

Addressing violence against women and girls during and after the COVID-19 pandemic requires **FINANCING, RESPONSES, PREVENTION AND DATA COMPILATION**



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Since the COVID-19 pandemic was declared on 11 March 2020, in Latin America and the Caribbean, as in other world regions, it has been necessary to address a rise in gender-based violence against women and girls, which has been aggravated by the lockdown measures, physical distancing and mobility restrictions that have left women more isolated from their support networks and created additional barriers in access to essential services. Faced with this global emergency, 146 Member States and observer States have expressed their support for the United Nations Secretary-General's call in April 2020 to ensure that preventing and redressing violence against women and girls are a core component of national COVID-19 response plans.¹

The Secretary-General's campaign "UNITE to End Violence against Women" calls on governments to take the following actions:

- Prioritize **funding** for a minimum package of essential services that include prevention of gender-based violence against women and girls in fiscal stimulus packages. And ensure secure funding for civil society organizations.
- **Prevent** gender-based violence against women by means of national zero tolerance policies.
- **Respond** with explicit measures to ensure that services for gender-based violence survivors are maintained or adopted as essential and continuous access to the criminal justice system is guaranteed.
- **Collect data** for improvement of gender-based violence services and programmes.

¹ See [online] <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/take-action/unite>

of the Platform for Action. There is still a lack of budgetary prioritization to achieve unrestricted access to justice and generate comprehensive policies to overcome cultural resistance to eradication of violence against women and girls.³

At the global level, but especially in Latin American and Caribbean countries, women's and feminist movements have organized mass mobilizations in recent years to denounce feminicide and other forms of gender-based violence against women and girls. Campaigns on social networks and digital media —such as #NiUnaMenos, #VivasNosQueremos and #25NcontraLaViolencia— and performance protests, for example, by the group *Las Tesis*, have had a unique impact in recent years.

In the words of United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, “sexual violence against women and girls is rooted in centuries of male domination”;⁴ it undoubtedly continues to be an obstacle to the effective enjoyment of human rights, as well as having adverse physical, psychological, social and economic impacts on the lives of thousands of women and girls and their communities. Data from before the COVID-19 crisis show the persistence of violence against women and girls as a “shadow pandemic” at the global and regional levels, where an average of one in three women have been subjected to or are experiencing physical, psychological and/or sexual violence inflicted by a former or current partner, which always carries the risk of lethal violence: feminicide or femicide.⁵

All women and girls are at risk of gender-based violence at some point in their lives. Based on national surveys available in the region, between 60% and 76% of women and girls have been victims or have experienced some episode of gender-based violence in different settings in their lives.⁶ Gender-based violence against women occurs in the domestic sphere as well as in public spaces, in the workplace, in the context of political and community participation, on public transport, on the street, in schools and other educational settings, and in cyberspace; the latter is particularly troubling in times of high exposure to digital media as a result of physical distancing measures. Violence also intersects with other forms of discrimination and inequalities, such as those that occur in the labour market, women's lack of own income and difficulties in accessing quality basic services. It is exacerbated when it intersects with other dimensions such as violence and discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and age, among others. All this grows more acute in crises such as the pandemic and the lockdown measures to contain its spread.

Femicide persists in the region

According to official data from 18 Latin American and 6 Caribbean countries reported to the ECLAC Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, there were at least 4,640 cases of feminicide or femicide (depending on how the crime is classified in national legislation) in the region in 2019.⁷

Data provided for 2019 show rates of over 2 women killed per 100,000 in the cases of Honduras (6.2), El Salvador (3.3), the Dominican Republic (2.7) and the Plurinational State of Bolivia (2.1). The decline in the number of feminicides, both in absolute numbers and rates in El Salvador, is mainly linked to a sharp drop in total homicides in the country over the previous year.

³ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Regional report on the review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in Latin American and Caribbean countries, 25 years on* (LC/CRM.14/4), Santiago, 2019.

