



Latin American countries are implementing innovative mechanisms to address different forms of gender violence, including establishing a regional convention, national laws against femicide, programmes aimed at creating safer cities for women and gender observatories.

TACKLING GENDER VIOLENCE IN LATIN AMERICA

SUMMARY

Gender violence not only constitutes a severe violation of women's rights, but also affects society as a whole. Unfortunately, gender violence persists worldwide representing a challenge for many regions and countries. Latin America has adopted a two-fold approach to tackling gender violence. First, the creation of the only regional commitment to eradicating gender violence, which clearly establishes the responsibilities of states to safeguard women's rights. Second, countries in the region have implemented a range of mechanisms at the national level to tackle specific forms of violence, such as domestic violence and femicide laws, the creation of gender observatories, as well as programmes for building safer cities for women. This Guide begins with an overview of violence against women in the world and Latin America, before analysing a selection of Latin American responses, achievements and the lessons learned so far.



VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN PERSISTS WORLDWIDE

Women's right to a life free of any form of violence is recognised and promoted at the international level in the [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW), created in 1979,¹ and in the [Beijing Platform for Action](#) of 1995. Over the years, the United Nations Secretary General has released periodic [reports](#) documenting the progress of countries towards eradicating violence against women. In spite of some advances in the international legal realm, gender violence in all its different forms (physical,

¹ In 1992, the CEDAW Committee published [General Recommendation Number 19](#), which establishes that "gender-based violence is a form of discrimination that seriously inhibits women's ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on a basis of equality with men." Since then, gender violence practitioners have advocated for eliminating all forms of discrimination in society that perpetuate gender violence.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

The existence of a strong regional human rights system, with institutions that have jurisdiction over states, plays a fundamental role in efforts to eliminate gender violence. In Latin America, the Inter-American System of Human Rights has the authority to hold states responsible for cases of gender violence and provides victims with an independent mechanism for demanding that their rights be upheld.

The creation of a regional convention on gender violence can provide a powerful instrument for setting binding obligations for states to implement measures to prevent, eradicate and punish acts of violence against women. Such conventions can be strengthened by follow-up mechanisms that ensure compliance.

The Latin American approach demonstrates that it is important to understand gender violence from a women's rights perspective and not merely as a criminal problem. In doing so, public policy can be designed to include a more comprehensive and effective approach to prevention and treatment.



sexual, domestic, institutional etc.) persists worldwide, preventing millions of women from fully exercising their rights. According to the World Health Organization, some 35% of all women experience intimate or non-partner violence. This percentage increases when other forms of gender violence, such as violence inflicted during armed conflicts, femicide and trafficking in women, are taken into account.²

BOX 1: WHAT IS GENDER VIOLENCE?

Gender violence refers to any type of violence committed against a person on the basis of gender, whether male or female. However, the majority of gender violence in the world is perpetrated against women. For the purposes of this Guide, then, the concept of gender violence would refer exclusively to acts of violence against women.

Forms of gender violence include:

- Domestic violence or intimate partner violence. Occurs within families or between partners and can include physical, psychological and sexual abuse, as well as various controlling behaviours;
- Institutional violence against women refers to violence that is sanctioned implicitly or explicitly by governments and public administrations in their organisations, systems and procedures;
- Trafficking in women involves forced recruitment, transportation, labour and/or slavery-like practices (actual or attempted);
- Sexual violence refers to any sexual act, harassment or practice directed against a woman using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting;
- Femicide is the attempted murder or actual murder of a woman for the sole reason of being a woman.

Sources: European Institute for Gender Equality. 2013. [What is Gender-Based Violence?](#) EIGE, online publication; United Nations. 2006. [Ending Violence Against Women: From Words to Action. Study of the Secretary-General](#). United Nations, New York; United Nations Department of Public Information. 2009. [Violence Against Women](#). United Nations Department of Public Information, New York; World Health Organization (WHO). 2013. [Violence Against Women](#). WHO, Geneva; Stop Violence Against Women Campaign. 2013. [What is Trafficking in Women?](#) Stop Violence Against Women, Online publication; Women Against Violence Europe. 2013. [Gender Violence Definitions](#). Women Against Violence Europe, online publication. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>.

Gender violence not only constitutes a severe violation of women’s rights, but also affects society as a whole. It undermines economic development and growth, perpetuates poverty within communities and promotes the existence

of other forms of violence.³ For this reason, international organisations, women’s social movements, civil society organisations and female victims worldwide demand that governments implement measures to prevent and address gender violence. In response to this pressure, and also by their own initiative, governments in Latin America, Africa and Asia have made some progress towards tackling gender violence. However, doing so has not been easy given that gender violence is frequently rooted in cultural, historical, social and political practices and stereotypes that are difficult to transform.

GENDER VIOLENCE IN LATIN AMERICA

Gender violence is a serious and persistent problem in Latin America. A 2013 study from the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) found that in 12 countries in the region, between 17% and 53% of women had been victims of physical or sexual violence inflicted by their partners.⁴ Additionally, 14 of the 25 countries with the highest rates of femicide are from the Latin American region: four in the Caribbean (the Bahamas, the Dominican Republic, the Lesser Antilles and Jamaica); four in Central America (Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras); and six in South America (Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana and Venezuela).⁵ Previous and on-going armed conflicts in countries such as Colombia, Guatemala and El Salvador, drug trafficking in Central, South America and Mexico and trafficking in women throughout the region all contribute to creating an unsafe environment for women. In addition, deep-rooted gender stereotypes prevail across the private and public spheres, perpetuating violence against women in its various forms. Yet despite these figures, Latin American countries are undertaking measures to reduce and eradicate gender violence, having implemented innovative regional and country-level initiatives. This Guide presents these initiatives with the aim of providing useful lessons and nurturing debate around policy and practice in other regions of the world.

The Latin American experiences showcased in this Guide are presented using a framework established by the United Nations (UN), which consists of identifying different forms

² WHO *et al.* 2013. [Global and Regional Estimates of Violence Against Women: Prevalence and Health Effects of Intimate Partner Violence and Non-Partner Sexual Violence](#). WHO, Geneva.

³ United Nations. 2006. [Ending Violence Against Women: From Words to Action. Study of the Secretary General](#). United Nations, New York.

⁴ PAHO. 2013. [“OPS/QMS Llama al Sector de la Salud a Fortalecer sus Respuestas de Atención a las Mujeres Sobrevivientes de la Violencia” \(“The PAHO/WHO Calls Upon the Health Sector to Strengthen its Responses For Attending to Women Survivors of Violence”\)](#). PAHO, online publication.

⁵ Small Arms Survey. 2012. [Femicide: A Global Problem](#). Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva.



of violence against women and analysing government responses or inaction in relation to them. The work of civil society groups (such as feminist movements, women activists, academics and civil society organisations) is also analysed using this framework. It is worth noting that UN Women uses this framework for reporting state progress and actions aimed at eradicating gender violence.⁶

The following tables present an overview of regional mechanisms and country-level initiatives according to the type of gender violence they aim to tackle. In order to identify these mechanisms and initiatives, the authors reviewed available books, articles, publications, handbooks and reports on regional and national experiences, as well as thematic websites. As Table 1 shows, at the regional level, the Inter-American Human Rights System and the Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (known as the Belém do Pará Convention) are highly relevant because they set standards for the protection of women’s rights across the region.

Table 1: Regional frameworks protecting women’s rights

Mechanism	Form of violence it addresses				
	Domestic Violence	Institutional Violence	Sexual Violence	Femicide	Trafficking in Women
Inter-American Human Rights System and the Commission and Court’s recommendations and rulings	X	X	X	X	
Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (known as the Belém do Pará Convention)	X	X	X	X	X

Table 2 shows that at the national level, Latin American countries have implemented two categories of measures; those which attempt to address a particular form of violence, such as domestic violence, and those which aim to tackle multiple forms of violence, such as programmes that build safer urban environments for women or gender violence observatories.

Table 2: Country-level initiatives

Initiative	Countries of implementation ⁷	Form of violence it addresses				
		Institutional Violence	Sexual Violence	Domestic Violence	Femicide	Trafficking in Women
Programmes aimed at building safer cities for women	Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico and Uruguay		X		X	X
Domestic violence laws and complementary measures	Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela			X	X	
Special laws on femicide and/or reforms to national criminal codes	Costa Rica, Chile, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru				X	
Laws, creation of special units, and institutional strengthening to combat and punish trafficking in women	Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua and Peru					X
Development of legal frameworks, victim support mechanisms and innovative research and documentation practices for addressing sexual violence in armed conflicts	Colombia, Guatemala and Peru	X	X			
Gender observatories	Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico and Peru	X	X	X	X	
Protocols for reducing and preventing institutional violence	Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico and Uruguay	X				

⁶ United Nations. 2006. *In-depth Study on All Forms of Violence Against Women: Report of the Secretary-General*. United Nations, New York.

⁷ This list is not exhaustive.



