

# Responses to Domestic Violence and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

Latin America, MENA and West Africa



Among the challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, gender-based problems -such as sexual exploitation and abuse, domestic violence and gender violence- intensified. This newsletter is a comparative analysis of countries' responses to domestic violence and sexual abuse and exploitation in the following regions: Latin America, West Africa and the MENA. The newsletter also highlights the number of cases received in certain years and whether it has increased with the onset of the pandemic. It also notes peculiar types of sexual violence depending on the context and finally proffers recommendations for policy reforms.





**GPSP** Global Partnership for Security and Peace



## Context

The global COVID-19 pandemic that started in Wuhan in 2019 was declared a global health emergency by World Health Organization (WHO) on 30th January 2020. The Latin American, West African and the MENA regions were adversely affected by the impact of the pandemic in the health, social, educational, security and economic sectors. From March 2020, the countries in focus imposed diverse measures to curb the spread of the virus such as social distancing, partial or complete lockdowns, restriction of movements, and mandatory quarantine for asymptomatic or symptomatic persons, etc.

### Cumulative cases of COVID-19\*

	 Covid cases	 Cases per 100,000 inhabitants	 Covid fatalities	 Cases per 100,000 inhabitants
<b>Latin America</b>				
<b>Middle East</b>				
<b>West Africa</b>				
Argentina	1,626,000	3,631.0	43,245	96.6
Benin	3,251	26.9	44	0.4
Bolivia	160,124	1,390.8	9,165	79.6
Brazil	7,676,000	3,637.1	194,949	92.4
Chile	608,973	3,213.2	16,608	87.6
Colombia	1,643,000	3,263.9	43,213	85.8
Costa Rica	169,321	3,354.2	2,185	43.3
Dominican Republic	170,785	1,590.3	2,414	22.5
Ecuador	212,512	1,223.2	14,034	80.8
Egypt	138,062	137.6	7,631	7.6
El Salvador	45,960	712.1	1,327	20.6
Ghana	54,771	185.0	335	1.1
Guatemala	138,012	785.0	4,813	27.4
Haiti	9,999	88.8	236	2.1
Honduras	121,827	1,250.0	3,130	32.1
Jordan	294,494	2,723.9	3,834	35.5
Lebanon	181,503	2,664.1	1,468	21.5
Mexico	1,426,000	1,117.8	125,807	98.6
Nicaragua	6,046	92.4	165	2.5
Nigeria	87,607	38.6	1,289	0.6
Panama	246,790	5,812.3	4,022	94.7
Paraguay	107,932	1,532.0	2,262	32.1
Peru	1,015,000	3,122.1	37,680	115.9
Togo	3,633	42.2	68	0.8
Uruguay	19,119	552.3	181	5.2
Venezuela	113,558	398.2	1,028	3.6

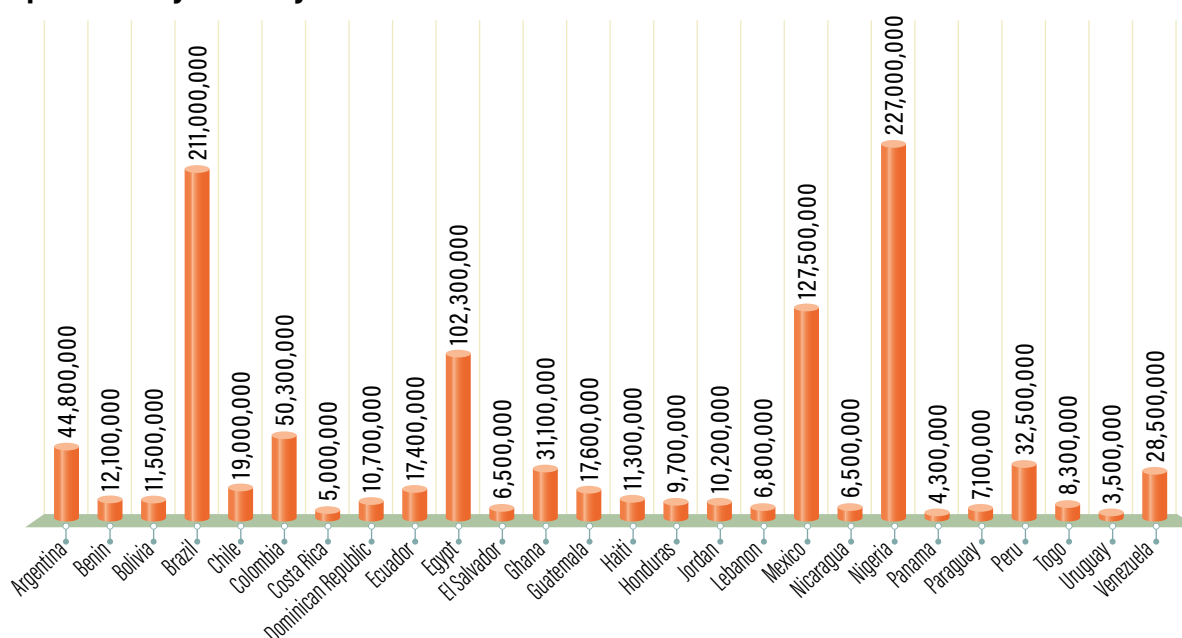
\*As of December 31, 2020.