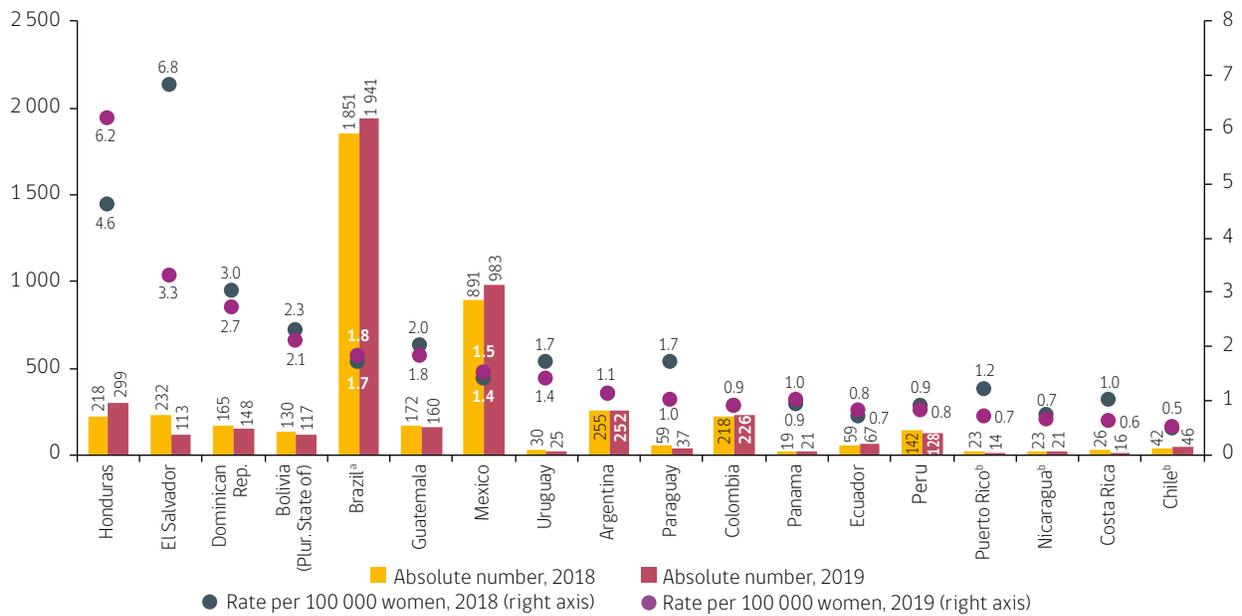
⁴ See [online] <https://www.un.org/en/events/endviolenceday/>.

⁵ It is termed feminicide or femicide, depending on the classification of the crime in national laws.

⁶ Information based on national surveys of family relationships or gender-based violence: Mexico, 2016; Dominican Republic, 2018; Ecuador, 2018; Ecuador, 2019; Peru, 2019; Uruguay, 2019; Chile, 2020.

⁷ The data collected were published in official documents or sent to the Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean by the entities that produced the information and by mechanisms for the advancement of women.

Figure 1
Latin America (18 countries): femicide or femicide, 2018/2019
(Absolute numbers and rates per 100,000 women)



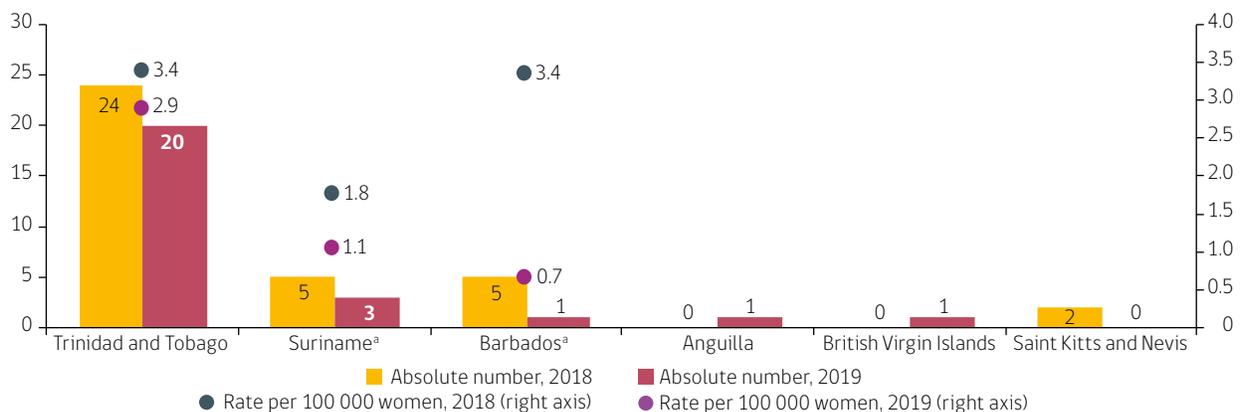
Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean [online] <https://oig.cepal.org/en>.

