

Summary of Findings: Northern Central America & Mexico, LACLEARN GBV Impunity Regional Study

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a global health pandemic. GBV includes not only sexual violence, but also physical, psychological, economic, and political violence. GBV can be lethal. It thrives in complex contexts of social, economic, legal, and political gender inequality, corruption, and impunity.

The report [*Survivor-centered Strategies to Improve Gender-based Violence Accountability in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico*](#) investigates factors driving GBV impunity, barriers to increasing GBV accountability, and solutions to address GBV in these four countries. Findings and recommendations are based on interviews with 106 GBV survivors and government and civil society organization (CSO) staff who provide direct services to survivors. The country case studies that form the basis of the report pay special attention to impunity for GBV against underserved groups, including Indigenous women, Afro-descendant women, transgender women, and gay men.



The goal of the report is to guide strategic USAID investments in programs to promote inclusive GBV accountability through survivor-centered recommendations for improved recovery support services, justice services, and prevention initiatives in northern Central America and Mexico. Survivor-centered approaches recognize the priorities, rights, needs, and wishes of each person who has experienced GBV.

Key Findings

- 1 Northern Central America and Mexico include some of the highest rates of GBV impunity in the world.** In El Salvador and Mexico, an estimated 25% of girls and women aged 15-49 years who are married or cohabiting have faced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence. The full scale of GBV in the region is widely underestimated. Most GBV survivors do not report to the police. Many reported incidents are not investigated or tried in court. Available statistics further under-report GBV among Indigenous, Afro-descendant, transgender, and migrant women.
- 2 GBV survivors experience “impunity” as being ignored and revictimized.** “Accountability” would require, at minimum, transparent, non-discriminatory, high-quality, and timely protection and recovery support services, and economic empowerment. Judiciary staff and service providers need to put safety, confidentiality, respect, and non-discrimination at the center of their interactions with every survivor.
- 3 Survivors describe negative experiences and little trust in interacting with law enforcement and justice institutions.** Discrimination and inequality reduce survivors’ access to and benefits from an already limited set of justice, protection, and recovery support services. These effects can be exacerbated and compounded based on survivors’ intersecting identities and vulnerabilities (e.g., their sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, location, etc.).
- 4 Socioeconomic, legal, and political gender inequities in low-resource and violence-prevalent 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.

Recommendations for USAID Missions and Regional Programs in Northern Central America and Mexico

The report outlines three strategic approaches to achieve greater GBV accountability. In the near term, **it is most urgent for USAID to prioritize strategies and investments focused on GBV survivor-centered protection and recovery support.** Across all approaches, USAID should resource local, survivor-led service provider organizations to develop and implement survivor-centered, contextually specific programs and services to improve GBV accountability.

Approach 1: GBV survivor-centered protection and recovery support services. This includes expanding and improving safe shelters and affordable housing for diverse survivors and their dependents; improving survivor-centered procedures for investigating GBV crimes; improving government-provided GBV protection and recovery support services; and increasing CSO funding, technical, and human resources to expand GBV recovery support services.

Approach 2: GBV survivor-centered justice services. This includes support to local, ideally survivor-led, organizations for reforming legal frameworks, developing gender diversity and Indigenous identity laws, and improving staff training in justice institutions on law implementation. It also includes engaging active participation of gender-diverse, Indigenous, and Afro-descendant survivor groups in legal and policy reform and in public decision-making processes. USAID should ensure GBV survivors can access restitution and reparations alongside protection and recovery assistance services.

Approach 3: GBV survivor-centered prevention initiatives. This includes identifying structural and community-level risk factors that perpetuate the exclusion of and discrimination against underserved survivor groups. It further requires investing in campaigns to promote gender equality and survivor-centered, non-violent conflict resolution, restorative justice, and accountability. Supporting activities should promote positive, non-violent masculinities. USAID should also develop programs to prevent re-offense, recidivism, and recurring cycles of GBV perpetration and impunity.

Recommendations for the LAC Bureau

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 bureau and other Washington, D.C.-based operating units. Specific recommendations include:

- Coordinate with USAID's Office of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment to develop terms of reference to engage and **recruit a team of full-time Senior GBV Technical Advisors.**
- Develop a USAID **LAC Bureau GBV Prevention, Response, and Accountability Implementation Plan.**
- Translate the Implementation Plan into **sector-specific guidance** for integrating recommended GBV accountability strategies throughout the Program Cycle.
- Allocate sustained funding, senior GBV technical advisors and materials, training, and training evaluation to **increase staff performance** on GBV accountability integration in USAID country offices.
- **Commission research and toolkits** for integrating survivor-centered GBV prevention, response, and accountability in intersecting sectoral programming.
- Pair senior GBV technical advisors with sectoral technical advisors to develop **requests for proposals.**
- Implement, monitor, evaluate, and **adaptively manage the Implementation Plan.**

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