**Source:** Demographic Observatory, Latin America and the Caribbean 2019, ECLAC (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela); General Census of Population and Housing Result 2015 (Jordan); Global COVID-19 Map, Coronavirus Resource Center, Johns Hopkins University of Medicine (December 31, 2020); National Bureau of Statistics 2016 (Nigeria); United Nations Population Fund 2020 (Benin, Egypt, Ghana, Togo, Lebanon).

When combined, the selected countries from Latin America have an estimated population of 627 million; this figure amounts to 279 million for those countries from West Africa and 119 million for the MENA region. They were selected because they demonstrate considerable variety with regard to their socio-demographic factors, COVID-19 responses and instances of SEA and DV. Consequently, they provide ample potential to conduct in-depth analysis and extract rich data to provide corroborated policy recommendations.

A combined population density of the West African countries stands at 614.42 per/km<sup>2</sup>, Latin America at 154.58 per/km<sup>2</sup>, whilst MENA is 888.09 per/km<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup>. Countries with a particularly high population density are especially susceptible to the effects of the health pandemic as overly cramped conditions facilitate the spread of COVID-19. Equally, in such conditions, resources might expectedly be over-stretched and insufficient, and infrastructure could be inadequate for the citizens.

### Population by country



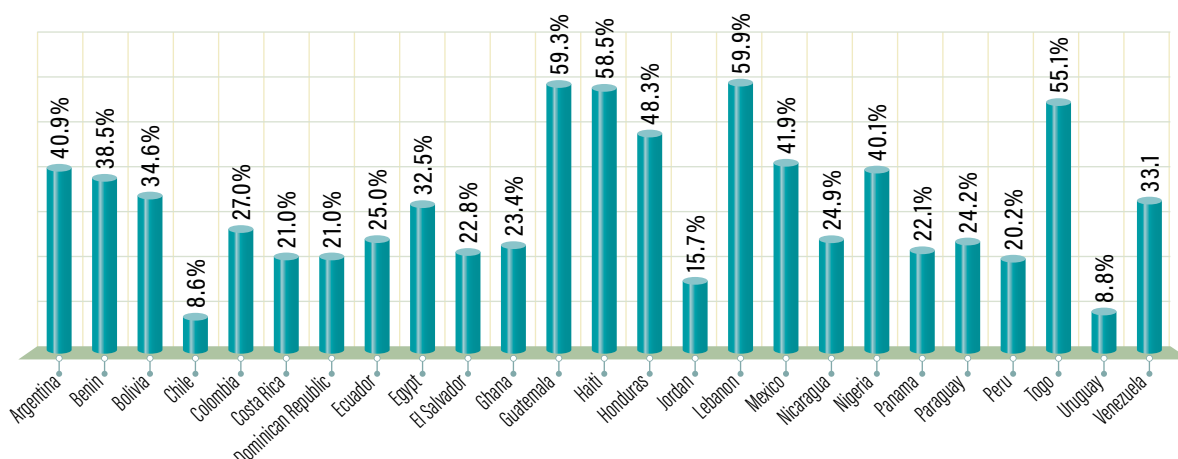
**Latin America:** Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela. **Middle East:** Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon. **West Africa:** Benin, Ghana, Nigeria and Togo.

**Sources:** Demographic Observatory, Latin America and the Caribbean 2019, ECLAC (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela); National Bureau of Statistics 2016 (Nigeria); United Nations Population Fund 2020 (Benin, Egypt, Ghana, Jordan, Lebanon, Togo).