^a The data for Brazil have been rectified by the Ministry of Women and the Council of the Judiciary for the years 2016–2019.

^b Chile, Nicaragua and Puerto Rico only report cases of intimate femicide.

In the Caribbean, six countries recorded a total of 26 women victims of gender-based violence in 2019, the bulk of the cases corresponding to the 20 victims of femicide in Trinidad and Tobago, with a rate of 2.9 deaths per 100,000 women. The total number of cases in the Caribbean for 2019 marked a downturn from the 36 cases reported in 2018.

Figure 2
The Caribbean (6 countries): femicide or gender-based violent deaths, 2018/2019
(Absolute numbers and rates per 100,000 women)

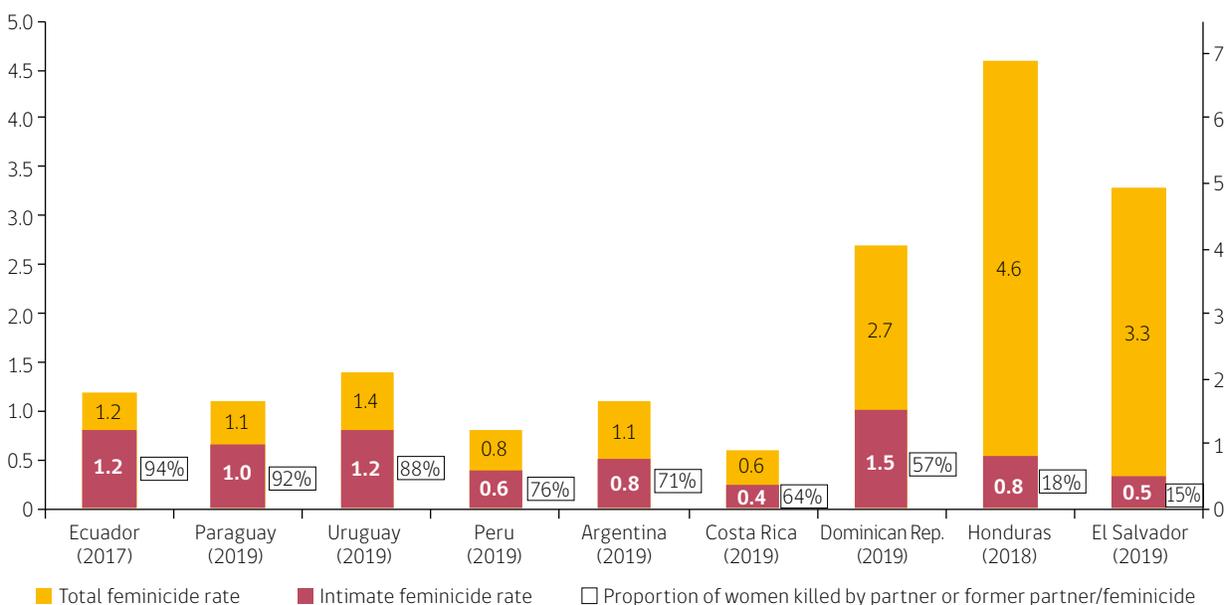


Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean [online] <https://oig.cepal.org/en>.

^a Barbados and Suriname only report cases of intimate femicide.

Due to the way in which information is collected and disseminated, only seven countries report on intimate femicide. That is, those killings where the perpetrator is or was in a conjugal, cohabiting, dating, or occasional amorous liaison relationship with the victim. In Ecuador (2017) and Paraguay (2019) this type of femicide accounts for more than 90% of all feminicides.⁸ This trend is reversed in countries such as El Salvador and Honduras, where intimate feminicides amount to less than 20% of the total, indicating that femicidal violence is perpetrated mainly by strangers or people with whom the victim had no emotional ties (see figure 3).

Figure 3
Latin America (9 countries): total and intimate feminicides, latest year available
(Rates per 100,000 women)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean [online] <https://oig.cepal.org/en>.

