Violence: A Holistic Approach to Understanding Violence Against Women and Girls. Working Paper. What Works to Prevent Violence. NUI Galway, Ipsos Mori, ICRW, UK AID.

STRUCTURAL GENDER INEQUALITIES

GBV impunity is sustained by a range of social, economic, legal, and political conditions driving structural gender inequalities in the countries of northern Central America and Mexico. Gender unequal structural conditions shape survivors' risks and consequences of GBV across their lifetime. In this section, we compare country-level structural contexts and gender inequalities and synthesize factors that drive GBV impunity persistently at a sub-regional level.

The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index measures gender-based social, economic, and political disparities across four dimensions: Economic Participation and Opportunity; Educational Attainment; Health and Survival; and Political Empowerment. A higher index score indicates more gender parity and a narrower gender gap. Table 2 presents the 2021 results from the countries featured in this report.⁴⁵ Guatemala ranks lowest overall in the LAC region. While educational opportunity and health were near parity in Guatemala, there were significant gaps in economic participation and political empowerment, especially relative to other countries in the LAC region.

Table 2: Global Gender Gap Index, 2021: Results for Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala

COUNTRY	INDEX SCORE	RANK (OUT OF 156 COUNTRIES)
Mexico	76/100	34
El Salvador	74/100	43
Honduras	72/100	67
Guatemala	66/100	122

The lack of official recognition of diverse gender and Indigenous populations in legal frameworks is a common gender inequality that drives GBV impunity across the sub-region. There is also inadequate implementation of existing legal remedies to protect the rights of women, LGBTQIA+, Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and migrant GBV survivors. In 2021, the IACHR found Honduras in violation of the American Convention on Human Rights due to their failure to investigate, identify, and prosecute the perpetrators of Vicky Hernández's murder.⁴⁶

Vicky Hernández was a transgender woman, sex worker, and human rights defender with Colectivo Unidad Color Rosa⁴⁷ in Honduras. She was the victim of an extrajudicial murder on June 28, 2009. In 2021, the InterAmerican Court on Human Rights provided the landmark ruling that the Honduran government was responsible for her murder.⁴⁸ Transgender rights groups submitted her case to the IACHR due to Honduras's lack of compliance with their recommendations. This includes the failure to investigate her death as a transfemicide and identify or prosecute her murderer.⁴⁹ Hernández's transfemicide is part of a larger context of impunity for lethal violence in Honduras against LGBTQIA+

⁴⁵ World Economic Forum. 2021, March. "The Global Gender Gap Report 2021." https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf.

⁴⁶ LGBTI Rights. IACHR finds Honduras in violation of the rights of murdered trans human rights defender. 2021, July 8. <https://ishr.ch/latest-updates/lgbti-rights-iachr-finds-honduras-in-violation-of-the-rights-of-murdered-trans-human-rights-defender/>.

⁴⁷ See Colectivo Unidad Color Rosa website: <https://cucrhn.org/>.

⁴⁸ BBC News. 2021. Vicky Hernández: Court Says Honduras to Blame for Trans Women's Murders. Accessed June 8, 2023. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-57650995>.

⁴⁹ Honoring Vicky Hernández | RFK Human Rights. 2020, November 11. ROBERT F. KENNEDY HUMAN RIGHTS. Accessed February 1, 2022. <https://rfkhumanrights.org/press/honoring-vicky-hern%C3%A1ndez>.

individuals, especially transgender and sex worker rights defenders. Out of the seven women who founded Colectivo Unidad Color Rosa, six have been murdered.⁵⁰ Relevant studies situate GBV impunity within a continuum of State and non-State violence and impunity. They also highlight how structural gender, socioeconomic, legal, and political inequalities threaten national security and development. These studies highlight how structural gender inequalities and GBV increase the risks of civil insecurity and intra-State conflict.^{51,52}

EROSION OF DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND NORMS

Global and regional trends of democratic erosion drive and exacerbate GBV impunity within wider forms of gendered structural, political, and human rights impunity.^{53,54} Democratic backsliding, or the gradual dismantling of democracy by popularly elected illiberal leaders, is evident to varying degrees in the region. Although all four countries that are the focus of this report are formally considered democracies, a 2022 Congressional Research Service report that assembled independent indices for democracy from NGOs found that each is considered by at least one index to have concerning autocratic tendencies.⁵⁵

There is an increasingly broad trend in LAC in which some elected leaders strategically take over legislative and judicial systems or co-opt the military to maintain their power, which promotes impunity.⁵⁶ Democratic norms erode as these leaders further consolidate their power, and there are few formal mechanisms to hold them accountable for delivering basic rights, including the right to protection and recovery support services for GBV survivors. Without civil society space or resources, diverse GBV survivors are silenced, and impunity is perpetuated.

CORRUPTION

Women and all people of diverse SOGIESC are often among direct and indirect victims of corruption in the form of gender-based discrimination and gross violations of human rights involving GBV perpetration by State and private sector actors. Corruption can also drive discrimination in access to GBV justice and accountability for protection and recovery support services.^{57,58,59} Mistrust in corrupt institutions poses

⁵⁰ LGBTI Rights | ISHR intervenes in regional legal proceedings against Honduras in case of transfemicide of defender Vicky Hernández. 2020, November 11. ISHR. <https://ishr.ch/latest-updates/lgbti-rights-ishr-intervenes-regional-legal-proceedings-against-honduras-case-transfemicide/>.

⁵¹ Caprioli, M. 2005. Primed for Violence: The Role of Gender Equality in Predicting Internal Conflict. *International Studies Quarterly* 49, 161-178. Melander, E. 2005. Gender Equality and Intrastate Armed Conflict. *International Studies Quarterly* 49, 695-714.

⁵² True, J. 2011. The Political Economy of Women's Human Rights: Problems of Gender, Violence, Development and Labour. Oxford University Press. <https://academic.oup.com/british-academy-scholarship-online/book/20139/chapter-abstract/179141902/redirectedFrom=fulltext>.

⁵³ Roggeband, C., and Krizsan, A. 2019. Democratic Backsliding and Backlash Against Women's Rights: Understanding the Current Challenges for Feminist Politics. Expert Group Meeting. Background paper for the Sixty-fourth Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW64) 'Beijing +25: Current context, emerging issues and prospects for gender equality and women's rights,' New York. <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/64/EGM/Roggeband%20C%20and%20A%20Krizsanbackground%20paperfinalEGMB25BGPI.pdf>.

⁵⁴ Sosa, L. 2021. Beyond gender equality? Anti-gender campaigns and the erosion of human rights and democracy. *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights*, 39(1), 3-10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0924051921996697>.

⁵⁵ Democracy in Latin America and the Caribbean: A Compilation of Selected Indices. 2022. Accessed December 29, 2022. <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R46016.pdf>.

⁵⁶ NORC at the University of Chicago. 2022. Democratic Backsliding and Authoritarian Resurgence in Latin America. Summary of Findings from an Expert Roundtable. <https://www.norc.org/PDFs/Democratic%20Backsliding%20Panel/Democratic%20Backsliding%20Panel%20-%20Brief%20-%20English.pdf>.

⁵⁷ UNODC. Gendered Impacts of Corruption. Model Series on Anti-Corruption. Accessed December 29, 2022. <https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/anti-corruption/module-8/key-issues/gendered-impacts-of-corruption.html>.

⁵⁸ EBA. 2020. Sextortion: Corruption and Gender-based Violence. https://eba.se/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Sextortion_webb.pdf.

⁵⁹ Transparency International. 2014. Policy Brief 01/2014: Gender, Equality and Corruption: What are the Linkages? <https://www.transparency.org/en/publications/policy-position-01-2014-gender-equality-and-corruption-what-are-the-linkage>.

barriers to GBV survivors’ access to justice, protection, and recovery. Discriminatory social norms and structural forces that drive women and excluded groups to be most affected by GBV also make them more vulnerable to weak and corrupt State bureaucracies that under-invest in GBV survivor-centered protection and recovery services, justice response, and prevention initiatives. For example, across the types of corruption that the Latin America Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) 2014 survey measured, women and girls were more likely to be victims of corrupt abuses of power and position in the education and health sectors, which can include emotional, physical, and sexual violence perpetrated by authority figures or health workers.⁶⁰

To give an overview of perceived corruption in northern Central America and Mexico, we provide some available data below. The Corruption Perception Index (CPI) provides yearly data on public sector corruption in 180 countries and territories. The CPI defines corruption as “an abuse of entrusted power for private gain” and highlights both corruption and human rights “pandemic backsliding”⁶¹ during the COVID-19 pandemic. A country’s score is the perceived level of public sector corruption on a scale of 0–100, where 0 means “highly corrupt” and 100 means “very clean.” Table 3 presents results from the 2021 CPI, which demonstrates how each country in the region suffers from moderate to high levels of corruption. Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras each established anti-corruption panels with high-level international cooperation over the last 20 years. Some of these, especially the CICIG in Guatemala, resulted in successful prosecutions of officials, but each country nonetheless struggles with persistent corruption.