In the following sections, these regional and country-level mechanisms and initiatives will be analysed in detail, including an assessment of whether they attempt to prevent or treat gender violence. This is because international standards affirm that state responses to gender violence must include both prevention and treatment measures.⁸ Prevention measures are key for reducing the chance of violence against women occurring and have the ultimate goal of eradicating gender violence completely. These measures generally seek to empower women, tackle gender inequalities and modify discriminatory social and cultural behaviours that foster and tolerate gender-based violence.⁹ Treatment measures, on the other hand, address violence once it has happened and include victim support services and training for police officers and members of the judiciary to investigate and prosecute cases of violence. Governments that only focus on treatment measures fail to address the origins of gender violence and the problem is likely to persist. Good practice therefore requires states to implement both prevention and treatment measures.¹⁰

REGIONAL MECHANISMS FOR THE PROTECTION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS AGAINST GENDER VIOLENCE

The development of two regional mechanisms for tackling gender violence in Latin America has been possible thanks to the existence of the [Organization of American States](#) (OAS). Founded in 1948, currently the OAS brings together all 35 [independent states](#) of the Americas and constitutes the main political, juridical, and social governmental forum in the hemisphere. Amongst its guiding principles are respect for and protection of human rights. Since its inception, the OAS has successfully encouraged member states to establish regional human rights institutions and legal frameworks. The Inter-American Human Rights System and the [Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women](#) are two outcomes of this process that demonstrate the important role of the OAS in facilitating regional dialogue and in promoting the creation of mechanisms against gender violence.

The Inter-American Human Rights System

The Inter-American Human Rights System (IAHRS) was created to protect and promote human rights, including women's rights. The system operates via two main agencies - the [Inter-American Human Rights Commission](#) (hereinafter "the IAHR Commission"), created in 1959, and the [Inter-American Human Rights Court](#) (hereinafter "the IAHR Court"), established in 1979.

The principal mandate of the IAHR Commission is to receive and investigate individual claims of human rights violations from within member states. After assessing each case, the IAHR Commission publishes a report and makes recommendations to the particular state involved. If the state does not address the recommendations but has accepted the jurisdiction of the IAHR Court, the Commission can submit the case to the IAHR Court for a ruling.

The IAHR Court is an independent legal body responsible for interpreting and applying the [American Convention on Human Rights](#).¹¹ Among its main functions, the Court makes judgments on cases of alleged human rights violations. American states choose whether to accept the Court's jurisdiction. If they do accept, then: a) the Court can attribute responsibility to states that have violated the American Convention; and b) states are obliged to adhere to the Court's rulings, including all the measures they contain. This makes the IAHR Court a powerful agent in the region since other international human rights bodies cannot assign responsibility to states (they can only attribute individual responsibility or solve conflicts between states).¹² In recent years, the IAHR Court has played a progressive role in the defence and enforcement of women's rights by referring to the obligations set out in the [Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women](#) and other international gender violence treaties.¹³

Since the nineties, the IAHR Commission and IAHR Court have played a major role in identifying, condemning and setting legal precedents for cases of gender violence during a period when these forms of violence were largely ignored by many states in the region. The IAHR Commission and the IAHR

⁸ Castillo, P., Prado, L. 2010. *Ficha Técnica: Violencia Contra las Mujeres en América Latina (Technical Note: Violence Against Women in Latin America)*. CIM/OAS, Washington, DC; UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for the Advancement of Women. 2010. *Handbook on Legislation on Violence Against Women*. United Nations, New York; Falú, A. (ed). 2010. *Women in the City: On Violence and Rights*. Women and Habitat Network of Latin America, Santiago.

⁹ Castillo and Prado. 2010, above n8 and UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for the Advancement of Women. 2010, above n8.

¹⁰ UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for the Advancement of Women. 2010, above n8.

¹¹ [Article 1, Statute of the Inter-American Court](#).

¹² Sanchez de Tagle, M., López, C. Saenz, J. 2013. *The Role of the Inter-American Human Rights System in the Protecting Women's Rights*. Paper produced for the Evidence and Lessons from Latin America (ELLA) Programme Human Rights Learning Alliance run by Fundar.

¹³ Palacios Zuolaga, P. 2008. *The Path to Gender Justice in the Inter-American Court of Human Rights*. In: *Texas Journal of Women & the Law* 17 (2) 227-295.



Court’s recommendations and rulings can be considered truly ground-breaking since, for the first time, they mandated states to take concrete measures to prevent, tackle and redress various forms of gender violence. Thanks to these institutions, the failure of states to address these issues is now firmly under the spotlight and, increasingly, Latin American governments are initiating measures to fulfil their obligations to safeguard women’s rights. IAHR Court rulings on gender violence are now beginning to be invoked as supranational precedents before domestic courts and are influencing the drafting of legislative reforms and public policy.¹⁴

Two Landmark Cases Brought Before the IAHR Commission

1. Domestic Violence: The Case of Maria da Penha Maia Fernandes vs. Brazil

In 2001, the IAHR Commission received a petition from Maria da Penha Maia Fernandes, a Brazilian woman who suffered domestic violence at the hands of her husband for more than 15 years. As a result of these aggressions, Maria da Penha became paraplegic and contracted several diseases. In her petition to the IAHR Commission, she argued that the Brazilian state had failed to undertake effective measures to investigate and sanction her aggressor, despite the many police reports she had filed over the years. After assessing the petition, the IAHR Commission issued a [report](#), in which it reaches three conclusions. First, the Brazilian state violated Maria da Penha’s right to legal guarantees and protection. Second, discrimination persists in Brazil where tolerance towards domestic violence manifests itself in judicial ineffectiveness in prosecuting and sanctioning aggressors and providing victims with adequate redress. Third, the Brazilian state failed to prevent acts of domestic violence. This ruling represented the first time that a Latin American state had been found responsible for domestic violence.¹⁵ The IAHR Commission’s conclusions were highly influential and have had a long-lasting impact within Brazil, including being an input for the enactment of the Domestic Violence Law (known as the [Maria da Penha Law](#)) in 2006. This law mandates the prosecution of aggressors of domestic violence, sets out harsher degrees of punishment for acts of domestic violence and orders the creation of rehabilitation programmes for aggressors and specialist gender violence agencies and courts.¹⁶

Figure 1: Maria da Penha, whose case inspired the enactment of the Domestic Violence Act in Brazil



Source: [Céara Public State Ministry website](#).

2. Sexual Violence Inflicted by State Armed Forces: The Case of Ana, Beatriz & Celia González Pérez vs. Mexico

In 1994, Ana, Beatriz and Celia González Pérez, three Mexican sisters from the Tzeltal indigenous community, were illegally detained and questioned along with their mother during the Zapatista armed conflict; a group to which they were suspected of belonging. The three sisters were separated from their mother, interrogated and raped by members of the military. These crimes were reported to the Attorney General’s Office and then to the Public Prosecutor for Military Justice’s Office, however, both institutions failed to investigate the case.¹⁷ Due to public humiliation and social stigmatisation, the González Pérez sisters and their mother were forced to flee their community. The petition the women filed before the IAHR Commission in 1994 claimed the Mexican state was responsible for the crimes of sexual violence they had suffered and had failed to investigate the case and provide adequate redress. After examining the evidence, the IAHR Commission concluded that the Mexican state had violated the women’s rights to personal liberty, humane treatment, privacy, fair trial, judicial protection, as well as children’s rights (in the case of the youngest sister). The IAHR Commission also found that the Mexican state had not fulfilled its responsibility to prevent and punish torture and to respect indigenous rights. The Commission therefore recommended that the Mexican state carry out a full investigation in order to prosecute the crimes through the civil penal justice system and provide adequate redress to the victims.¹⁸

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Tojo, L. 2012. [Maria da Penha Maia Fernandes v. Brazil, Case N° 12.051, Report N° 54/01, April 16, 2001](#). In: Center for Justice and International Law (CEJIL). [Tools for the Protection of Human Rights - Summaries of Jurisprudence: Gender-based Violence](#). CEJIL, Washington, DC.

¹⁶ CEJIL. 2013. [Maria da Penha/ Brazil](#). CEJIL, online publication.

¹⁷ IAHR Commission. 2001. [Report N° 53/01, Case 11.565, Ana, Beatriz and Cecilia González Pérez vs. México](#). IAHR Commission, Washington, DC.

¹⁸ Ibid.



This ruling is relevant for various reasons. First, because the state was found responsible for crimes committed by the military and for the inadequacies of the justice system. Second, it demonstrated the incapacity of the military justice system to investigate human rights violations perpetrated by the military in an impartial and independent manner. In this way, the case highlighted the need for reforms to military jurisdiction in Mexico and other Latin American countries.¹⁹ Third, the IAHR Commission set the precedent, in accordance with international law, that rape perpetrated by the military in the context of an armed conflict constitutes a form of torture.²⁰ Finally, the Commission acknowledged that since the women were part of an indigenous group, the crime not only affected the victims themselves, but also their relationship with their community. This set an important precedent by demonstrating the need to understand any crime from the perspective of the victim, in this case an indigenous people's worldview.