Impoverished living conditions and a high poverty headcount are also responsible for contributing to the spread of COVID-19. A living environment which fails to guarantee safety and warmth will undoubtedly exert a detrimental impact on occupants' health. In addition, COVID-19 and its associated repercussions have in many cases deepened the economic divide between the richest and poorest citizens. Comparing the countries selected in this research, Chile and Uruguay have the lowest poverty headcount at 8.6% and 8.8% respectively; while Guatemala, Haiti and Togo have the highest poverty headcount at 59.3%, 58.5% and 55.1% respectively. Looking specifically at the West African countries selected for analysis, there is also considerable disparity across the poverty headcount for each country with Togo standing at 51.5% and Ghana being the lowest at 23.4%. For the MENA region, Jordan stands at 15.7%, falling below the average poverty headcount for all the cases.

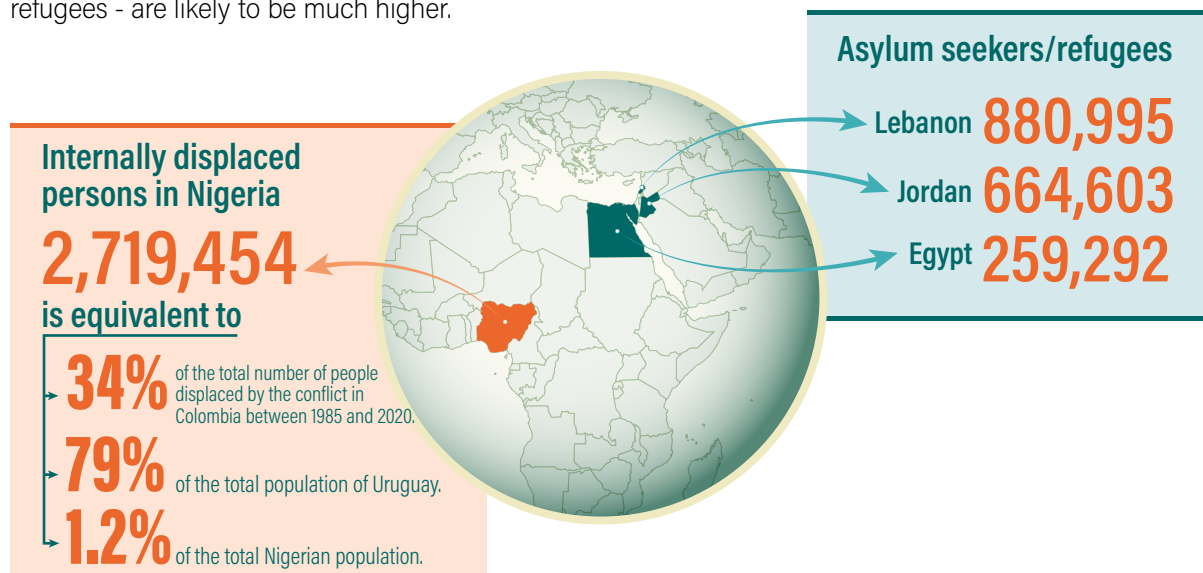
<sup>1</sup> Own elaboration based on data produced by the World Bank. (2018). Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.POP.DNST>

## Poverty headcount across selected cases (%)



**Source:** The World Bank. Poverty Headcount Ratio at National Poverty Lines (% of population). In all cases, the source takes the most recent available year (range from 2012 to 2020). Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.NAHC>

Insecurity and other economic challenges have led to internal displacements, refugee situations and homelessness especially in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Nigeria and Venezuela. Women who fall into these categories can be subject to double discrimination and, therefore, rendered particularly vulnerable. In addition, such groups tended to be more susceptible to falling victim to gender-based violence even before COVID-19. When considering these issues in the current context, it becomes evident that the pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities and heightened the vulnerabilities of these groups. In Nigeria, 71 million people were estimated to require humanitarian assistance in 2019, out of which 5.68 million were women.<sup>2</sup> The diagrams below map out the complicated situation concerning refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in some of the selected cases. Although, it must also be noted that these figures indicate only registered refugees and, therefore, the actual numbers - including all nationalities, such as palestinians, and unregistered refugees - are likely to be much higher.