Table 3: Corruption Perception Index, 2021

COUNTRY	INDEX SCORE	RANK (OUT OF 180 COUNTRIES)
El Salvador	34	115
Mexico	31	124
Guatemala	25	150
Honduras	23	157

Survivors interviewed under LACLEARN’s Regional Study of GBV Impunity expressed their view that ongoing human rights violations by police and security forces represent a kind of corruption, or inappropriate use of institutional status and power. Survivors expressed a perspective that GBV impunity and corruption are mutually exacerbating processes. In other words, state security forces feel empowered to commit or ignore GBV given the presence of corruption throughout their institutions, and persistent impunity for GBV among these actors reinforces the notion that other corrupt behaviors are acceptable.

⁶⁰ Pérez, Orlando J., et al. 2015. Political Culture of Democracy in Honduras and in the Americas, 2014: Democratic Governance across 10 Years of the Americas Barometer. Vanderbilt University. LAPOP.

https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/honduras/AB2014_Honduras_Country_Report_English_V2_W_082515.pdf.

⁶¹ V-dem (Varieties of Democracy). 2022. Pandemic Backsliding: Democracy During COVID-19 (March 2020 to June 2021). Pandemic Backsliding Project. <https://www.v-dem.net/pandem.html>.

ARMED CONFLICT, ORGANIZED CRIME, AND GANGS

Complex situations of armed conflict, organized crime, and gang control intersect with structural gender inequalities and corruption to increase risks of GBV and impunity.^{62,63} Both El Salvador (1979–1992) and Guatemala (1960–1996) experienced a civil war within living memory. Cases of sexual violence by State security forces, often against Indigenous women, remain largely unresolved. However, GBV survivor groups have advocated for justice in national courts to bring about some restitution and reparations for women survivors of sexual violence in armed conflict. In 2022, Guatemalan Indigenous women achieved a national court ruling that during the 36-year civil war, paramilitary patrolmen raped and sexually exploited Mayan Achi women. Five former “Civil Self-Defense Patrol” members of a paramilitary group received court sentences for 30 years in prison for sexual violence crimes committed in the 1980s.⁶⁴ Many Indigenous women GBV survivor groups in northern Central American countries with conflict histories are still seeking justice for sexual violence as a tactic that military and security forces used against them.

Since the 1990s, northern Central America and Mexico have struggled with legacies of conflict, including sexual violence, and the influence of drug and weapons trafficking, organized crime, and the proliferation of gangs in highly violent communities. Democratically elected governments have failed to address these issues, which combine with structural gender inequalities to create conditions for GBV impunity.⁶⁵ Counterinsurgency groups with military and intelligence forces have not been dismantled in areas where armed conflicts have occurred, and they engage in illegal activities such as drug and human trafficking, including sex trafficking and exploitation of women and girls, and arms trade, exacerbating all forms of violence, including GBV.⁶⁶ In Mexico, cartels control entire areas, making it difficult for the government to maintain control and community security.

In each of the northern Central America countries and Mexico, gangs have displaced the government in some communities, filling a vacuum in public services by providing education, health care, and relative security. However, cisgender and transgender women become targets of gang-related GBV when they live in or migrate through gang-controlled areas. This GBV can arise due to relationships with a gang member or simply becoming caught in inter-gang conflicts. The risk of experiencing gang-related GBV can be even higher for poor people, whose vulnerability may drive them to the drug trade or sex work, or racial minorities who can be targets of racist attacks. Survivors of gang-related GBV experience impunity due to a power imbalance with gang members in gang-controlled areas.

Militarization of law enforcement in the mid 2000s in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala contributed to human rights violations in these countries, including sexual violence and femicide among other forms of GBV.⁶⁷ The 2009 coup d'état in Honduras increased the military's power through greater participation in political decision-making and in law enforcement. Militarized and institutionally

⁶² UNODC. 2022. Organized Crime and Gender: Issues Relating to the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime. https://sherloc.unodc.org/cld/uploads/pdf/Issue_Paper_Organized_Crime_and_Gender_1.pdf.

⁶³ IDLO and GWI. 2022. Survivor-Centered Justice for Gender-based Violence in Complex Situations. <https://www.idlo.int/publications/survivor-centred-justice-gender-based-violence-complex-situations>.

⁶⁴ Impunity Watch. 2022. Guatemala: Indigenous women celebrate historic ruling on war-time sexual violence. <https://www.impunitywatch.org/guatemala-maya-achi-verdict/>.

⁶⁵ USAID Guatemala Final Performance Evaluation of Project Against Violence and Impunity. 2012.

⁶⁶ Shifter, M. 2012. Countering Criminal Violence in Central America. Council Special Report No. 64, April 2012. Council on Foreign Relations: Washington, DC.

⁶⁷ Argueta, O, and Walter, K. 2020. La función política de los militares en Centroamérica. <https://sv.boell.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/Funci%C3%B3n%20Militares%20Centroam%C3%A9rica.%20APAZ-hbs.pdf>.

empowered law enforcement institutions represent yet another armed group in each country that wields physical and political power that exacerbates GBV impunity. Powerful local actors also target women human rights and environmental defenders with intimidation and violence when they perceive these groups' activities as a threat to their interests. While human rights and environmental defenders do not play any role within powerful criminal organizations, their risks lie in their proximity, be it in territorial, affective, labor, or sociopolitical terms.⁶⁸

MIGRATION

A confluence of conditions, including chronic community violence and GBV among them, have driven hundreds of thousands to migrate from the region in the past five years.⁶⁹ Migrants face corruption and exploitation, including sexual exploitation, along their journey to better opportunities and safety. Women in particular face “sextortion,” or sexual extortion from “coyotes” who are hired to lead them across international borders from northern Central America and Mexico, into the United States.⁷⁰ Once reaching the U.S. border in Mexico, many women work in sex work until they have enough money to make the border crossing. There are no specific legal frameworks for prosecuting sextortion in the region. A recent study assessed that legal structures and institutions fail migrants, especially women and girls, and exacerbate their socioeconomic and legal vulnerabilities along their journey from northern Central America and Mexico to the United States.⁷¹

⁶⁸ PNUD. 2021. La violencia contra las mujeres y niñas en contextos de crimen organizado. Centroamérica, Colombia, México y República Dominicana. Iniciativa Spotlight—Programa Regional para América Latina. PNUD.

https://www.spotlightinitiative.org/sites/default/files/publication/E3_Resumen_FINAL.pdf.

⁶⁹ Central America's Turbulent Northern Triangle. June 2022. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/background/central-americas-turbulent-northern-triangle>.

⁷⁰ Feigenblatt, H. 2020. Breaking the Silence around sextortion: the links between power, sex, and corruption. Transparency International. <https://transparency.org.au/publications/breaking-the-silence-around-sextortion/>.

⁷¹ Menjivar, C., and Drysdale Walsh, S. 2019. Chapter 3: Gender, Violence, and Migration. Handbook on Critical Geographies of Migration, edited by K. Mitchell, R. Jones, and J.L. Fluri. Social and Political Science 2019. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781786436030>.

GBV SURVIVORS' OWN DEFINITIONS OF IMPUNITY, HUMAN RIGHTS, AND ACCOUNTABILITY

GBV SURVIVOR DEFINITIONS OF IMPUNITY

GBV impunity has a disproportionate impact on survivors who have experienced long histories of social, legal, economic, and political marginalization and exclusion in northern Central America and Mexico. Through direct engagement with survivors and staff who work with survivors, it becomes clear that the lack of accountability for GBV is part of a broader continuum of persistent impunity for gender-based crimes, gender inequality, and racism perpetuated by State and non-State actors. This continuum is also linked to historical structural socioeconomic, legal, and political exclusion and long-standing government failures to ensure basic human rights for diverse national populations.

Survivors and service providers witness how GBV impunity intersects with broader systemic issues and forms of marginalization, which exacerbate the impact of GBV and create significant barriers for survivors to access protection, recovery support, and justice. Therefore, addressing GBV impunity in northern Central America and Mexico requires a holistic approach that tackles the multiple intersecting factors that contribute to systemic impunity and marginalization across diverse sectors and the populations they are responsible for serving.

Diverse survivors interviewed often describe GBV impunity as “being ignored” by the State. Being ignored manifests through experiences of reporting a crime to law enforcement and filing “case after case,” in survivors’ words, with little to no police or judicial response. Lack of response ranges from an absence of police documentation of GBV crime reports, investigations, and arrests, to little or no compensation, restitution, reparations, or justice for survivors. Quote 3 highlights how judicial systems and processes are not survivor-centered despite established obligations that judges order reparations and restitution to GBV survivors:

Quote 3: Government institution staff member (Country omitted for interview participant confidentiality.)

“In the case of violence against women, the Belem do Para⁷² and CEDAW⁷³ conventions establish the obligation that judges must make reparations, the obligation to repair all forms of discrimination or violence against women, and that is an imperative and must be done. What happens is that we have a justice system in this country that is more focused on penalties of the perpetrator. Unfortunately, criminal matters are thought of from a point of view of the accused, the accused is the center of the criminal process, but the victim is forgotten. That is a practice that has been generated, but we have the tools to change this paradigm and focus on the victim and make reparations.”