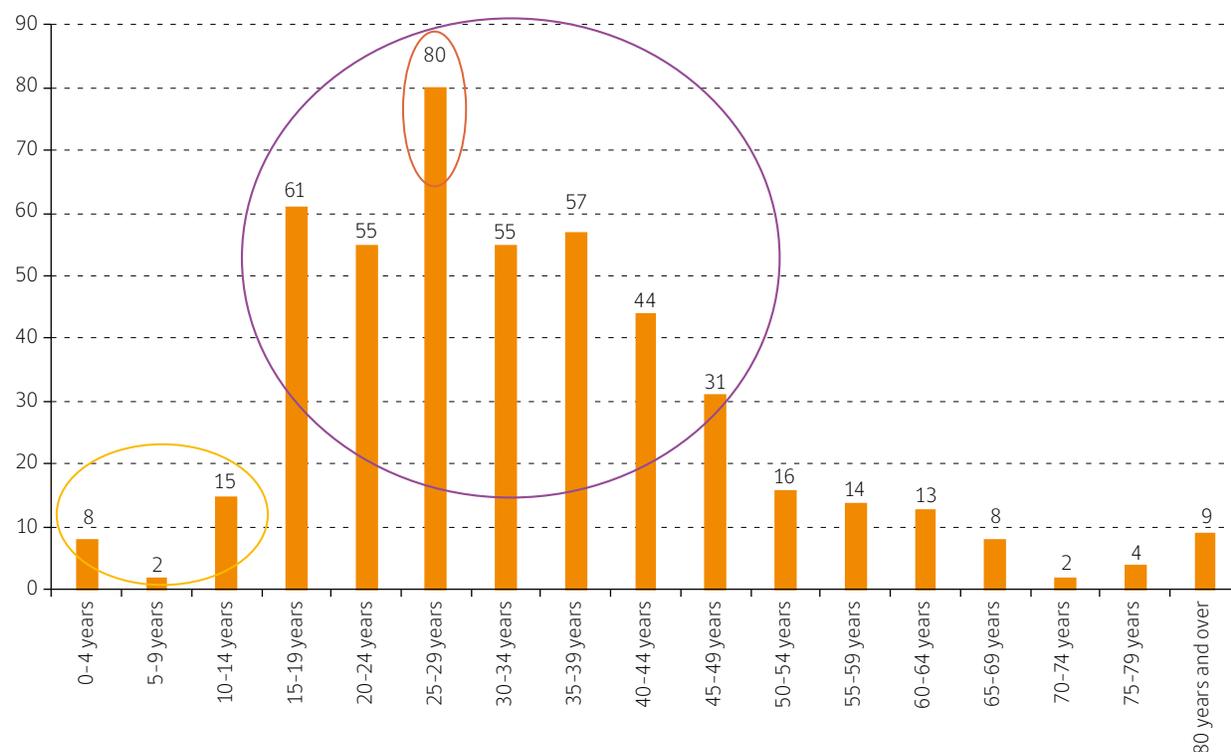
Data production on gender-based violence against girls and adolescents is only recent in some of the region's countries and disaggregation by age is sparser still. However, in seven countries, data is available for five-year age groups, which strengthens analysis and clearly shows that adolescent and young adult women are most at-risk for femicide. Based on an analysis of the trends in violence and abuse, this information on the age of greatest vulnerability to femicide is linked to forms of violence that occur in childhood and are associated with a patriarchal culture, types of discipline used on girls, controlling behaviour towards them, forced sexual initiation, sexual violence, child marriages or early unions and dating violence.

In 2019, 25 girls between the ages of 0 and 14 were victims of femicide in seven countries in the region. During adolescence, between the ages of 15 and 19, 61 were killed. The age group with the highest absolute number is between 25 and 29 years, where there were 80 reported victims of femicide.

Also, in 2019, four countries provided disaggregated information for the 0-17 age group, registering a total of 142 girl and adolescent victims of femicide in Argentina (26), Chile (1), Colombia (17) and Mexico (98).

⁸ The available figure for type of femicide –specifically intimate femicide– is for 2017. Therefore, the information differs from that shown in figure 1.

Figure 4
Latin America (7 countries^a): feminicides by age range of victims, 2019
(Absolute numbers)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean [online] <https://oig.cepal.org/en>.

^a Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama, Paraguay, Puerto Rico and Uruguay.

Measuring femicide

- Depending on the domestic law concerned, in 18 countries it is variously termed femicide, feminicide or aggravated gender-based homicide.
- The femicide indicator corresponds to the total number of women violently killed on the basis of their gender in one year.
- The femicide rate (femicide deaths per 100,000 women) was adopted as a regional indicator by the Statistical Conference of the Americas on the understanding that it was key to monitoring target 5.2 (Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation) of Sustainable Development Goal 5 in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- Official statistics on femicide in Latin American and Caribbean countries are produced by various State institutions and validated in most countries through interinstitutional coordination arrangements.