Two Emblematic Cases Brought Before the IAHR Court

1. Gender Violence: The Case of González et al. ("Cotton Field") vs. Mexico

The Cotton Field case is illustrative of the structural causes of discrimination and violence against women in Latin America. After the violent abuse and murder of three women, institutional prejudices and inconsistencies marred investigative processes, representing a grave failure by the Mexican government to protect women's rights and provide adequate access to justice for the victims' families. The IAHR Court ordered the Mexican government to implement actions aimed at preventing the future reoccurrence of these events, including changes to search and investigation protocols. The ruling contains key aspects that have helped drive the fight against gender violence in Mexico and beyond. To learn more about this case, read the [ELLA Brief: The Cotton Field Case in Mexico: Setting Legal Precedents for Fighting Gender-Based Violence](#).

2. Institutional Gender Violence: The Case of Inés Fernández Ortega vs. México

Inés Fernández, an indigenous Me'phaa woman from the state of Guerrero, Mexico, was a victim of torture and rape

committed by members of the Mexican military in 2002. In 2010, in a pioneering ruling, the IAHR Court found the Mexican state responsible for committing institutional gender violence and, for the first time ever, it ordered the state to make collective reparations to the Me'phaa community for the acts of sexual violence committed against one of its members. Among these reparations were the creation of a community school promoting women's rights and education, and the establishment of a women's community centre. The ruling set an important precedent for providing adequate reparations to indigenous women and their communities, in this case reflecting the Me'phaa viewpoint that acts of violence against one of its members affects communal structures and social relations. To learn more about this paradigmatic ruling, read the [ELLA Brief: Victims' Rights in Multicultural Contexts: The Case of Inés Fernández at the Inter-American Court of Human Rights](#).

Latin America's Regional Legal Framework on Gender Violence

In 1994, Latin American states signed the [Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women](#) in Belém do Pará, Brazil. Also known as the Belém do Pará Convention, it establishes women's right to a life free of violence and affirms that gender violence must be considered a violation of women's human rights and fundamental freedoms and treated as such. The convention defines gender violence as any act that generates death or physical, sexual or psychological harm to women and that can be perpetuated within the private sphere (in the family or any interpersonal relationship) or in public spaces (such as the community, the workplace, educational institutions and health facilities, among others) or by the state.²¹ The convention also associates gender violence with the subordination and domination of women that characterises the Latin America Region.²²

The ratification of the Belém do Pará Convention has not only strengthens the whole Inter-American Human Rights System significantly, it has also led to the implementation of national laws and policies that acknowledge gender violence

¹⁹ Some years later, and thanks to another case brought before the IAHR Court, Rosendo Radilla vs. Mexico, the Mexican Supreme Court ruled that the Military Code should be modified to limit its jurisdiction since the military was not considered independent enough to investigate such cases. To learn more about the Rosendo Radilla vs. Mexico case and military jurisdiction read the [ELLA Guide: Human Rights in Latin America](#).

²⁰ Feria Tinta, M. 2008. [The Landmark Rulings of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights on the Rights of the Child: Protecting the Most Vulnerable at the Edge](#). Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Leiden/Boston.

²¹ OAS, MESECVI, Canadian International Development Agency. (No date). [The Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women \(Belém do Pará\)](#). OAS, MESECVI, Canadian International Development Agency, Washington, DC.

²² Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). 2009. [No More! The Right of Women to Live a Life Free of Violence in Latin America and the Caribbean](#). ECLAC, Santiago.

²³ Ibid.



in its three dimensions (private, public and institutional) by many Latin American governments.²³ The influence of the convention on states is due to two characteristics in particular. First, it is the only binding regional mechanism in the world on gender violence that mandates signatory states to implement measures to prevent, eradicate and punish acts of violence against women.²⁴ For example, the convention contains specific provisions regarding the obligation of states to implement legislation on gender violence, including:

- Legal measures that require the perpetrator to refrain from harassing, intimidating or threatening the victim;
- Amendments to existing laws or modifications to legal or customary practices which sustain the persistence and tolerance of violence against women;
- Establishment of fair and effective legal procedures for victims;
- Establishment of the necessary legal and administrative mechanisms to ensure that victims have effective access to justice and remedies.²⁵

Second, the Belém do Pará Convention benefits from two enforcement mechanisms. The first, the Mechanism to Follow Up on Implementation of the Convention (MESECVI), is an independent system that oversees whether and how states comply with their obligations to achieve the objectives of the convention. Created in 2004, the MESECVI is composed of two bodies. The Committee of Experts on Violence (CEVI) is the technical body made up of gender violence experts appointed by Latin American governments and is in charge of publishing regular reports on state progress. The CEVI presents its reports to the Conference of States Party, MESECVI's political body that brings together representatives from different Latin American governments.²⁶ CEVI's reports are compiled based on national government reports and information provided by civil society organisations, such as the [Comité Latinoamericano y del Caribe para la Defensa de las Mujeres](#) (Latin American and Caribbean Committee for the Defence of Women's Rights – CLADEM). Based on

case study evidence, the reports examine the impact of the convention on gender violence in the region and conclude with technical recommendations.²⁷ Collaborations between the MESECVI, other OAS institutions (such as the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women and the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women) and civil society organisations have led to the development and promotion of common approaches and work methodologies throughout the region.²⁸

The second enforcement mechanism is the Mechanism for Protection that allows individual and collective petitions to be presented to the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights in the event that any state violates Article 7 of the convention.²⁹ In considering these claims, the IACHR Commission may appeal to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights for its opinion on the interpretation of the convention.

LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRY-LEVEL RESPONSES TO GENDER VIOLENCE

At the country-level, a range of different initiatives have aimed at transforming the structural causes of gender violence in Latin America. Here we focus on the ones listed in Table 2 above.

Building Safer Cities for Women

Latin America has high levels of urban violence and its cities have been qualified as highly segregating, with women one of the most vulnerable groups. Little research has been carried out into urban violence in Latin America, however between 2003 and 2005, several surveys in the capital cities of Buenos Aires (Argentina), Bogota (Colombia), Lima (Peru) and Santiago (Chile) revealed that more than half of the interviewees (men and women) reported having been a victim of violence. What is more troubling is that, when answering questions on security in their city, as many as 61% of women admitted to feeling unsafe, while between 43% and 55% of men shared the same impression.³⁰ Likewise, Latin American

²⁴ UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for the Advancement of Women. 2010, above n8; OAS. (No Date). [About the Belém do Pará Convention](#). OAS, online publication.

²⁵ To learn more about the provisions in the Convention, see OAS, MESECVI, Canadian International Development Agency. (No date), above n21 and UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for the Advancement of Women. 2010, above n8.

²⁶ ECLAC. 2009, above n22.

²⁷ OAS. (No Date), above n24.

²⁸ ECLAC. 2009, above n22.

²⁹ OAS. (No Date), above n24.

³⁰ Dammert, L. 2007. Entre el Temor Difuso y la Realidad de la Victimización Femenina en América Latina (Between Vague Fear and the Reality of Women's Victimization In Latin America). In: Falú, A., Segovia, O. (eds). 2007. [Ciudades Para Convivir: Sin Violencias Hacia las Mujeres \(Coexisting in Cities: Without Violence Against Women\)](#). Ediciones SUR, Santiago.



cities are hotspots for sexual harassment and femicide.³¹ Gender-based violence in public spaces not only deprives women of one of their most fundamental rights – the right to a life free of violence – but it also restricts their movement in the city, their mobility and independence, and prevents them from exercising their socio-economic and political rights.

Up until recently, however, violence against women in public spaces was not recognised in national legislation as a form of gender violence. This often led public authorities to mistreat the problem and resort to inappropriate practices and attitudes, such as considering women responsible for the violence they face or believing that the best way to keep women safe is for them to stay at home. Moreover, urban planning in the region excluded women’s participation, generating cities that are hostile to their safety, with inadequate street lighting and unsafe public transportation, for example.³²

Figure 2: Campaign supporting Building Safer Cities for Women in the Mexican province of Baja California



Source: [imacitychanger’s website](http://imacitychanger.com).