Survivors believe that law enforcement and the justice systems’ disregard for their needs and rights is based on structural socioeconomic inequalities and inequitable social norms. They feel that inequality and injustice stems from socioeconomic and political factors and intersecting discrimination, such as

⁷² See OAS. Belém do Pará Convention. Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence Against Women. <https://oas.org/en/mesecvi/convention.asp>.

⁷³ United Nations General Assembly. 1979. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women [CEDAW]. New York. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>. El Salvador ratified CEDAW August 19, 1980; Guatemala, August 12, 1982; Honduras, March 3, 1983; and Mexico, March 23, 1981: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?Treaty=CEDAW&Lang=en.

sexism, heteronormativity, classism, racism, and xenophobia, that impact cisgender women, LGBTQIA+, Afro-descendant, Indigenous, and migrant individuals disproportionately. Survivors describe how multiple forms of structural inequality are embedded in social, legal, economic, and political institutions and systems, leading to inequitable access to services and discriminatory behaviors across both institutional and societal spheres. In Quote 4, a law enforcement official reflects on how socioeconomic inequality, injustice, and GBV impunity intersect.

Quote 4: Law enforcement staff member, woman (Country omitted for interview participant confidentiality.)

“Interviewer: Do economic inequalities influence GBV impunity? [If yes, how?]

Participant: Economic inequalities? In my opinion yes, they do, because, you know, as a police officer I can make a difference, I can do that, but to change the mentality of each person is a decision of each one. [Y]es, it [economic inequality] has a lot to do [with GBV impunity]. [T]here have been cases in which, for example, [if] I have money, then I can fix anything. [O]r you go to file a record, but because you have money the authorities are going to listen to the one with money and the one that is poor, that came from far away, they do not pay any attention [to them] and say, ‘No, this woman bothers too much.’ Then yes, economic inequalities have a lot to do [with GBV impunity] because that inequality has always happened, sometimes priority is given to someone that is economically stable and not to someone with few economic resources.”

Survivors see the State as responsible for addressing GBV impunity and protecting the social, economic, legal, political, and cultural rights of those most affected by it. They also repeatedly highlight widespread lack of political will and government institutional interest to address GBV and impunity as structural and systemic problems both within the judiciary and law enforcement, as well as across economic, health, education, social work, and other public sectors. In Quote 5, a GBV survivor explains what “impunity” means to her and other survivors:

Quote 5: GBV survivor, cisgender woman, Mexico

“We know perfectly well what impunity is. A failed state, a corrupt, and misogynistic system of delivery of justice. For us, impunity is living within our own country as prisoners and not having the guarantees to be able to get out of here.”

Survivors also highlight how critical CSO support to survivors remains in the absence of accessible and non-discriminatory State services. They explain further how organized crime and gang control in communities and local markets contribute to GBV impunity and hinder institutional and CSO support service provision to survivors. Survivors emphasize that gang control in communities worsens both GBV and structural socioeconomic, legal, and political discrimination against and structural exclusion of women, especially transgender women.

Quote 6: GBV survivor, CSO staff member, transgender woman (Country omitted for interview participant confidentiality)

“I had to do different focus groups with different people, even with gangs. Why? [Was it] to avoid discrimination and violence against our transgender community because last year we were affected by organized criminal groups because they demanded our companions to sell, I mean, drug dealing, and if they [transgender] refused, gangs threaten to kill them? Then we had to face the situation, assuming the risk of talking with these gang members and explain to them why people from our community cannot take part [in drug dealing] because there was a risk of being killed or incarcerated. We reached an agreement with the gangs in which they will stay on their side and us in ours, without bothering each other and without going where they are because in doing so the gangs would consider us as their property.”

Survivors identify several factors that contribute to GBV impunity in gang-controlled communities. These factors include the absence of survivor protection, post-GBV recovery and support services, and safe income-generating opportunities in gang-held territories. Survivors describe how gangs use GBV within commercial activities, forcing women and people of diverse SOGIESC into drug and sex trades. Such coercion helps gangs maintain control and prevents survivors from reporting GBV crimes to law enforcement. Survivors and service providers report that, unfortunately, the State often fails to invest sufficiently in CSOs in gang-controlled communities to provide post-GBV protection and recovery support services to diverse survivors. Survivors and service providers describe how they are largely left to navigate complex community security dynamics in areas of gang control on their own without effective government support.

SURVIVOR VIEWS ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND GBV IMPUNITY

Survivors share a range of views on how human rights violations and GBV impunity intersect, often fueled by discriminatory social and institutional norms that compound gender inequality. Quote 7 illustrates how socioeconomic inequities, as well as language and geographic disparities, in critical services limit access to justice in Mexico.

Quote 7: CSO staff member, woman, Mexico

“On the one hand, [we need to pay attention] to the conditions in which women live on a day-to-day basis, which reinforce a scenario of impunity. Why? Because women in the mountain regions do not have access to economic resources or even transportation to get to the prosecutor’s offices, one. Two, because many of the women in the highlands speak another language, and therefore the issue of the language barrier and the non-recognition of other languages in the country has been one of the obstacles. Three, obviously there is also the issue of deep abandonment of the towns because there are no campaigns or public policies aimed at talking about violence against women in these areas, which are deeply marginalized. Just to give an example, if we think that there are more than 500 Indigenous peoples throughout the country, we are talking about a situation that affects a lot of women.”

Numerous survivors emphasize State responsibilities to deliver and uphold inalienable, basic social, economic, legal, and political human rights for the entire population. As a survivor from Honduras describes:

Quote 8: GBV survivor, Honduras

“The rights that we defend regardless of what race, sex, origin, ethnicity they belong to, they are human rights that belong to us from birth until we die, we could say, we also know that human rights are not rejectable. Humans cannot reject human rights.”

Many see GBV as motivated based on norms devaluing people of diverse SOGIESC. This is particularly true of cisgender and transgender people who identify as women. As one interview participant describes:

Quote 9: Interview participant, Mexico

“Not because of some question of [...] some religious or political issue, [...], but precisely because they are women or because they represent being women. And this implies that they [women] are susceptible, subject, to be able to be violated because they consider themselves from a macho [or machist] perspective, as a second category [i.e., less powerful or valued in society than men].”

Survivors of diverse SOGIESC report that GBV and impunity are perpetrated by often-chauvinistic men who adhere to narrow gender norms and societal expectations for women’s and men’s behavior and perceived roles and value in society. Social norms that reinforce men’s socioeconomic and political dominance and higher value in society than cisgender women enable power abuses against all people perceived as less socially valuable than dominant men. GBV impunity, including victim blaming, then forms one of many patriarchal tactics to regulate and silence the voices, social agency, and societal value ascribed to cisgender women and people of diverse SOGIESC as inferior to men. One survivor from El Salvador describes, for example:

Quote 10: GBV survivor, El Salvador

“Gender-based violence means that, if I am a woman, I [...] have limits in my life [...]. I must be subject to regulations and social norms. [...] For example, being a woman implies that [...] I do not have a greater authority, and that my voice is not heard in front of men, [...] but if a man says [my ideas], then they are ‘great.’”

Survivors describe layers of discrimination and multiple types of gendered violence experienced over the life course, with femicide as the most extreme form of domination and silencing. A survivor from Mexico remarks:

Quote 11: GBV Survivor, Mexico

“Femicide violence is a process of violence, or of many types of violence or other forms of violence, which underlie throughout the life of a woman.”

Several interview participants shared that, while it should be the State’s responsibility to guarantee human rights, they cannot always rely on the State to do so. Frequently when a survivor wants to file a complaint, government institutional staff violate and deny their rights. For example, a survivor remarks:

Quote 12: Transgender woman GBV survivor, Guatemala

“All rights for people have to be respected, but they are not respected [...]. The same institutions violate your rights, or they want to make you believe that you do not have rights.”

A survivor from El Salvador outlines how governments reproduce and perpetuate GBV impunity, highlighting how State institutions also discriminate against cisgender women when seeking to file a report:

Quote 13: Cisgender GBV survivor, El Salvador

“In the Government, when one goes to file a complaint or something for gender violence, for harassment, sometimes they are not taken into account. We are not taken into account.”

Similarly, some survivors also recognize how the State may not respect women’s human rights uniquely in cases of reproductive coercion as GBV. Women in El Salvador have been imprisoned for spontaneous abortions:

Quote 14: Cisgender women GBV Survivor, El Salvador

“A woman was deprived of liberty [i.e., incarcerated in prison] because she allegedly aborted her child, that is, because she had aborted, because she had ‘murdered her own child,’ when the circumstances were not like that.”

Survivors also emphasize how structurally excluded survivors, such as those from LGBTQIA+ communities, are disproportionately impacted by a widespread lack of access to basic social, economic, health, legal, and political rights and discrimination that perpetuates structural gender inequalities and GBV. One LGBTQIA+ survivor from Mexico explains:

Quote 15: LGBTQIA+ GBV survivor, Mexico

“Human rights are for people who have money, who have power. Because [LGBTQIA+] people, according to the rulers of society, do not have rights. [They] take away the rights. We demand though, we do not ask for it. We demand that we be given the same rights as a heteronormative person. Because the truth of human rights here in Mexico leaves much to be desired.”