- In order to have increasingly robust and systematic information, coordinated efforts by all the State organizations involved in the provision of care, certification and the judicial process are key, from the reporting and verification of the violent death of a woman to the closure of her case.
- There has been progress in terms of registration and the process of definition and labelling femicide in the region.

During the lockdown resulting from the COVID-19 crisis, the potential increase in violence against women and girls has been a global cause for alarm

As a result of the health crisis, movement restrictions and the reduction in in-person emergency services, demand for helplines has risen among women and girls who are victims of violence. There was already high demand for such telephone services in many of the region's countries. States have responded to this increased demand by strengthening emergency helplines and implementing alternative channels for complaints and assistance. Resources such as cell phone text messaging, the implementation of new protocols and campaigns for detecting cases of violence against women in different public services and in shops such as supermarkets and pharmacies were tools for dealing with this increase in recorded cases and reporting on operational services in the context of the lockdown.

Government responses for preventing and addressing gender-based violence have varied, but the most notable have been those of Argentina, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Honduras and Mexico, where all or part of services to address violence against women were declared essential. In most countries, instructions or decrees were enacted for the operation of certain judicial services and the automatic extension of protective measures (Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay).

Governments in the region have informed the COVID-19 Observatory in Latin America and the Caribbean of ECLAC of more than 90 measures to tackle violence against women in the context of the pandemic. However, adjustment by public officials to operating services remotely has been very complex and limited in the justice sector, which increases the risk of impunity traditionally associated with such crimes.

The saturation of health-care services as a result of the COVID-19 health crisis has adversely affected care for victims of sexual violence in health services, as have mobility restrictions. The large number of complaints on helplines as well as in face-to-face services requires strengthened public action and greater fiscal resources and measures to guarantee comprehensive care in social services such as health and security, as well as timely access to justice through active, expeditious channels.

Overcoming gender-based violence against women and girls requires policies to address structural problems of inequality, particularly those resulting from discriminatory and violent patriarchal cultural patterns.

Beyond the design of policies on care, access to justice and punishment, emphasis must be placed on changing social norms and advancing public policies on prevention in the education system, the media and the various mechanisms by which gender-based violence is transmitted in the region's societies.

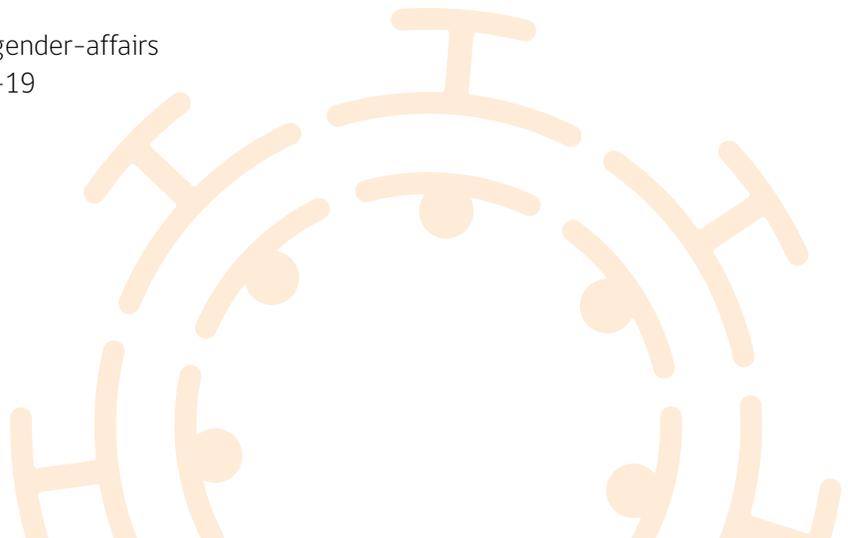
Achieving a life free of violence requires the involvement of a variety of social, community and private sector actors, as well as a commitment from men to zero tolerance for violence against women and girls.

Only then can equal progress towards sustainable development be made.

<https://oig.cepal.org/en>

<https://www.cepal.org/en/work-areas/gender-affairs>

<https://www.cepal.org/en/topics/covid-19>



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