It is only recently that gender violence committed in public spaces has been acknowledged in legal frameworks, such as in the Belém Do Pará Convention, as well as by national and city governments. Both the 2001 [City Statute](#) in Brazil and the [New Constitution](#) of 2008 in Ecuador, for instance, acknowledge women’s right to access a city free of violence. Several Latin American cities have implemented programmes with the aim of providing safer cities for women. These vary broadly. However, three common components can be identified:

1. Territorial or urban upgrading aimed at reducing the possibility of violence occurring. These actions include improving street lighting, installing public telephones, increasing police presence, providing self-defence training to women, and implementing “pink public transportation”, such as in Mexico City where the [Mexico City Women’s Institute](#) (INMUJERES DF) implemented the [Travelling Safely in Mexico City’s Public Transportation](#) (*Viajemos Seguras en el Transporte Público de la Ciudad de México*) programme in 2008. This programme created 25 bus routes entirely reserved for women and women-only wagons in more than half of the city’s metro stations, as well as in the *Metrobus* and suburban trains. These preventive measures have an immediate impact, are easy to implement and increase women’s perception of safety and well-being. As such, they represent a simple first step any city can take to prevent gender violence.³³

2. Awareness raising and capacity building activities targeting women and civil servants. Not only do these strategies aim to change attitudes towards preventing and dealing with gender violence, but they also seek to raise women’s awareness of their own rights and empower them to lobby local institutions.³⁴ Through UNIFEM and the Women and Habitat Network’s programme [Cities Without Violence Against Women, Safe Cities for All](#), several Latin American cities including Suchito (El Salvador), Santiago (Chile), Bogota (Colombia) and Rosario (Argentina) organised the occupation of public spaces, such as public transport and streets, by women’s groups campaigning against gender violence.³⁵ In Rosario, the Urban Municipal Police Force (*Guardia Urbana Municipal* – GUM) trained its officers on the different types of gender violence that exist and how to provide assistance to women victims of violence, and also established the [Intervention Protocol to Prevent and Attend Situations of Violence Against Women in the City of Rosario](#). In Bogota, women’s groups and organisations were trained to lobby local authorities to integrate a gender perspective into local development plans.³⁶

3. Actions to include women’s opinions and gender perspectives in urban development plans and in the

³¹ Massolo, A. 2007. Análisis y Propuestas para la Acción de los Gobiernos Locales en la Seguridad de las Mujeres en las Ciudades (Analysis and Propositions for Local Government Action to Improve Women’s Safety in Cities). In: Falú & Segovia. 2007, above n30.

³² ECLAC 2009, above n22; Falú 2010, above n8; Vargas, V. 2007. [Public Spaces, Citizen Safety and Gender-Based Violence Reflections Emerging from Debates in Latin America in 2006-2007](#). UNIFEM Brazil and Southern Cone, Brasilia.

³³ Vargas. 2007, above n32; Falú. 2010, above n8.

³⁴ Vargas. 2007, above n32.

³⁵ Falú. 2010, above n8; UNIFEM Regional Office for Brazil and South Cone. 2010. [Ciudades Sin Violencia Hacia las Mujeres, Ciudades Seguras para Todos y Todas \(Cities Without Violence Against Women, Safe Cities for All\)](#). UNIFEM, Red Mujer y Habitat de América Latina, Brasilia.

³⁶ UNIFEM Regional Office for Brazil and South Cone. 2010, above n 35.



construction of public spaces. These measures are crucial for safeguarding women's right to participate in decision-making processes and for preventing situations where women are at risk.³⁷ In Santiago, for instance, women have been involved in the design of public spaces through the [UNIFEM Safe Cities for All programme](#). In Montevideo, Uruguay, the [Programme for Equal Opportunities and Rights in Montevideo City "No More, No Less"](#) has promoted the incorporation of a gender perspective into city-level decision-making processes.³⁸ This strategy is recommended to all cities in order to make decision-making processes more inclusive and reduce segregation.

Latin American experiences provide some important lessons on how to achieve success with such programmes. Firstly, design and implementation must include as many actors as possible. To ensure a sense of ownership from both men and women, it is important to create spaces for collaboration that convene national and local government, women's and human rights organisations, educational institutions and the media, among others, with the aim of developing strategies and public policies with a gender approach. These platforms also provide a suitable site for transforming the common perception of women as weak and vulnerable into a greater appreciation for women's right to full citizenship.³⁹ Violence roadmaps (reports assessing the situation of gender violence in the different parts of the city) are a useful tool for developing an accurate diagnosis of the contexts and causes of gender violence, and for designing programmes and public policies that respond to these issues.⁴⁰ Finally, successful programmes usually contain a strong preventive approach, not only dealing with high-risk situations, but also tackling other risk factors such as drug use, unemployment and a culture of violence.⁴¹

Although building safer cities for women is still more of an aspiration than a reality in Latin America, important progress has been made regarding the acknowledgement of gender violence in urban public spaces by citizens and public institutions. The programme [Cities Without Violence Against Women, Safe Cities for All](#), for instance, catalysed

public and political debate around urban gender violence in many countries.⁴² Similarly, the inclusion of women in urban planning and decision-making processes, and the development of a new vision of the city as a space with equal opportunities for women and men have been key elements to lowering all kinds of gender violence.⁴²

Domestic Violence Laws and Measures

Latin American countries have adopted different measures to detect, prevent and address domestic violence,⁴⁴ but perhaps the most important mechanism has been the establishment of laws. By 2011, 18 Latin American countries – Argentina (2009), Bolivia (1995), Brazil (2006), Chile (1999), Colombia (2008), Costa Rica (1996), Ecuador (1995), El Salvador (2011), Guatemala (2008), Honduras (1997), Mexico (2007), Nicaragua (2011), Panama (2001), Paraguay (2000), Peru (1997), Dominican Republic (1997), Uruguay (2002) and Venezuela (2007) – had passed new laws against domestic violence that are, for the most part, in line with international standards.⁴⁵ This represents an important first step for three reasons. First, because the laws acknowledge that domestic violence is no longer a private problem, rather it is a crime that the state is responsible for preventing, addressing and punishing. Second, these laws mandate the creation of specialised agencies, policies and protocols to address gender violence within different branches of government. The variety of measures proposed aims to ensure that domestic violence is addressed in a more comprehensive way (for example, by providing health and psychological support to women, access to safe shelters and to specialised courts). Finally, these laws provide civil society organisations and women's victims with the necessary backing to file petitions and demand their right to a life free from domestic violence.

Even with these laws in place, it is important to highlight that Latin American countries have not yet implemented a coordinated strategy across government ministries. Instead, public policy on gender violence generally represents isolated responses from particular branches and levels of government.⁴⁶ Notwithstanding, Latin American countries

³⁷ Vargas. 2007, above n32.

³⁸ Falú. 2010, above n8.

³⁹ Vargas. 2007, above n32.

⁴⁰ Falú. 2010, above n8.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² UNIFEM Regional Office for Brazil and South Cone. 2010, above n35.

⁴³ Massolo. 2007, above n31; Vargas. 2007, above n32.

⁴⁴ Castillo, P., Prado, L. 2010, above n8.

⁴⁵ Garita Vélchez, A. I. *La Regulación del Delito de Femicidio en América Latina y el Caribe (The Regulation of Femicide in Latin America and the Caribbean)*, United Nations Secretary General's Campaign UNITE to End Violence Against Women, Panama.

⁴⁶ Rioseco Ortega, L. 2005. *Buenas Prácticas para la Erradicación de la Violencia Doméstica en la Región de América Latina y el Caribe (Good Practices for the Eradication of Domestic Violence in the Latin American Region)*. Serie Mujer y Desarrollo 75, CEPAL, Santiago.



have implemented a variety of initiatives and measures aimed at preventing and treating domestic violence.

Prevention Measures

Latin American countries have allocated most of their resources to treatment measures rather than to prevention. This is due to the fact that initial responses to domestic violence focused on criminalisation rather than on dealing with the root causes. More recently, however, the importance of preventative measures is being reflected in both policy and practice.⁴⁷ Following this new trend, countries such as Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Paraguay, Panama and Mexico have implemented education and awareness-raising initiatives.⁴⁸ Some of these include:

- A gender domestic violence prevention programme launched by the Ministry of Education in El Salvador in schools to sensitise students, teachers, parents, etc. In 2010, this programme targeted 42 schools and included artistic, cultural, informative and participatory activities seeking to prevent violent behaviours from happening;⁴⁹
- The creation of a Master in Gender Studies in Education in the National Pedagogic University in Honduras, which includes domestic violence themes;⁵⁰
- Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico have all run national campaigns to raise awareness among citizens on violence against women and domestic violence.⁵¹ For example, in Mexico, in 2005, the Women’s National Institute launched the media campaign “*El que golpea a una, nos golpea a todas*” (If you beat one woman, you beat all of us”. Well-known journalists and actresses joined the campaign (see Figure 3 below) and helped to raise awareness of the need to end domestic violence;
- Mexico, Honduras and Panama have developed curricula and prevention material on domestic violence. Mexican and Ecuadorian teachers have been sensitised on gender, domestic violence, gender equality and human rights.⁵²

Figure 3: Carmen Aristegui, a well-acknowledged journalist participating in the national campaign on gender violence in Mexico: “If you beat one, you beat all of us”



Source: [El Universal \(Mexican newspaper\) website](#).

Treatment Measures

The Belém do Pará Convention mandates Latin American states to provide women with free specialised services to treat cases of domestic violence, including emergency lines, health care, psychological counselling and legal counsel. Thus far, the focus of Latin American countries has been to work towards creating and extending the provision of these services:

- Currently, 16 Latin American countries – Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela – have emergency phone lines with personnel trained to provide support to victims of domestic violence.⁵³ For example, the National Women’s Institute in Mexico receives a call every 30 minutes from a female victim of domestic violence, proving the importance of emergency phone lines.
- Eight Latin American countries – Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay and Uruguay – have established protocols to guide healthcare staff in detecting cases of domestic violence and providing support to victims.⁵⁴ Mexico stands out because the government has created a [mandatory protocol, NOM 046](#), which includes specific standards that medical personnel

⁴⁷ UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for the Advancement of Women. 2010, above n8.