Gender-based hate crimes become normalized with persistent impunity through frequent hate speech targeting LGBTQIA+ people within each of the four countries. Hate speech heightens risks and consequences of both GBV and impunity against LGBTQIA+ people, activists, and human rights defenders, according to survivors interviewed. An LGBTQIA+ community member who survived GBV in Guatemala emphasizes:

Quote 16: LGBTQIA+ GBV survivor, Guatemala

“[The] violence must be addressed from breaking stereotypes and prejudices in society and the hatred they have for [LGBTQIA+ people]. A lot of work must be done on the human rights of these people because just because they are from this community, they are killed or suffer violent deaths.”

Survivors are aware that individuals who do not conform to societal expectations of gender expression face greater GBV impunity and severe impacts. They reported that discrimination against LGBTQIA+ individuals is common, including transphobia and homophobia, in families, communities, schools, workplaces, hospitals, and government offices. One LGBTQIA+ survivor from El Salvador described that:

Quote 17: LGBTQIA+ GBV survivor, El Salvador

“Many times, violence begins with our parents, and not only with people outside of the home and as a result of when sexual identity [develops]. [Violence] starts with family. The family is where the violence begins. They begin to violate you for having different sexual tendencies [or gendered self-expression].”

Lack of legal or societal recognition of diverse SOGIESC justifies and normalizes multiple forms of GBV experienced by LGBTQIA+ survivors. Another survivor explains:

Quote 18: Lesbian cisgender woman GBV Survivor, Guatemala

“[T]he man who is feminine, the trans[gender] girl, the person who does not meet a binary parameter, that is the population that is subjected to violence and has to do with this binary pattern of the same society that is so conservative, sexist, and retrograde.”

Survivors interviewed characterize GBV impunity as a national crisis that requires urgent emergency protection and recovery support, justice, and prevention programs. They emphasize the importance of transparency and accountability in government and CSO service delivery, monitoring, and evaluation.

GBV SURVIVORS’ DEFINITIONS OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Survivors of GBV offer valuable insights into a survivor-centered approach to GBV accountability that prioritizes non-discrimination, diversity, inclusion, safety, dignity, confidentiality, and respect, whether they stay in their home community or migrate. Key themes emerged from interviews with survivors from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico. They viewed GBV accountability as interconnected with social, economic, legal, political, and cultural human rights and highlighted the need for a multisectoral approach.

Survivors stress the importance of a transparent and accountable State that upholds fundamental rights and addresses the contextual factors contributing to GBV impunity. They also emphasize the need for families, communities, and services to consider survivors' diverse experiences and rights to equity, dignity, respect, confidentiality, justice, restitution, and reparations. Survivors call for consistent State compliance with international human rights court rulings, including those of the IACHR, and national laws that implement international standards on GBV. Non-discriminatory, survivor-centered judicial

processes, protection, and recovery support services, and GBV prevention are urgent needs that require resources and sustained attention.

A recurring theme in interviews with diverse survivors in northern Central America and Mexico is the State's responsibility for implementing, monitoring, and evaluating GBV survivor-centered, trauma-informed legal investigative protocols and protection and recovery services. Survivors emphasize that accountability for GBV should involve thorough investigation and prosecution of every reported case, with the State providing free legal aid, restitution, and comprehensive psychosocial, medical, shelter, and economic support services. In Honduras, a survivor representative specified that GBV accountability should include access to "tools and institutions for justice," such as a legal process for prosecuting perpetrators and appropriate sentencing.

Meanwhile, other survivors stress the need for transparency and publicly accessible information on GBV case processes and outcomes. A public database of cases with measures to safeguard privacy and confidentiality of personal information would enable survivors, loved ones of femicide victims, and advocates to monitor the progress of similar cases and justice outcomes. As a GBV survivor in Mexico explained, the State should:

Quote 19: GBV survivor, Mexico

"[...] be accountable to the citizens: show how many sentences, how many cases are already under investigation, how many people are locked up. I think it would enormously change the way we are seeing justice in Mexico right now, right? I think that is what is needed because, here, nobody is accountable to anyone. They do not say how many sentences there are for such a crime or how many are about to receive a sentence."

Beyond tools for making data on GBV impunity publicly visible, there must further be mechanisms to monitor transparency and accountability in judiciary responses to GBV cases. As a GBV survivor in Guatemala further noted:

Quote 20: GBV survivor, Guatemala

"What I see is that tools are generated to collect the information, but officials do not use them."

Survivors in Guatemala and El Salvador often rely on community-based groups or CSOs for legal and resource support, due to inadequate institutional response from the State. These groups provide psychological counseling, health care, shelter, job training, financial and material assistance, and access to phones or computers while pursuing formal justice. Community-based groups and grassroots movements are essential in responding to GBV impunity, raising awareness, seeking justice, and providing recovery support services and material assistance, while contributing to longer-term GBV prevention efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO USAID FOR IMPROVING SURVIVOR-CENTERED GBV ACCOUNTABILITY

Our topline recommendation is for USAID to operationalize a survivor-centered approach across the USAID Program Cycle to integrate GBV accountability throughout its programming.⁷⁴ This will involve working throughout the Program Cycle to integrate strategies and investments that survivors and service providers articulated would constitute meaningful GBV accountability. By following the leadership of diverse GBV survivors and service providers, USAID can ensure that their efforts are survivor centered and therefore can be more effective in addressing GBV impunity.

GBV accountability means providing non-discriminatory, survivor-centered protection and recovery services, justice response services, and prevention initiatives engaging structurally underserved groups.

Survivor-centered GBV programming actions will involve strengthening or reforming government and CSO services to become inclusive and accountable to diverse survivors. By doing so, USAID can contribute to improving accountable services for all GBV survivors, including those disproportionately affected by impunity and structural gender inequalities. Improving GBV accountability can become both a consequence and catalyst of greater social, economic, and political gender equality and justice at all levels of society.

We present two levels of recommendations. The first is for USAID Missions and regional programs operating in northern Central America and Mexico and relates to promoting GBV accountability along three strategic intervention pathways. The second is for the LAC Bureau and technical advisors in Washington D.C. who are well placed to strengthen technical and funding support for holistic, cross-sectoral integration of GBV accountability initiatives across the region. All of these recommendations are in line with the key pillars, results framework, and foreign assistance reporting indicators of the **United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to GBV Globally 2022**. They further contribute to LAC Bureau implementation of **USAID’s 2023 Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Policy**, which lays critical groundwork for addressing the structural gender inequalities that underpin and perpetuate GBV impunity.

Although all these recommendations would help improve GBV accountability, it is not necessary to pursue all of them to achieve meaningful improvements. Implementing even one recommendation will help USAID improve accountability and advance its policy goals. Greater improvements are possible as more recommendations are implemented, particularly when strategically coordinated. For all recommendations, we suggest that USAID incorporate best practices in **survivor-centered, locally led** GBV programming as specified in how-to notes funded under USAID’s Collective Action to Reduce GBV (CARE-GBV) activity. Additional sector-specific best practices are available in CARE-GBV’s “foundational elements” brief on **addressing GBV through DRG programs**.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ USAID. 2022. ADS Chapter 201. Program Cycle Operational Policy. Functional Series 201—Programming. <https://www.usaid.gov/about-us/agency-policy/series-200/201>.

⁷⁵ All three of these resources are available on CARE-GBV’s website: <https://makingcents.com/project/collective-action-to-reduce-gbv/>. Last accessed September 7, 2023

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR USAID MISSIONS AND PROGRAMMING IN NORTHERN CENTRAL AMERICA AND MEXICO

For missions and regional programs that support activities that engage directly with GBV survivors, we offer recommended strategies and investments organized and prioritized into the three intervention pathways to improve GBV accountability, as defined by survivors and service providers.




Strategic intervention pathways to improve GBV accountability		
1. GBV survivor-centered protection and recovery support services	2. GBV survivor-centered justice response	3. GBV survivor-centered prevention initiatives

Survivors and service providers that serve them consider all the recommended investments to be needed. Yet, USAID operates within practical constraints that may preclude Missions and regional programs from implementing the recommendations wholly. Implementing one or more recommendations in any of the three strategic pathways would meaningfully contribute to GBV accountability and demonstrate implementation of the 2022 United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to GBV Globally.

Where prioritization of an intervention pathway is required, we recommend that Missions focus in the near term on GBV Survivor-centered Protection and Recovery Services (pathway 1). This prioritization will help ensure that urgent resources and support are provided more directly to the vast majority of GBV survivors in northern Central America and Mexico, who are unlikely ever to file a police report or pursue a court case under current socioeconomic, legal, and political conditions. Survivors require protection and recovery support services to heal, rebuild their lives, or build a new life elsewhere, often before they can consider making a formal police report or pursuing costly justice in court. Even though the recommended strategies and investments within Pathway 1 focus on protection and recovery support, they can contribute indirectly to improving survivors' willingness and capacities to seek justice.