⁴⁸ Rioseco Ortega. 2005, above n46; United Nations. 2010. [Intensification of Efforts to Eliminate All Forms of Violence Against Women: Report of the Secretary-General](#). United Nations, New York.

⁴⁹ Organization of Ibero-American States. 2013. [El Salvador: Prevención de la Violencia de Género \(El Salvador: Preventing Gender Violence\)](#). Organization of Ibero-American States, online publication.

⁵⁰ Rioseco Ortega. 2005, above n46.

⁵¹ United Nations. 2010, above n48.

⁵² Ibid and Rioseco Ortega. 2005, above n46.

⁵³ Castillo and Prado. 2010, above n8.

⁵⁴ Ibid and Rioseco Ortega. 2005, above n46.



should follow to prevent, detect and address domestic violence.

- By 2011, 15 Latin American countries – Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela – provided free specialised legal counselling and aid to women victims of domestic violence. For example, in Brazil, 66 Public Defender’s Offices provide this assistance to women. The same happens in Argentina, Ecuador and Uruguay, where Public Defender’s Offices are responsible for dealing with emergency cases.
- 13 Latin American countries – Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela – provide psychological support to victims of domestic violence. In Brazil, for example, specialised social assistance referral centres and centres specialised in women’s care have been set up to provide psychological support, so that victims can recover from violent episodes and reintegrate fully into society.
- By 2010, 15 Latin American countries had established protocols for the police to deal with cases of domestic violence. Of them, countries such as Bolivia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras and Panama demonstrate particularly good practices since they have established official protocols to deal with cases of domestic violence that involve indigenous women.⁵⁵
- By 2011, 17 Latin American countries had created shelters for women victims of domestic violence. CSOs have contributed greatly to this process since they run and manage many of these shelters, either on their own or in coordination with the government. Four countries that stand out due to the high number of shelters are Brazil (70), Peru (46), Mexico (55) and Chile (25).⁵⁶ In Mexico, specialist shelters for indigenous women are run by the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples.⁵⁷ There is also a National Network of Shelters (*Red Nacional de Refugios*), created by a CSO, which runs a shelter in every Mexican province. Some of these shelters are

funded exclusively by the Network, while others receive government funding.

- By 2010, Chile and Mexico had set up programmes to rehabilitate perpetrators by changing their attitudes and behaviours.⁵⁸ It is worth noting that, since the nineties, CSOs in countries such as Costa Rica (*Instituto Wem* - Wem Institute), Mexico (*Hombres por la Equidad* - Men for Equity), Nicaragua (*Asociación Hombres Contra la Violencia* - Men’s Association Against Violence) and Peru (*Programa de Hombres Renunciando a su Violencia* - Men Saying No to Violence Programme) have been running their own rehabilitation programmes.⁵⁹

Finally, it is important to highlight that even though Latin American countries do not tend to evaluate the impacts of these measures in a systematic way (mainly due to the fact that these actions are generally the result of independent initiatives rather than part of a cross-cutting public policy), it is clear that they are providing greater protection, support and justice for women victims of domestic violence, while at the same time rehabilitating perpetrators in an attempt to stop the cycle of violence within societies. Nevertheless, the next step for these countries – as recommended by international organisations, CSOs and academics – will be to create coherent national plans and coordination mechanisms to link up these measures. Numerous Latin American countries have started along this path, including Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay and Venezuela.⁶⁰

Special Laws on Femicide and Reforms to National Criminal Codes

In the face of increasing cases of femicide, Latin American countries have pushed through two reforms in an attempt to address this phenomenon and provide justice to victims and their families. First, countries such as Chile, Mexico, and Peru have included femicide as a specific crime in their national criminal codes and have increased the penalties for perpetrators. Defining a maximum sentence or special punishment has helped to establish the severity of femicide,

⁵⁵ Castillo and Prado. 2010, above n8.

⁵⁶ OAS. 2012. *Second Hemispheric Report on the Implementation of the Belém do Pará Convention*. OAS, Washington DC, 2012.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ United Nations. 2010, above 48.

⁵⁹ Ortiz Mariscal, J. D. 2010. *Buenas Prácticas para la Atención de la Violencia Sexual Contra las Mujeres (Good Practices for Responding to Sexual Violence Against Women)*. FLASOG, Lima.

⁶⁰ United Nations. 2010, above 48.



thereby providing greater justice to victims and their families. Second, countries such as Costa Rica, Guatemala and Mexico have adopted special laws on femicide that include a variety of measures to tackle the underlying causes of femicide, such as reparations, creation of institutional mechanisms and specialised gender units. Special laws on femicide go one step further than national criminal codes in that they mandate governments to take action.

Both types of reform mark important progress towards the implementation of a more comprehensive strategy for preventing, addressing and eradicating femicide, as advocated by international, regional and civil society organisations. To learn more about femicide in the region, the outcomes of these initiatives and lessons learned so far, read the [ELLA Brief: Building Legal Frameworks to Address Femicide in Latin America](#).

Laws, Special Units and Institutional Strengthening to Combat Trafficking In Women

BOX 2: WHAT IS HUMAN TRAFFICKING?

According to the [UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime](#) (hereinafter the UN Protocol on Trafficking in Persons), human trafficking consists of three elements: i) an act (recruitment, transportation, transfer, receipt of persons); ii) a means (force, fraud or deception); and iii) a specific purpose (the exploitation or the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs).

The causes of trafficking in women are complex and vary from country to country, but are generally rooted in gender inequality and discrimination. Complex migration flows in Latin American countries and restrictive migration policies in Central America have increased the illegal activities of traffickers who take advantage of the vulnerability of undocumented migrants, especially women and girls who are the main victims of human trafficking.⁶¹ Poverty and a lack of economic opportunities also increase the risk of women and girls being trafficked for sexual exploitation under false

promises of employment in other countries far from their families and culture. This form of recruitment often leaves women isolated from any social network, which further increases the risks of exploitation and sexual abuse. In Central America, illegal networks established by organised criminals and the militarisation of the region to deal with gang violence have both had a negative impact on the security of women.⁶²

Major forms of trafficking in women are considered multi-offensive given the range of human rights they violate. Sexual exploitation, forced prostitution, labour exploitation, sexual assault and violence all result in gross violations of women’s rights to integrity, to a life free of violence and to freedom of movement, among others. Reports show that between 2007 and 2010 more than 6,000 people in Latin America were victims of trafficking, with 50% either women or girls. Almost 51% of the victims were trafficked for sexual exploitation (which corresponds to the proportion of female victims) and 44% for forced labour. Large proportions of victims came from Mexico; in the Central American region from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua; and in South America from Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay and Peru.⁶³ However, the real number of victims is unknown due to the clandestine nature of this crime and the lack of indicators in public databases.

Figure 4: Campaign against trafficking in women: “Your Life is Not Merchandise”



Source: [Mujeres por la Democracia website](#).

⁶¹ Central America Women’s Network. 2012. [Trafficking of Women in Central America and Mexico](#). Central America Women’s Network, London.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. 2012. [Global Report on Trafficking in Persons](#). UN, New York.



Due to the scale and impacts of trafficking in women in the Latin America region, some initial efforts are being made at the regional and local levels to tackle this phenomenon. In the first instance, the OAS and the Inter-American Development Bank have established regional initiatives to strengthen state capacity to prosecute, protect and punish trafficking. At country level, some governments have enacted laws mandating the creation of special units to tackle trafficking in women. In this Guide, special attention is given to efforts made by Central American governments to address this phenomenon due to the significant advances made in these countries.

Regional Mechanisms

As a coordinated effort to deal with trafficking in persons, OAS member states elaborated a Work Plan Against Trafficking in Persons in the Western Hemisphere from 2010 to 2012, a framework for guiding actions to improve state capacity to investigate, prosecute and penalise trafficking in persons, especially in women and children. The work plan has two key features. First, it contains a proposal for cooperation at the sub-regional level and for the establishment of regional networks for exchanging information on training and awareness programmes. Second, the work plan lists specific actions to provide restitution, recovery, compensation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition. Examples of these include: i) taking appropriate measures to assist and protect national and foreign victims; ii) creating support programmes for victims including social, psychological and legal assistance; iii) ensuring victims are informed about protection services; and iv) building capacities among public authorities to identify victims of trafficking.⁶⁴ Although it is a non-binding convention, the work plan goes a step beyond the UN Protocol on Trafficking in Persons since it provides a human rights perspective for addressing human trafficking, instead of a criminal perspective, which has been the predominant approach. This means that the responses against trafficking in women proposed in the work plan consider actions that enforce and protect women's rights, instead of treating trafficking in women as merely a criminal problem. The work plan has been recently extended up to 2015.

Besides the work plan, the OAS has provided technical support

to member states by organising anti-trafficking training programmes and creating opportunities for information exchange. By 2012, the OAS had trained over 1,000 police, migration officers, prosecutors and judges from Central America and English-speaking Caribbean countries to prevent and combat trafficking.⁶⁵

The [Inter-American Development Bank](#), the [International Organization for Migration](#) and the Ricky Martin Foundation launched the first campaign to combat human trafficking in the Latin America region since 2008. This programme represents an innovative effort to prevent trafficking by educating women and girls. The main objective is to raise regional awareness of the impacts of this phenomenon in Latin America through public service announcements, dissemination of campaign materials and the promotion of national hotlines for prevention and victim protection. Initial impacts of the campaign include over 33,000 phone calls received in Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Peru, resulting in 176 police investigations and more than 6,000 potential victims saved from trafficking networks.⁶⁶

Country-Level Initiatives in Central America

Governments from the Central America region have ratified the UN Protocol on Trafficking in Persons and have since gone on to adopt new domestic laws mandating the creation of special units, as a first step to tackle trafficking in women.

In 2009, Guatemalan CSOs working to prevent violence against women lobbied the National Congress to adopt a special law against sexual violence and human trafficking which resulted in the enactment of the [Law Against Sexual Violence, Exploitation and Trafficking in Persons](#) (*Ley Contra la Violencia Sexual, Explotación y Trata de Personas*). Inspired by human rights standards, this law seeks to protect children and ensure the right of women to a life free of violence by criminalising any form of sexual violence, such as forced prostitution, sexual exploitation, sexual tourism and forced pornography. These crimes are punishable with a prison sentence, which is more severe if the victim is a minor. It is noteworthy that the law also criminalises sexual violence, exploitation and trafficking committed in the private sphere, thereby eliminating previous legal barriers that impeded the prosecution of family members.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ OAS. 2013. [Work Plan Against Trafficking in Persons in the Western Hemisphere](#). OAS, Washington, DC.

⁶⁵ Ribando Seelke, C. 2013. [Trafficking in Persons in Latin America and the Caribbean](#). Congressional Research Service, Washington, DC.

⁶⁶ Central America Women's Network. 2012, above n61.

⁶⁷ Fundación Sobrevivientes. 2011. [Incidencia en el Abordaje de la Violencia Sexual en Guatemala \(Advocacy in Approaches to Sexual Violence in Guatemala\)](#). Fundación Sobrevivientes, Guatemala City.



The Guatemalan law also mandates the creation of the [Secretariat Against Sexual Violence, Exploitation and Human Trafficking](#) (*Secretaría de Violencia Sexual, Explotación y Trata de Personas*) which is in charge of coordinating national policy, raising awareness among public authorities and supporting recovering victims. In collaboration with the National Attorney and the National Office of Human Rights in Guatemala, the Secretariat published guidelines for the provision of appropriate support services to ensure appropriate physical, psychological and social support is provided to victims.⁶⁸ The Secretariat has also created programmes coordinated by the Ministries of Social Development and Public Health to provide health services and legal support.

In the context of increasing violence against women in Chihuahua, a northern province in Mexico, the Mexican Congress enacted a new version of the [Law to Prevent and Punish Human Trafficking](#) (*Ley para Prevenir y Sancionar la Trata de Personas*) in 2012. This law criminalises activities resulting from human trafficking such as slavery, forced prostitution, labour exploitation, illegal adoption, forced marriage, trafficking organs or biomedical experimentation. The law also states that protection and assistance must be provided to victims, including legal assistance, adequate housing, medical, psychological and social care, and access to education, training and employment opportunities until complete recovery. Finally, the law mandates the creation of two institutional mechanisms. The first is the Inter-sectorial Commission to Prevent and Punish Human Trafficking, responsible for coordinating institutional responses across government and formed by representatives from 15 ministries and [the National Institute for Women](#) (INMUJERES).

The second institutional mechanism is the [Special Office for Violence against Women and Trafficking in Women](#) (*Fiscalía Especializada para los Delitos de Violencia contra las Mujeres y Trata de Personas* – FEVIMTRA), which is housed within the Attorney General's Office. The main functions of FEVIMTRA are to improve the quality of criminal investigations, provide victim support, participate in the development of public policy and cooperate in the search for missing women and children. It is worth noting that the Mexican law recognises victims' right to receive legal, medical and psychological

assistance, as well as housing, regardless of whether they decide to assist the ministerial authority in the investigation process or not. Between 2009 and 2012, FEVIMTRA's shelters provided a safe house to more than four thousand women victims of trafficking. Likewise, the office set up a 24-hour hotline providing women with psychological and emotional support.⁶⁹ Despite this progress, Mexican CSOs criticise the FEVIMTRA for its poor results in terms of effective prosecution and imprisonment of human traffickers given that between 2008 and 2011, only 126 of 642 cases of trafficking actually got to trial, pointing to significant and persistent barriers in the country's justice system.⁷⁰

In 2012, the National Congress of Costa Rica enacted the [Law Against Human Trafficking](#). One of the main strengths of this law is the establishment of new penalties for people who profit from trafficking in all its various forms. The law also calls for the creation of the National Coalition Against Illegal Migrant Trafficking and Human Trafficking (*la Coalición Nacional contra el Tráfico Ilícito de Migrantes y la Trata de Personas* – CONATT) as a permanent body responsible for promoting the formulation and evaluation of public policy, as well as training civil servants and managing a National Fund for prevention, awareness and training projects, financed by tourism taxes.⁷¹

Addressing Sexual Violence in Armed Conflicts

In Latin America, as in other parts of the world, crimes of sexual violence perpetrated against women during armed conflicts form part of a war logic which posits women's bodies as symbolic war trophies and sites for territorial battles fought out between male actors and their enemies. In addition, armed conflict tends to exacerbate existing patterns of gender discrimination that generate inequalities between men and women, and in particular for marginalised indigenous, ethnic and racial groups. Despite this, reports by national and international human rights institutions, truth commissions and grassroots organisations point out that acts of sexual violence committed during armed conflicts are the least denounced and most difficult to identify, given, in part, the personal, family, community and national implications associated with bringing these cases to light.

⁶⁸ Revista Amiga. 2012. [El Grillete de la Edad Moderna \(Slavery for the Modern Age\)](#). Revista Amiga, online publication.

⁶⁹ Procuraduría General de la República. 2012. [Informe de Rendición de Cuentas 2006-2012. \(Accountability Report 2006-2012\)](#). Procuraduría General de la República, Mexico City.

⁷⁰ Alcántara, L. 2013. [Denuncian ante ONU Ineficiencia de FEVIMTRA \(FEMIREA Denounced for Inefficiency to UN\)](#). El Universal, online publication.

⁷¹ Guerrero, E. 2013. [Costa Rica Cuenta con Nueva Ley para Combatir la Trata de Personas \(Costa Rica Enacts a New Law for Fighting Human Trafficking\)](#). CRHoy, online publication.



And yet shedding light on the causes and consequences of sexual violence committed during armed conflicts, as well as effective investigation and sanctioning of the perpetrators, is central to processes of transitional justice.

In Latin America, international legal standards have been adapted to particular national contexts. To do this, countries such as Colombia, Guatemala and Peru are implementing a range of innovative strategies in an effort to improve justice and reparation for women victims of sexual violence. These strategies include: i) research and documentation methodologies for identifying the particular ways in which women are affected by armed conflict; ii) public programmes to prevent the re-victimisation of women; and iii) bottom-up approaches to providing victim support services. To learn more about these strategies, consult the [ELLA Brief: Access to Justice for Survivors of Sexual Violence in Conflicts: Three Latin American Approaches](#).

Gender Violence Observatories

Against a backdrop of poor quality statistics relating to gender violence and government reluctance to disclose this kind of information, several Latin American regional and national civil society organisations (CSOs) have created gender observatories to collect data, produce and analyse indicators and improve the visibility of gender violence in their countries or region. This new trend has been taken up in countries as diverse as Argentina, El Salvador, Mexico and Peru. A regional observatory, the [Latin American and Caribbean Gender Equality Observatory](#), was also set up by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) after a request from member states in 2007.

Gender violence observatories appear in different shapes and forms across the continent, but share common objectives such as producing quantitative and qualitative data on gender violence and using this to lobby for improvements in public policy and practice. Gender observatories also seek to correct state deficiencies relating to the elaboration of complete official records on gender violence cases and the disclosure of relevant statistics. Indeed, gender observatories are considered a powerful instrument for education and empowerment.⁷²

Latin American gender observatories generally divide their work between three key activities:

1. Data collection. To ensure the accuracy of this information, data is collected from diverse sources, including local

women's organisations that are closer to the reality and have better access to accurate data. Observatories sometimes obtain information from the Public Attorney's Office and other public institutions, such as in Peru and Mexico, but even when these are willing to disclose information, it is often incomplete. This is the reason why the main source of information remains the media, particularly in relation to cases of femicide. The Mexican [National Citizen Femicide Observatory](#) (*Observatorio Ciudadano Nacional del Femicidio*) and El Salvador's [Gender Violence Against Women Observatory](#) (*Observatorio de la Violencia de Género Contra la Mujer*), for example, monitor the media to denounce cases that are being neglected by public institutions. From these local media reports, the observatories produce national or regional diagnoses. Two government-run observatories – the [Criminality Observatory](#) (*Observatorio de Criminalidad*) in Peru and the [Gender Affairs Observatory](#) (*Observatorio de Asuntos de Género*) in Colombia – are two interesting examples because they use the data they collect to produce diagnostic reports comparing acts of violence committed against men and women. In this way, the two observatories produce concrete evidence indicating the particular ways in which women specifically are subject to violence.⁷³

2. Gender observatories in Latin America use this information to lobby the government to enact laws and develop public policy aimed at eliminating violence against women. In Peru, for instance, the Criminality Observatory made a recommendation to the Attorney General that issuing an aggressor with an "order to cease violence" (*orden de cese de violencia*) was insufficient to prevent gender violence from taking place. Data collected by the observatory demonstrated that many aggressors issued with this order had continued committing acts of violence, sometimes culminating in femicide. The Attorney General therefore took the decision that the order would no longer be used in cases of violence against women since stronger measures were clearly required.⁷⁴ In Ecuador, the activities of the [Observatory for Women's Right to a Life Free of Violence](#) (*Observatorio del Derecho de las Mujeres a una Vida sin Violencia*) led to the creation in 2004 of a unit specialised in sexual crimes and domestic violence, housed within the Public Attorney Office, and to reforms to the criminal code and the national constitution.