We place access to justice initiatives as a secondary priority among strategic intervention pathways for the mid and long term. While legal and justice sector reform, as well as GBV prevention interventions, are essential for building GBV accountability in northern Central America and Mexico, these interventions will require longer time horizons to produce measurable outcomes. It will similarly take a long time to shift the social, economic, legal, and political conditions required for building GBV survivor-centered accountability. Conditions that must change include promoting more gender equitable social norms and reforming legal and judicial sectors.

In the meantime, survivors require immediate protection and recovery support services, as well as emergency socioeconomic empowerment programs. These immediate interventions are crucial for addressing the urgent needs of survivors while long-term interventions are implemented. If desired, readers may skip directly to the intervention pathway most relevant to their needs using the links below:

-  **Intervention Pathway 1: GBV survivor-centered protection and recovery services**
-  **Intervention Pathway 2: GBV survivor-centered justice services**
-  **Intervention Pathway 3: GBV survivor-centered Prevention initiatives**

INTERVENTION PATHWAY 1: GBV SURVIVOR-CENTERED PROTECTION AND RECOVERY SERVICES

Strategy 1: Expand and improve shelters with safe, inclusive spaces and safe, affordable housing assistance for diverse GBV survivors and their dependents

Investment 1.1: Expand access to safe shelters and safe, affordable housing assistance in urban and rural areas for all GBV survivors of diverse SOGIESC and their dependents who need emergency protection or rehousing. Ensure inclusive safe spaces within shelters with culturally contextualized case management services for referrals, learning, dialogue, and socioeconomic empowerment of historically excluded and underserved groups. Improve safety and protection also for shelter staff from attacks from known and unknown perpetrators.

Strategy 2: Improve and evaluate standard operating procedures in the health sector and health-judiciary coordination for investigating GBV crimes, including femicide and transfemicide

Investment 2.1: Develop, implement, and evaluate standard operating procedures for frontline GBV service providers, including the coordination of health and justice services for evidence documentation that consider the distinct needs of diverse, historically underserved victims and survivors.

Strategy 3: Improve and evaluate government-provided GBV protection and recovery support services

Investment 3.1: Strengthen public education communication strategies to increase awareness of available GBV support services provided by national and sub-national institutions, including legal aid; mental health, including post-traumatic stress and vicarious trauma counseling; social support; medical and child support; economic empowerment; scholarships; or job training, among others.

Investment 3.2: Conduct an audit of institutional GBV survivor support services to guide future budget allocations. Establish standard operating procedures and a regulatory framework for every sector serving GBV survivors, including a transparent budget for operations. Implement mechanisms for the participation and accompaniment of civil society to promote transparency, legitimacy, and dialogue between the State and historically underserved survivor groups.

Investment 3.3: Evaluate and improve institutional GBV survivor and witness protection programs with inclusive shelter protocols and practices, ensuring the involvement of LGBTQIA+, Indigenous, migrant, and persons with disabilities. Improve accessibility, funding management for survivor relocation, and confidentiality and safety of survivors and witnesses.

Investment 3.4: Invest in and monitor economic recovery assistance programs for GBV survivors of diverse and underserved groups. Ensure economic recovery support programs and economic development programs engaging women of diverse SOGIESC assess and mitigate ongoing GBV risks related to economic activities.

Strategy 4: Increase CSO resourcing to expand inclusive, locally led, survivor-centered GBV recovery support services

Investment 4.1: Provide increased resources to CSOs and support for CSO leadership, management, and governance to expand direct service provision to diverse and underserved survivors, including in isolated areas, and foster organizations sustainability. Offer post-GBV wraparound care services in the short and long term to support survivors. CSOs play a critical role in providing essential services to GBV survivors and their families, including psychosocial, medical, legal aid, material and economic support, law enforcement, and protective accompaniment to health clinics and judicial courts. These services are crucial in ensuring that survivors have access to the necessary protection and recovery support while considering formal justice.

Investment 4.2: Ensure access to non-discriminatory health care and education programs for transgender, Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and migrant women. Make sure that GBV-related services and programs are culturally competent and accessible in each underserved community, including the provision of materials and services in the languages of Indigenous and migrant communities. Use inclusive, non-discriminatory, and non-stigmatizing language when working with GBV survivors of historically excluded backgrounds.

Investment 4.3: Evaluate existing programs and identify effective models for inclusive post-GBV care services for the reintegration of returned migrants and deportees from the U.S. to El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico, particularly returned and deported transgender, Indigenous, and Afro-descendant women.

Investment 4.4: Identify and build the capacities of local transgender, Indigenous, and Afro-descendant women's organizations to receive and manage USAID GBV-related program and services funding support directly rather than as sub-recipients.

Investment 4.5: Involve diverse, local GBV survivor representative CSOs and communities directly in planning, designing, implementing, monitoring, evaluating, and learning related to programs. Strengthen programming by focusing on improving communitywide processes over the mid to long term.

Investment 4.6: Support the creation of a survivor-led, community-level monitoring system to track GBV impunity, as well as the safety of civil society personnel working with diverse GBV survivors. Such a system should be designed to identify possible harassment and persecution by State and non-State actors and could be extended to a sub-regional level.

INTERVENTION PATHWAY 2: GBV SURVIVOR-CENTERED JUSTICE SERVICES

Strategy 5: Resource and strengthen State implementation of IACHR rulings, the Belém do Pará Convention, and the Latin America Model Protocol

Investment 5.1: Bolster government capacities and CSO advocacy for monitoring State implementation of rulings concerning femicide, transfemicide, rape, intimate partner violence, and other GBV-related cases heard by the IACHR in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico.

Investment 5.2: Strengthen resources and capacities for States to implement and monitor application of the Belém do Pará Convention (Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence Against Women).

Investment 5.3: Invest in expert trainings in the Latin American Model Protocol to increase numbers and skills of special investigators. Evaluate Model Protocol application through strategic litigation and monitoring of State compliance for cases of gender-related killings of women (also known as “femicide” or “feminicide”).

Strategy 6: Advocate for and monitor reform of legal frameworks, support development of national gender diversity and Indigenous identity laws, and improve and evaluate ongoing staff training in justice institutions on law implementation.

Investment 6.1: Influence public policy and national legislation: Advocate for amendment and monitoring of identity-related laws and policies that promote diversity and inclusion. Formal identity documents for transgender, Indigenous, and Afro-descendant people contribute to greater GBV accountability and more gender equitable societal norms. This also involves advocating for strong institutional frameworks to provide legal and judicial support for the work of locally led CSOs serving historically underserved survivor groups, as well as for the approval of non-discriminatory, free, and accessible legal identity change procedures.

Investment 6.2: Advocate for reform of laws and sexual violence investigative procedures to operationalize that a lawful sexual act requires active, willing, and continuous consent. Remove outdated legal definitions of rape that require the use of additional violence, threat or the survivor’s physical helplessness, incapacity, or inability to resist, as evidentiary elements of rape, as opposed to being based on lack of consent to a sexual act.

Investment 6.3: Advocate for revision and standardization of the criminal legal definition of *feminicidio* and expand criminal definitions to include transfemicide.

Investment 6.4: Provide technical assistance, equipment, training, and performance evaluation to strengthen the administrative and operational capacity of justice and law enforcement institutions. Career advancement should be conditional and tied to institutional benchmarks that demonstrate delivery of survivor-centered, non-discriminatory law enforcement, and justice services for GBV survivors.

Investment 6.5: Support CSO monitoring of judicial decisions to assess and inform improvements in the implementation of legal frameworks concerning gender equality, diversity, and inclusion, and GBV, among other hate crimes.

Strategy 7: Advocate for direct participation of historically excluded and underserved GBV survivor groups in legal and policy reform and in public decision-making processes

Investment 7.1: Increase skills of public officials to collaborate with historically excluded and underserved GBV survivor groups, such as LGBTQIA+, Indigenous, and Afro-descendant communities. Consider roundtables and other exchange opportunities with public officials to inform decision-making on community initiatives as strategies to achieve this purpose. Strengthen the capacity of public officials to develop intercultural understandings of GBV impunity. This includes recognizing collective rights violations that exacerbate GBV impunity at individual and community levels.

Investment 7.2: Promote spaces for dialogue for judicial institutions and CSOs so that the State can receive feedback about opportunities for improvement in serving historically excluded and underserved GBV survivor groups.

Strategy 8: Support development of and GBV survivor access to restitution, reparations, and recovery assistance services to which law enforcement and courts can refer survivors

Investment 8.1: Support the development of judicial mechanisms for GBV crime victim restitution and reparations referrals for diverse survivors and their dependents. Referrals should be made for material and economic assistance, psychosocial counseling, health services, legal aid, protective court accompaniment, and interpretation. Fund programs that increase access to justice for diverse survivors and their dependents by providing inclusive and holistic support.

Investment 8.2: Train and sustain cadres of specialized lawyers, paralegals, and free legal aid advisors for GBV survivors and their representatives. Specialized legal advisers can provide support through existing government institutions and CSOs, including survivor commissions, women's, LGBTQIA+, and Indigenous justice centers, and in cases where there are legal powers to do so, dedicated secretariats and public defenders' offices.

Strategy 9: Improve equity through increasing the amount of resources distributed to improve technical, financial, and human resources across the judicial system to reach underserved and structurally excluded GBV survivors

Investment 9.1: Improve budgeting for the judiciary and ensure fair distribution of resources (financial, technical, personnel) to ensure access to GBV justice for all communities and service providers supporting GBV survivors. Offer on-site and mobile justice and protection services to survivors in rural and structurally excluded areas.

Strategy 10: Bolster resources and alliances among civil society and community groups serving diverse GBV survivors to raise awareness of their legal rights

Investment 10.1: Provide resources to community-based organizations supporting diverse GBV survivor groups. This includes disseminating legal information and providing bridging support for survivors to access legal services and justice processes. Help improve access to legal experts and safe physical spaces and strengthen the network of support groups facilitating access to justice. Prioritize autonomy and systemization of GBV survivor-led approaches and establish alliances to minimize operating costs.

Strategy 11: Improve the capacity of law enforcement personnel to engage in a survivor-centered, trauma-informed, interculturally appropriate way with GBV survivors of diverse backgrounds

Investment 11.1: Support and monitor ongoing training and evaluation of law enforcement in a survivor-centered, trauma-informed, interculturally appropriate approach to GBV cases. Tie licensing, certification, salary, and promotions to accountable implementation of non-discriminatory, survivor-centered, trauma-informed procedures for filing and investigating GBV cases. This includes training officers and evaluating police response using standard operating police procedures for processing GBV cases.

Investment 11.2: Review, evaluate, and improve existing criminal investigation protocols from a gender and diversity inclusive, survivor-centered, and trauma-informed approach. This should include at a minimum, investigative protocols for crimes of sexual violence, femicide, and transfemicide.

Strategy 12: Support CSOs and grassroots groups in establishing community-based mediation processes that build on local, indigenous, and ancestral alternative justice processes

Investment 12.1: Strengthen CSO and grassroots mediation and local, indigenous, and ancestral processes to ensure that they remain survivor-centered and trauma-informed, and they address inequitable community power dynamics to ensure no further emotional, social, physical, sexual, or financial harm to survivors.

INTERVENTION PATHWAY 3: GBV SURVIVOR-CENTERED PREVENTION INITIATIVES

Strategy 13: Support GBV technical advisors, program designers, researchers, and evaluators to identify and assess social, economic, physical, geospatial, legal, and political risk factors that perpetuate structural discrimination against marginalized GBV survivor groups

Investment 13.1: Conduct formative research, assessments, and evaluation to assess feasibility, community acceptance, and effectiveness of project designs before scaling up intervention models to reach larger or different GBV survivor groups.

Investment 13.2: Ensure GBV prevention programs are designed and evaluated, taking into account previous formative research and program evaluation findings and recommendations to ensure appropriateness and inclusion of interventions to engage diverse survivor groups.

Strategy 14: Invest in community-based and institutional social norm change interventions combined with local, social media, and mass media campaigns to facilitate community dialogues that promote gender equality and GBV accountability at a community level drawing on, or transforming from within, community customs and practices

Investment 14.1: Strengthen collaboration between academia, CSOs, and community-based organizations to design, implement, and evaluate interventions that promote positive social norms to promote GBV accountability through prevention. These interventions aim to change harmful stereotypes and instead foster societal norms that support gender diversity, inclusivity, justice, equality, and non-violence.

Investment 14.2: Support CSOs, universities, and local government institutions to develop survivor-centered social and mass media campaigns and community-based social network interventions to promote non-violence, active bystander behaviors, and accountability for GBV. The media projects should avoid reproducing gender or racist stereotypes or disseminating photographs of murdered individuals.

Investment 14.3: Ensure government institutions, CSOs, and workplaces have inclusive and equitable policies, practices, and spaces. Support the formulation of public policies requiring establishment of non-discriminatory, inclusive policies and practices.

Strategy 15: Support diverse and inclusive GBV prevention awareness-raising, public education, and training in schools, community youth groups, and community spaces that promote positive, non-violent masculinities

Investment 15.1: Support the development of cross-cutting programs in primary and secondary schools, community youth groups, and community spaces, to reflect on and transform masculinities and gender equality, sexual violence prevention, dating and sexual consent practices, healthy relationship communication, and diversity and inclusion in SOGIESC.

Investment 15.2: Support capacity building for CSOs, human rights defenders and human rights organizations, government staff, and community leaders at national and community levels on gender equality, SOGIESC diversity, and GBV accountability.

Investment 15.3: Encourage GBV prevention programs to partner with underserved community-based service providers and advocacy organizations to promote contextualized diversity and inclusion, healthy intimate partner communication, and sexual consent in racially and ethnically diverse LGBTQIA+ communities, seeking to reduce both hate-motivated GBV crimes against LGBTQIA+ people at a community and societal level, and LGBTQIA+ intimate partner violence at the interpersonal level.

Investment 15.4: Support community awareness-raising public education resources and campaigns to ensure LGBTQIA+ survivors have information on how to access services.

Strategy 16 Engage convicted offenders and other likely perpetrators of GBV in programs to prevent recidivism, re-offense, and persistent patterns of GBV

Investment 16.1: Prevent perpetrator re-offenses through support for government institutions, CSOs, research organizations, academia, and youth movements, to design, evaluate, and improve recidivism prevention programs.

Investment 16.2: Strengthen GBV technical capacities of CSOs to prevent GBV as a persistent pattern in gang-controlled communities that increases risks and impacts for cisgender and transgender women and Indigenous women disproportionately and drives GBV impunity.

Investment 16.3: Strengthen CSO capacities to prevent GBV against women and girls in Indigenous communities, especially those in areas of extractive industries and commercial tourism.

Strategy 17: Expand the evidence base to inform GBV prevention through resourcing crime data monitoring and reporting systems, GBV research, and evaluations of GBV projects and activities

Investment 17.1: Support government, universities, and civil society to improve data collection and monitoring of GBV-related crimes to be SOGIESC and indigenous identity disaggregated, including femicides, transfemicides, and gender-based hate crimes against underserved groups such as LGBTQIA+ communities and Indigenous people. Develop a regional database compiling GBV data on diverse underserved groups, including those with migration backgrounds.

Investment 17.2: Strengthen policymakers' and program implementers' capacity to use SOGIESC and indigenous identity disaggregated GBV epidemiological data from health and public health studies and monitoring systems to inform strategic planning of policies, programs, and services.

Investment 17.3: Fund evaluations of GBV justice, protection, recovery, and prevention projects, to improve these programs, services, and public policy implementation.

Investment 17.4: Fund academic and research organizations to develop quantitative and qualitative, mixed-methods research specifically for informing femicides and transfemicide prevention, among other GBV prevention, protection, and justice programs-based research and evaluation. Research should include community-level studies and a regional-level survey to estimate, for example, the prevalence and health and socioeconomic status of LGBTQIA+ GBV survivors in Indigenous communities. Studies are needed to inform community-level interventions to promote gender and diversity inclusion in Indigenous communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE LAC BUREAU

Acknowledging that Missions and regional programs will directly fund and oversee most GBV initiatives, the LAC Bureau has an important role to support the development and integration of survivor-centered GBV accountability initiatives in programming across the region. This will require coordination within and across the LAC Bureau and other Washington D.C.-based operating units. It will also require allocating sufficient funding, technical resources, and senior GBV technical personnel with relevant sectoral expertise to strengthen organizational capacity for operationalizing GBV accountability initiatives throughout the USAID Program Cycle. Specific recommendations for the LAC Bureau include:

Recommendations for the LAC Bureau
<p>A. Coordinate with USAID’s Office of Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment to develop terms of reference to engage and recruit a team of Senior GBV Technical Advisors. The GBV advisors must have sufficient seniority and sector expertise to strengthen and increase LAC Bureau and Mission institutional capacities to integrate gender equality, women’s empowerment, and GBV accountability into the various sectoral programs that interact with GBV perpetrators and survivors across the region.</p>
<p>B. Develop a USAID LAC Bureau GBV Prevention and Response Implementation Plan. This should operationalize the United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to GBV Globally 2022 with funding and technical resources and accountability mechanisms to make meaningful and measurable progress toward achieving the Strategy’s objectives.</p>
<p>C. Translate the Implementation Plan into sector-specific guidance for integrating GBV accountability strategies throughout the Program Cycle. Senior GBV Technical Advisors in the LAC Bureau and other D.C.-based operating units should support developing this guidance.</p>
<p>D. Allocate sustained funding, senior GBV technical advisors and materials, training, and training evaluation to increase staff technical performance on GBV integration in USAID country offices. Mobilize resources to operationalize integration of survivor-centered GBV protection and recovery support services, justice, and prevention activities to strengthen GBV accountability throughout the USAID Program Cycle.</p>
<p>E. Commission research and toolkits for integrating survivor-centered GBV prevention and response in intersecting sectoral programming. Focus these efforts where the evidence base and practical guidance for a specific sector are currently lacking.</p>
<p>F. Pair senior GBV technical advisors with sectoral technical advisors to develop specific requests for proposals (RfPs) to translate the Implementation Plan into targeted sectoral projects. The RfPs should call for implementing partners to compete for awards proposing strategies, project designs, and evaluations that incorporate recommendations in this report and advance the United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to GBV Globally 2022. An example of such an RfP includes USAID/Guatemala’s 2023 “Gender-based Violence Prevention and Response Activity.”</p>
<p>G. Implement, monitor, evaluate, and adaptively manage the Implementation Plan. Ensure the plan includes standard indicators on which activities, programs, and Missions must report. Commission an evaluation of progress every three to five years against the plan and regular evaluations of staff performance to operationalize integration of GBV protection and recovery support services, justice, and prevention activities to strengthen GBV accountability within and across sectoral initiatives.</p>