3. Finally, Latin America gender observatories monitor the implementation of public policy on gender violence and the behaviour of public institutions. Peru's Criminality

⁷² Fernós, M. D. 2010. [National Mechanisms for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women in Latin America and the Caribbean Region](#). Division of Gender Affairs, ECLAC, Santiago.

⁷³ Alméras, D., Calderón Magaña, C. 2012. [Si No Se Cuenta, No Cuenta. Información Sobre la Violencia Contra las Mujeres \(If No One Tells, it Doesn't Count. Information on Violence Against Women\)](#). In: *Cuadernos de la Cepal 99*. ECLAC, Santiago.

⁷⁴ Alméras & Calderón Magaña. 2012, above n73.



Observatory, for instance, monitors the media to make sure that the Public Attorney’s Office does not omit any cases in the reports they are required to provide to the observatory.⁷⁵

[The Judicial Rulings Observatory](#) (*Observatorio de Sentencias Judiciales*) monitors 36 Courts of Justice at the national and local levels in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, gathers rulings and evaluates compliance with the rights set out in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). It also disseminates regional good practices for the defence and safeguarding of women’s rights. The main objectives of the Judicial Rulings Observatory are to provide open-access, easy-to-use databases and to reinforce the acknowledgement of women’s rights by legal institutions. The Mexican [National Citizen Femicide Observatory](#) (*Observatorio Ciudadano Nacional del Femicidio*) monitors public policy and demands accountability from the government in terms of preventing and sanctioning cases of femicide.

The main achievements of Latin America’s gender observatories to date are that they are improving the visibility of gender violence at the local, national and regional levels, while at the same time improving government accountability. By disaggregating data by age, type of relationship with the aggressor and type of violence, among other indicators, gender observatories provide a detailed analysis of

gender violence and on this basis can make strong policy recommendations.

Protocols for Preventing Institutional Violence

Institutional violence against women refers to violence sanctioned implicitly or explicitly by governments and public administrations in their organisations, systems and procedures. It generally manifests itself at two levels: when public officers or structures impede women from accessing public services or exercising their rights in key areas such as healthcare, education or access to justice, or within the organisation of a public agency through either abusive behavior in the workplace or in denying women access to equal opportunities.

According to the 2003 Annual Report by the [United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women](#), gender violence in the workplace – entailing among others sexual harassment, exclusion from areas or job tasks, restricted access to professional development or work opportunities and unequal pay for equal work – represents one of the principal forms of violence against women around the world and in Latin America.⁷⁶ The reasons behind it are rooted in asymmetrical power relations between men and women in the workplace and society more broadly.

Countries like Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico and Uruguay have all criminalised sexual harassment in the workplace. Since 2001, the Mexican government has driven forward the adoption of a comprehensive strategy to tackle harassment and sexual harassment in public institutions. In 2009, these efforts culminated in the implementation of the Intervention Protocol for Harassment and Sexual Harassment by the National Institute for Women, INMUJERES, which contains innovative features including an oversight mechanism, ample scope, a complaints procedure and training for civil servants. To date, the Protocol has been implemented in over 30 state institutions, with replication also taking place at local level. It is a pioneering attempt to overcome the structural causes of institutional violence within the public administration. To learn more about this Protocol, read the [ELLA Brief: Addressing Institutional Violence: Intervention Protocol for Sexual Harassment in the Mexican Federal Public Administration](#).

BOX 3: LATIN AMERICAN OBSERVATORIES WORKING ON GENDER VIOLENCE

The following list provides links to some additional regional and national observatories:

- [Observatory: Cities, Violence and Gender](#) covering Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, Peru and El Salvador. Responsible for monitoring the regional programme Cities Without Violence Against Women, Safe Cities for All.
- El Salvador: [Gender Violence Against Women Observatory](#) (*Observatorio de la Violencia de Género Contra la Mujer*)
- The Dominican Republic: [Justice and Gender Observatory](#) (*Observatorio de Justicia y Género*)
- Argentina: [“Adriana Marisel Zambrano” Observatory of Femicide in Argentina](#) (*Observatorio de Femicidios en Argentina “Adriana Marisel Zambrano”*)
- Ecuador: [Observatory for Women’s Right to a Life Free of Violence](#) (*Observatorio del Derecho de las Mujeres a una Vida sin Violencia*)

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Commission on Human Rights. 2003. [Violence Against Women](#). Commission on Human Rights, online publication.

CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

ENABLING GENDER VIOLENCE INITIATIVES



In Latin America, the democratisation process that most countries experienced from the 1980s onwards brought about two things. First, a new receptiveness from the government towards citizens' demands and respect for their rights (during authoritarian regimes, women had been ignored or repressed). Second, a renewed impetus for women's involvement in public affairs. In this context, numerous CSOs, feminist activists, victims' organisations and coalitions emerged and began lobbying governments to adopt laws and implement gender violence prevention and treatment mechanisms. Governments in the region have demonstrated commitment to these measures by allocating public funds to these activities and to the creation of specialised Women's Offices or Ministries.

The existence of a strong regional history of collaboration and a long-standing and respected human rights system (namely the OAS and the IAHR Commission and IAHR Court) were also fundamental for advancing the gender violence agenda in the region. The IAHR Commission and IAHR Court have made ground-breaking rulings on cases of gender violence, including ordering states to take concrete actions to fulfil their obligations to safeguard women's rights. These rulings have provided a powerful instrument for CSOs and victims to demand the enforcement of their rights from Latin American governments. The existence of a powerful regional human rights system also facilitated the drafting, approval and adoption of the Belém do Pará Convention, the only regional instrument on gender violence of its kind in the world and one which benefits from two oversight and follow-up mechanisms.

Civil society has also played a key role in monitoring the effectiveness of government actions in reducing gender

violence. In cases in which the government has not taken any action, or is not respecting or enforcing the law, civil society has filed petitions before regional organisations, such as the Inter-American Human Rights System. At the national level, civil society has also demonstrated the capacity to launch awareness-raising campaigns, train public officials, run shelters, and collect and analyse data on gender violence above and beyond what the government is doing. The increasing number of gender violence observatories that exist in the region on issues such as femicide and domestic violence reflect the increasing capacity of civil society to take a leading role in analysing and understanding gender violence, its causes and possible solutions.

In Latin America, consultation platforms bringing together local authorities, women's movements, educational institutions and the media, among others, have opened up spaces for discussing and overcoming traditional gender stereotypes. Likewise, participatory planning processes have led to the development of public policies and programmes aimed at tackling gender violence that have benefitted from wide expertise beyond just the government. For example, effective collaboration between governments and CSOs has facilitated the running and managing of shelters for women and the design of safer urban spaces.

Finally, the role of international and regional organisations such as UN Habitat, UN Women, the Inter-American Development Bank and the OAS has been key to encouraging some countries to push through reforms. As well as financial support, these institutions are providing capacity-building to governments and CSOs, and actively encouraging knowledge dissemination and sharing.

- 1 The existence of a strong regional human rights system, with institutions such as the IAHR Commission and Court that have jurisdiction over states, plays a fundamental role in efforts to eliminate gender violence. Not only does this system have the authority to hold states responsible and set legal precedents, it also provides victims with an independent mechanism for demanding that their rights be upheld. This is particularly relevant in cases in which the state itself has committed gender violence or when national courts have been unable to provide adequate justice. Similarly, external bodies like the IAHR Commission and IAHR Court are in a position to highlight forms of gender violence that are being largely ignored by national governments and therefore represent important agents of change.
- 2 The creation of a regional convention on gender violence, such as the Belém do Pará, can provide a powerful instrument for setting specific and binding obligations for states to implement measures to prevent, eradicate and punish acts of violence against women, as well as providing women with the tools they need to demand their rights. These conventions can be strengthened if they include follow-up mechanisms to ensure compliance.
- 3 Successful programmes to build safer cities for women should include both prevention and treatment
- 4 Observatories provide a successful model for improving the visibility of gender violence, particularly concerning issues that usually remain hidden due to a lack of public statistics and disclosure. These observatories play an important role in exposing the scale of gender violence and informing citizens, the media and the government on its causes and impacts. Observatories also provide an independent mechanism for monitoring government compliance with obligations set out in national constitutions and laws, as well as regional and international treaties.
- 5 Creating national laws that criminalise gender violence in its various forms, such as domestic and institutional violence, femicide and trafficking in women represents an important first step that states can take to prevent this phenomenon. As well as adequate sanctions for perpetrators, these laws should include measures to support victims and transform institutional behaviour and
- 6 The creation of special units and/or courts is another important strategy that governments can implement to tackle gender violence in its different forms. To be effective, these units require the technical capacity and political clout to coordinate national efforts and push through changes in the political and legal systems. Likewise, any new units should actively encourage civil society participation in order to ensure transparency and accountability on such sensitive and controversial issues.
- 7 As the Latin American approach highlights, it is important to understand gender violence from a women's rights perspective and not merely as a criminal problem. This way, public policies on gender violence can be designed to include a more comprehensive and effective approach to prevention and treatment.

CONCLUSION

The Latin American approach to gender violence offers three main conclusions. The first is that regional human rights mechanisms, such as an Inter-American Human Rights System and its organs, can be powerful instruments for promoting advances regionally and within countries on gender violence. The Belem do Pará Convention can be considered an important achievement in this respect. Second, experience in the region indicates the importance of government commitment and political will to allocate resources and implement policies aimed at preventing and addressing gender violence. Even if the region still has a way to go, an impressive variety of measures have been implemented over recent years that are ripe for replication and scaling-up. Finally, the role of civil society in the region has been key for pushing through new laws, taking cases to national and regional courts, documenting specific forms of violence, collaborating with the government on specific programmes, and providing services to victims of violence. Without constant oversight from civil society, Latin American governments would probably not have implemented as many measures as they have done.

RECOMMENDED READING

The following list provides a selection of some of the key publications relating to gender violence in Latin America. For more information about these and other publications, see the [ELLA Spotlight on Publications](#).

Bott, S. *et al.* 2012. [Violence Against Women in Latin America and the Caribbean: A Comparative Analysis of Population-Based Data from 12 Countries](#). Pan American Health Organization and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Washington, DC.

Castillo, P. and Prado, L. 2010. [Ficha Técnica: Violencia Contra la Mujeres en América Latina \(Technical Note: Violence Against Women in Latin America\)](#). Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM)/Organization of American States, Washington, DC.

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). 2009. [No More! The Right of Women to Live a Life Free of Violence in Latin America and the Caribbean](#). ECLAC, Santiago.

Falú, A. (ed). 2010. [Women in the City: On Violence and Rights](#). Women and Habitat Network of Latin America, Santiago.

Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR). 2011. [Access to Justice for Women Victims of Sexual Violence: Education and Health](#). IACHR, Washington, DC.

IACHR. 2011. [Access to Justice for Women Victims of Sexual Violence in Mesoamerica](#). IACHR, Washington, DC.

Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM)/OAS. 2012. [Second Hemispheric Report on the Implementation of the Belém Do Pará Convention](#). CIM/OAS, Washington, DC.

Organization of American States. [The Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence Against Women \(Belém do Pará\)](#). OAS, Mechanism to Follow Up on Implementation of the Convention (MESECVI), Canadian International Development Agency, Washington, DC.

UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for the Advancement of Women. 2010. [Handbook for Legislation on Violence Against Women](#). UN, New York.

The United Nations Regional Commissions. 2013. [Enhancing Capacities to Eradicate Violence Against Women](#). The United Regional Commissions, Santiago.

Vargas, V. 2007. [Public Spaces, Citizen Safety and Gender-Based Violence Reflections Emerging From Debates in Latin America in 2006-2007](#). UNIFEM Brazil and Southern Cone, Brasilia.



KNOWLEDGE PARTNERS

Below is a sample of some of the most influential organisations working on gender violence in Latin America and worldwide. For additional information about these and other organisations, read the [ELLA Spotlight on Organisations](#).

International and Regional Organisations

The [Comité Latinoamericano y del Caribe para la Defensa de las Mujeres](#) (Latin American and Caribbean Committee for the Defence of Women's Rights – CLADEM) is a feminist network that advocates for the defence and the full enforcement of women's rights in Latin America and the Caribbean. Its activities include strategic litigation, state monitoring, education and capacity-building, and campaigns. CLADEM also provides valuable inputs for reports produced by the MESECVI Committee of Experts on the implementation of the Belém do Pará Convention.

In 2004, the [Organization of American States](#) (OAS), through the [Inter-American Commission of Women](#), implemented the Mechanism to Follow Up on Implementation of the Convention (MESECVI) to monitor progress by member states to fulfil obligations set out in the Belém do Pará Convention. Its [Committee of Experts](#) is the organ in charge of evaluating progress among member states.

[Red Feminista Latinoamericana y del Caribe contra la Violencia Doméstica y Sexual](#) (the Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence) provides capacity building to member organisations, helping them to strengthen their advocacy work and influence at all levels of decision-making. The network also carries out research, prevention and victim support projects, advocacy work, and participates in diverse global campaigns.

[Red Mujer y Hábitat de América Latina](#) (the Latin American Women and Habitat Network) brings together women's organisations from 13 Latin American countries. It carries out programmes aimed at promoting women's rights and greater gender equity in urban environments and supports the development of public policies to prevent violence against women.

Through its regional office in Panama City and country and multi-country offices, [UN Women](#) assists Latin American governments to strengthen and reform their laws, institutions, national programmes and budgets with the aim of reducing and

eventually eliminating gender violence. For instance, through the [Safe Cities Global Initiative](#), UN Women helps several Latin American countries to tackle sexual violence in public spaces. [UN Women also actively participates in the UN Secretary-General's UNiTE to end violence against women campaign](#) in 33 Latin American countries.

National Organisations

The [Asociación para el Desarrollo Integral de Personas Violadas AC](#) (Association for the Integral Development of People Who Are Raped) is a Mexican organisation that provides victim support services, prevention and training programmes and runs diploma courses. It also carries out research and advocacy work.

[La Casa del Encuentro](#) (Meeting House) is an Argentinean feminist organisation that provides spaces where women can share and discuss their experiences of violence. It also provides victim support services and capacity building, and carries out research and advocacy work, including the publication of an [annual report on femicide in Argentina](#).

The [Equipo Latinoamericano de Justicia y Género](#) (Latin American Team for Justice and Gender – ELA) is a feminist organisation that brings together women from academia, civil society organisations and universities in Argentina. The organisation carries out research and advocacy work on access to justice, women's political participation and gender violence at national and regional levels. ELA also coordinates the [Observatorio de Sentencias Judiciales](#) (Observatory of Judicial Rulings) that monitors tribunals from Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru.

The [Fundación Propuesta](#) (Proposal Foundation) is an Argentinean organisation that supports women victims of violence, organises study groups with experts, lawyers and doctors, and creates informative meeting spaces where participants exchange experiences and case studies.

The [Observatorio Ciudadano Nacional del Femicidio](#) (National Citizen Femicide Observatory) brings together [49 civil society organisations](#) in an effort to promote women's rights in 19 provinces of Mexico. Through the analysis of cases of femicide, it seeks to identify and understand the different contexts in which gender violence is perpetrated. The observatory also monitors the implementation of the Mexican law 'Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence' at the local level.



The [Observatorio de Justicia y Género](#) (Justice and Gender Observatory) promotes equal access to justice and aims to integrate gender perspectives into the Dominican Republic’s legal system. The observatory also monitors and analyses legal processes, sentencing and protocols, and provides technical assistance to policy formulation processes.

The [Organización de Mujeres Salvadoreñas por la Paz](#) (Organisation of Salvadorian Women for Peace – ORMUSA) seeks to promote women’s rights and address gender violence through providing support to the development of public policy on violence prevention and victim support strategies. It also coordinates a [Gender Violence Observatory](#).

LEARN MORE FROM THE ELLA BRIEFS

These four ELLA Briefs provide analysis of some of the most important issues related to gender violence in Latin America.

[Access to Justice for Survivors of Sexual Violence in Conflicts: Three Latin American Approaches](#)

From innovative methodologies for investigating and documenting sexual violence, to legal reforms and CSO-led support initiatives, Latin American countries are having success in improving access to justice for women victims of sexual violence.

[The Cotton Field Case in Mexico: Setting Legal Precedents for Fighting Gender-Based Violence](#)

Systemic discrimination is a key driver of gender-based violence in Latin America. So how is a key ruling by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights helping to improve the protection of women’s rights across the region?

[Building Legal Frameworks to Address Femicide in Latin America](#)

By reforming national penal codes and enacting special laws, Latin American countries are taking first steps towards eradicating femicide in the region.

[Addressing Institutional Violence: Intervention Protocol for Sexual Harassment in the Mexican Federal Public Administration](#)

The Intervention Protocol for Harassment and Sexual Harassment is a pioneering attempt from the Mexican Federal Government to transform the structural causes of institutional violence within the public administration. Initiated in 2009, the protocol has been implemented in over 30 state institutions, with replication now taking place at local level.

CONTACT [FUNDAR](#)

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