ANNEX I: STUDY METHODOLOGY: CONCEPTUAL APPROACH, DESIGN, METHODS, ETHICS, AND SAFETY

The GBV Impunity Regional Study and its eight country case studies apply an intersectional, gender, power, and political economy analytical approach to investigating GBV impunity. The study's use of political economy analysis (PEA) shares core elements with USAID's framework, "Thinking and Working Politically through Applied Political Economy Analysis."⁷⁶ To paraphrase USAID's PEA framework, both approaches foster reflection on foundational influences, the impact of immediate events and actors, the institutional framework, and the dynamics between these forces, along with actors' incentives and interests that shape the behaviors and outcomes observed. The regional study adaptation of PEA goes beyond this framework by integrating an intersectional gender analysis.⁷⁷ While the approaches share similarities, there are also important and complementary distinctions between them.

*"PEA explores the political and economic processes in societies to provide an in-depth analysis of the power relations between groups. Gender analysis explores the power relations between men and women [girls, boys, gender diverse, and gender-non-conforming people], and often frames this as explicitly political [and economic]."*⁷⁸

The study looks at GBV impunity through an intersectional gender, power, and political economy approach. It considers how historically underserved and excluded GBV survivor groups are agents of human rights and national development. Institutional duty-bearers for human rights can end GBV impunity by addressing socioeconomic, legal, and political barriers to accountability. They can strengthen GBV survivor-centered pathways to accountability and build inclusive systems of accountability for protection and recovery services, justice response, and prevention. The study's methodological approach sheds light on:

*"[...] how the political economy impacts men and women [and gender diverse people] differently, whether [they] are differentially able to access power—including patronage networks—influence institutions, and how gender dynamics contribute to or block change."*⁷⁹

⁷⁶ USAID. (2018). Thinking and Working Politically Through Applied Political Economy Analysis: A Guide for Practitioners. Washington, DC. <https://usaiddlearninglab.org/resources/thinking-and-working-politically-twp-through-applied-political-economy-analysis-pea-guide>.

⁷⁷ Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the sociological term "intersectionality" in 1989. In 1991, she expanded the concept to show how some feminist and anti-racist discourses excluded Black women and other women of color in her *Stanford Law Review* article, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." The concept of intersectionality provides an analytical framework to identify multifaceted power structures and processes that produce and sustain oppression and structural inequalities. Discrimination perpetrated based on intersecting aspects of identity, such as age, gender, biological sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, religion, nationality, socioeconomic status, and other characteristics, lead to cumulative injustices, inequities, and inequalities in human development, health, and well-being outcomes over the life course. See also, for example: Kapilashrami, Anuj et al. (2018). Intersectionality and Why it Matters to Global Health. *The Lancet*, 391(10140), 2589 - 2591.

⁷⁸ Browne, E. (2014). Gender in Political Economy Analysis. Helpdesk Research Report. Governance and Social Development Resource Centre (GSDRC). AusAID. See also: Haider, H. and Rao, S. (2010) Political and Social Analysis for Development Policy and Practice: An Overview of Five Approaches. GSDRC. AusAID.

⁷⁹ Peterson, S. V. (2005). How (the meaning of) gender matters in political economy. *New Political Economy*, 10(4), 499-521. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13563460500344468>. Cited in Browne, E. (2014). Gender in Political Economy Analysis. Helpdesk Research Report. Governance and Social Development Resource Centre (GSDRC). AusAID.

Gender, power, and political economy analyses of GBV impunity can identify individuals, groups, and institutions that can help improve accountability for GBV protection, recovery, justice response, and prevention. The analyses also assess access to resources and services for diverse and underserved GBV survivors. They also look at the processes and outcomes of survivors' efforts to engage with various systems and norms that drive impunity, such as judiciary, law enforcement, health, economic systems, national laws, policies, and gender norms. The analyses also examine power hierarchies that perpetuate gender inequalities and harmful norms that underpin GBV impunity.

ETHICS APPROVALS, DATA COLLECTION, AND ANALYSIS METHODS

The Institutional Review Board of NORC at the University of Chicago, as well as ethics committees in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico, approved the regional and country case study protocols. To develop a contextualized protocol for each country case study, researchers adapted the regional protocol for a particular type of GBV, focus populations, and geographic contexts within each country. The regional and country case study teams selected types of GBV, survivor populations, and geographic areas for inclusion criteria for interviews, considering each USAID country office's previous work on GBV in the country and information gaps to inform upcoming program investments. The selected types of GBV, populations, and geographic contexts aimed to provide variation within and across the eight country case studies forming the regional study. Each team adjusted a common interview guide for each country case study, incorporating two contrasting, emblematic cases of focus types of GBV per case study. This helped to ground in-depth individual qualitative interviews in a reflection and analysis of GBV prevalence, social acceptance, and survivor-centered views on accountability. Additionally, the interviews aimed to provide recommendations for improving survivor-centered, accountable programs and services to reduce GBV impunity and address the structural gender inequalities that underpin it.

Each country case study team included three research consultants, many of whom had experience as both researchers and human rights defenders from affected populations. Before starting data collection, the regional study and country case study teams conducted a three-day capacity-sharing workshop. During the workshops, technical skills related to GBV survivor-centered, trauma-informed interviewing techniques were refreshed through role-plays with group feedback and technical support. Additionally, the workshops covered ethics and safety protocols, as well as good practices for managing trauma and stress in researching GBV. Specific workshop sessions included:

- Guiding ethics frameworks and principles for researching gender-based violence;
- Duty of care toward interview participants;
- Informed adult consent procedures;
- Privacy and confidentiality practices;
- Risks of and benefits to participants;
- Criteria and coordination for referrals to available GBV response services;
- Procedures and best practices for responding to GBV disclosures, reporting and facilitating referrals;
- Referrals tracking and follow-up;
- Data management and data protection procedures;
- Managing GBV researcher vicarious trauma and stress, psychosocial self-care, and team-care; and
- Researcher safety planning during and after GBV-related data collection

After each capacity-sharing workshop, the teams created a map of available GBV referral support services, such as psychosocial counseling, legal aid, economic recovery support, safehouses/shelters, and hotlines. They also developed an information sheet of verified contact details. The teams then field-tested and finalized an adapted interview guide for their specific population and contexts. Using ethics and safety procedures, the teams contacted and invited key informants to phone or internet-based interviews. Over a period of three months, each team conducted approximately 30 in-depth individual interviews with relevant staff from institutions and CSOs working with GBV survivors and survivor representatives. However, in El Salvador, due to the escalation and prolongment of the State of Emergency and civil insecurity, the team was only able to complete 16 interviews with GBV survivors safely before stopping. All data collection activities were conducted online or by phone via end-to-end encryption Voice Over Internet Protocol (VoIP) platforms to maintain privacy and adhere to ethics committee-approved COVID-19 safety protocols. Each team worked with study-dedicated translators and transcribers to produce transcripts of interviews for those in which the interviewee consented to being recorded. The teams reviewed their transcripts and redacted personally identifiable information, with technical support and oversight from the regional team. The regional team then stored the transcripts on a secure server with NORC at the University of Chicago using non-identifiable unique IDs.

The team used an adapted qualitative data analysis Framework Method⁸⁰ with integrated thematic analysis⁸¹ to identify, analyze, and interpret key themes emerging from the interview transcripts. Each country team collectively agreed on a context-specific codebook for qualitative data analysis, adapted from the regional study common codebook. The codebook retained a set of a priori codes for future synthesis with the other seven country case studies of the regional study. Each team researcher coded, analyzed, and interpreted data individually from transcripts and collectively through team interpretation discussions weekly or bi-weekly for consistency and reliability in the analytic process. The teams produced data reduction tables of key themes and illustrative quotes in the interview data, disaggregated by sexual orientation, gender identity, and profile of respondent. The country case study reports present each research team's analysis and interpretation, as well as participants' own reflections and analyses of GBV impunity, featuring illustrative quotes to put their voices and recommendations at the center of this study.

⁸⁰ Steps in a Framework Method qualitative data analysis process include: Transcription; familiarization with the interview; coding; developing a working analytical framework; applying the analytical framework; charting the data (data reduction); and interpreting the data. "Used effectively, with the leadership of an experienced qualitative researcher, the Framework Method is a systematic and flexible approach to analyzing qualitative data and is appropriate for use in research teams even where not all members have previous experience of conducting qualitative research." Gale, M. Heath, M., Cameron, E., Rashid, S., Redwood, S. (2013). Using the Framework Method for the Analysis of Qualitative Data in Multi-disciplinary Health Research. *BMC Medical Research Methodology* 13:117. <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2288/13/117>. Accessed December 29, 2022.

⁸¹ Terry, G., Hayfield, N., Clarke, V., Braun, V. (2017). Chapter 2: Thematic Analysis. *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research in Psychology*. Sage Research Methods. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781526405555.n2>.

ANNEX 2: GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

AGENCY: An individual's capacity to act or cause change

CISGENDER: A term used to refer to individuals whose sense of their gender aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth

GENDER: The different socially constructed roles, behaviors, expectations, expressions, identities, and power relations that affect and are affected by people of all SOGIESC. It varies from society to society and can be changed. The World Health Organization adds that, "The concept of gender includes important elements: relational, hierarchical, historical, contextual and institutional. While most people are born either [biologically] male or female, they are taught appropriate norms and behaviors—including how they should interact with others of the same or opposite sex within households, communities, and workplaces. When individuals or groups do not 'fit' established gender norms they often face stigma, discriminatory practices, or social exclusion—all of which adversely affect health [human rights, development, and democracy]."

GENDER ANALYSIS: Socio-economic analysis of available or gathered quantitative and qualitative information to identify, understand, and explain gaps between women and men [and people of all genders], which typically involves examining—(A) [gender] differences in the status of women and men [girls, boys, and gender diverse and gender non-conforming people] and their differential access to and control over assets, resources, education, opportunities, and services; (B) the influence of gender roles, structural barriers, and norms on the division of time between paid employment, unpaid work (including subsistence production and care for family members), and volunteer activities; (C) the influence of gender roles, structural barriers, and norms on leadership roles and decision-making; constraints, opportunities, and entry points for narrowing gender gaps and empowering women [and girls]; and, (D) potential differential impacts of development policies and programs on men and women [girls, boys, and gender diverse and gender non-conforming people], including unintended or negative consequences. Gender analysis includes conclusions and recommendations to enable development policies and programs to narrow gender gaps and improve the lives of women and girls [and gender diverse and gender non-conforming people].

GENDER DISCRIMINATION: Any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of real or perceived sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and/or gender expression (as the grounds of discrimination relevant to this paper) that has, for any individual or any group of individuals, the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.

GENDER EQUALITY: The state in which women, girls, men, and boys have equal access to opportunities, resources, benefits, and legal protections and which recognizes their equal inherent human dignity, worth, and unalienable rights.

GENDER EQUITY: A process of being fair to individuals of diverse genders, including cisgender and transgender men and women, other transgender people, non-binary people, and people with other gender identities, which may require differentiated strategies to achieve gender equal outcomes.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV): An umbrella term for any harmful threat or act directed at an individual or group based on actual or perceived biological sex, gender identity and/or expression, sexual orientation, and/or lack of adherence to varying socially constructed norms around masculinity and femininity. It is rooted in structural gender inequalities, patriarchy, and power imbalances. GBV is typically characterized by the use or threat of physical, psychological, sexual, economic, legal, political, social, and other forms of control and/or abuse. GBV impacts individuals across the life course and has direct and indirect costs to families, communities, economies, global public health, and development.

GENDER INTEGRATION/MAINSTREAMING: Means identifying, and then addressing, inequalities between women and men during the creation of USAID’s strategies; the design of all our projects and activities; and their implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

GENDER JUSTICE: “[A] movement to end patriarchy, transphobia, and homophobia and to create a world free from misogyny. As gender justice activists, we recognize that gender oppression is tied to classism, racism, ageism, and ableism, so gender justice can only truly be achieved when all forms of oppression cease to exist. [...] Gender Justice is a response to people’s lived experiences of violence and oppression that legal and civil protections alone can’t tackle. Gender justice as a framework recognizes the role that state, legal, and economic systems can play in perpetuating gender-based violence and oppression.”

GENDER IDENTITY: A person’s deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned at birth. For transgender people, their birth-assigned sex and their own internal sense of gender identity do not match.

GENDER EXPRESSION: External appearance of one’s gender identity which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine.

GENDER NORMS: Socially conscribed behavioral and self-expression standards and expectations to which “women,” “girls,” “boys,” and “men,” are seen as conforming or not conforming with, within a range that characterizes gendered social expectations of a given society, culture, community, or social group at that point in time.

HETERONORMATIVE OR HETERONORMATIVITY: An assumption that a person is heterosexual or the quality of making assumptions about others that expresses expectations that others should be heterosexual.

INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT: “Inclusive Development is the concept that every person, regardless of their identity, is instrumental in the transformation of their own societies and their inclusion throughout the development process leads to better outcomes. See Automated Directive System (ADS) 201’s “Additional Help” document for “Suggested Approaches for Integrating Inclusive Development Across the Program Cycle and in Mission Operations.”

INTERSECTIONALITY: An analytical lens to identify multifaceted power structures and processes that produce and sustain unequal human development outcomes. It moves beyond examining individual factors such as biology, socioeconomic status, sex, gender, and race, and focuses on the interactions

between factors, and across multiple levels of society, to assess social, health, economic, political determinants within and across populations and geographical contexts. It identifies important differences within groups often portrayed as relatively homogeneous (e.g., women, men, migrants, Indigenous peoples, visible minorities). It investigates how individual and group inequities are shaped by interactions between multiple sites and levels of power, including families, governments, laws, and policies; structures of discrimination such as sexism, ableism, and racism; and broader processes of globalization and neoliberalism.

INTERCULTURAL PERSPECTIVES: Involves bringing together Western and Indigenous knowledge and methods into GBV response without reproducing discrimination and inequalities against diverse and historically excluded survivors.

NON-DISCRIMINATION: USAID provides internal guidance regarding nondiscrimination in development policy. Guidance in the document, ADS Chapter 200 regarding, “Promoting Nondiscrimination and Inclusive Development in USAID-Funded Programs,” includes: “In designing and administering USAID programs, pursuant to existing USAID policy, Bureaus/Missions and Operating Units must not discriminate against any beneficiary or potential beneficiary, such as, but not limited to, by withholding, adversely impacting, or denying equitable access to benefits or services on the basis of any non-merit factor. A non-merit factor includes race, color, religion, sex (including gender identity and pregnancy), national origin, disability, age, sexual orientation, genetic information, marital status, parental status, political affiliation, or veteran’s status. Nothing in this requirement is intended to limit the ability of a program to target assistance to certain populations as defined in the project design.”

POWER: The GBV Impunity Regional Study asks critical questions of power: “Who decides? Whose interests are served?” This study recognizes at least four types of power: power within; power with; power to; and power over previously examined in gender and development research. Power as a concept is understood to be multi-directional, dynamic, and shifting, not just top-down. All actors at individual, collective, institutional, and structural levels can exercise power individually and collectively for socioeconomic political change and justice. Gender differences in access to, control over, and benefits from decision-making and collective action with others around shared interests are shaped and reshaped through gender power relations embedded in or contesting long-standing gender inequities and inequalities in a society.

PATRIARCHY: A social system in which men hold primary power, predominately in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and control of property. Historically, patriarchy has manifested itself in the social, legal, political, and economic organization of a range of different cultures. This system constrains the full actualization of all people, including men.

SEX: The classification of people as male, female, or intersex. At birth, infants are assigned a sex based on a combination of bodily characteristics including chromosomes, hormones, internal reproductive organs, and genitalia. Intersex is a term for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not appear to fit typical definitions of female or male.

SEXTORTION: Sextortion is a form of corruption and gender-based violence. It occurs when a person with entrusted authority abuses this authority to obtain a sexual favor in exchange for a service or benefit which is within their power to grant or withhold. Sextortion is a corrupt conduct in which

the currency is sex, and a sexual conduct involving coerced quid pro quo (this for that). The responsibility for sextortion always lies with the actor that abuses their entrusted authority (the perpetrator), and the transactional aspect of sextortion adds to the shame, fear, and invisibility by making the survivor appear ‘complicit.’ Sextortion is a violation of human rights and an abuse of power and must be understood in the context of gendered power relations and norms.⁸²

SEXUAL ORIENTATION: An enduring pattern of romantic or sexual attraction (or a combination of these) to another person. These inherent attractions are generally subsumed under heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, or asexuality.

SURVIVOR-CENTERED APPROACH: A survivor-centered approach means recognizing and prioritizing the rights, needs, and wishes of each person who has experienced GBV. A survivor-centered approach creates a supportive environment, ensures respect, safety, dignity, and confidentiality to promote a survivor’s recovery. The approach prioritizes and reinforces the survivor’s capacity to make decisions about any next steps, including accessing post-GBV care services for medical treatment, psychosocial counseling, safe shelter, material and economic assistance, job training and placement, legal aid, or other needed services for themselves and their dependents.

TRAUMA-INFORMED: A program, policy, or system that realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system; and responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices, and seeks to actively resist re-traumatization in policy, procedure, and practice-based processes and outcomes.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: The United Nations Declaration of the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women defines violence against women as “a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women.” It further asserts that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men.

⁸² EBA. (2020). Sextortion: Corruption and Gender-based Violence. https://eba.se/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Sextortion_webb.pdf.