**Source:** own elaboration based on statistics produced by UNHCR, the World Bank (2019) and the Unit for Comprehensive Care and Reparation to Victims, Single Record of Victims (up to December 2020). Available at: <https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Lebanon%20-%20Operational%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20January%202021.pdf>; <https://www.unhcr.org/eg/wp-content/uploads/sites/36/2021/01/December-2020-UNHCR-Egypt-Monthly-Statistical-Report.pdf>; <https://www.unhcr.org/jo/>; <https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Nigeria%20-%20All%20Population%20Snapshot%20January%202021.pdf>; <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL>; <https://www.unidadvictimas.gov.co/es/registro-unico-de-victimas-ruv/37394>.

<sup>2</sup> IOM. (2019). IOM Nigeria Emergency Response. 2019 Annual Report. Available at: [https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/situation\\_reports/file/2019\\_annual\\_report\\_-\\_iom\\_nigeria\\_emergency\\_responsefinal.pdf](https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/situation_reports/file/2019_annual_report_-_iom_nigeria_emergency_responsefinal.pdf)

The World Economic Forum report of 2020<sup>3</sup> indicates that there have been progressive efforts to improve gender parity across regions. According to this report, since 2018, the selected countries of Latin America has achieved a progress of 15.07% in this domain, whereas the selected cases of West Africa stands at 0.05% progress and the selected cases from the MENA region at 2.03%. The global gender gap report produced on an annual basis by the World Economic Forum assigns a value to each country dependent on gender-based gaps in access to resources and opportunities, where the highest possible value at 1 indicates maximum gender equality and 0 is the lowest possible score.

## Gender Gap Index 2020. Selected cases

<div> <div></div> Latin America           <div></div> MENA           <div></div> West Africa         </div>								
Nicaragua	Mexico	Bolivia	Chile	El Salvador	Paraguay	Ghana	Nigeria	
0.804	0.754	0.734	0.723	0.706	0.683	0.673	0.635	
Costa Rica	Argentina	Panama	Honduras	Dominican Republic	Guatemala	Benin	Togo	
0.782	0.746	0.73	0.722	0.7	0.666	0.658	0.615	
Colombia	Uruguay	Ecuador	Venezuela	Brazil	Peru	Egypt	Jordan	Lebanon
0.758	0.737	0.729	0.713	0.691	0.652	0.629	0.623	0.599

Source: Global Gender Gap Report 2020. World Economic Forum.

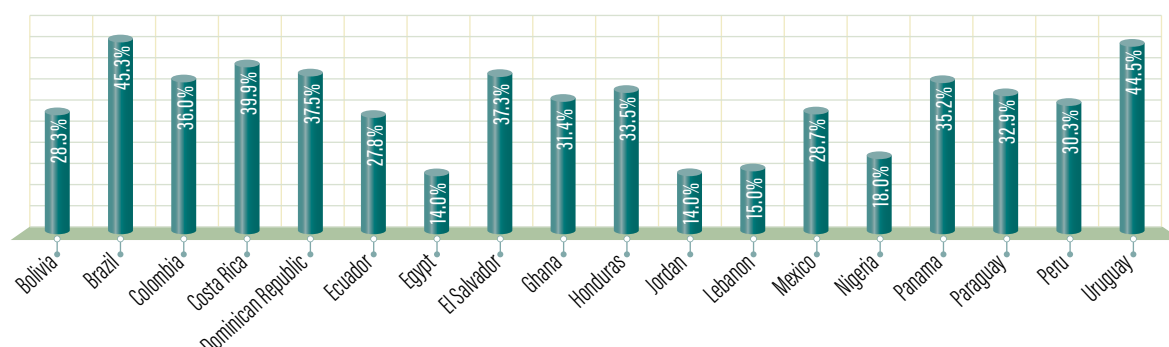
One of the issues that these types of index tend to measure is the participation of women in economic life. Economic independence means women are empowered and have more control over decisions affecting their lives. It is a vital prerequisite in striving for gender equality. Most of the countries in focus have an average of 40% of women in the work force with Togo having the highest at 49.6%<sup>4</sup> whilst Jordan has the lowest at 16.2%.<sup>5</sup>

3 World Economic Forum. (2020). *Global Gender Gap Report 2020*. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/gender-gap-2020-report-100-years-pay-equality#report-nav>

4 International Labour Organisation. (2020). *Labour Force Participation Rate by Sex and Age*. Available at: [https://www.ilo.org/shinyapps/bulkexplorer43/?lang=en&segment=indicator&id=EAP\\_2WAP\\_SEX\\_AGE\\_RT\\_A](https://www.ilo.org/shinyapps/bulkexplorer43/?lang=en&segment=indicator&id=EAP_2WAP_SEX_AGE_RT_A)

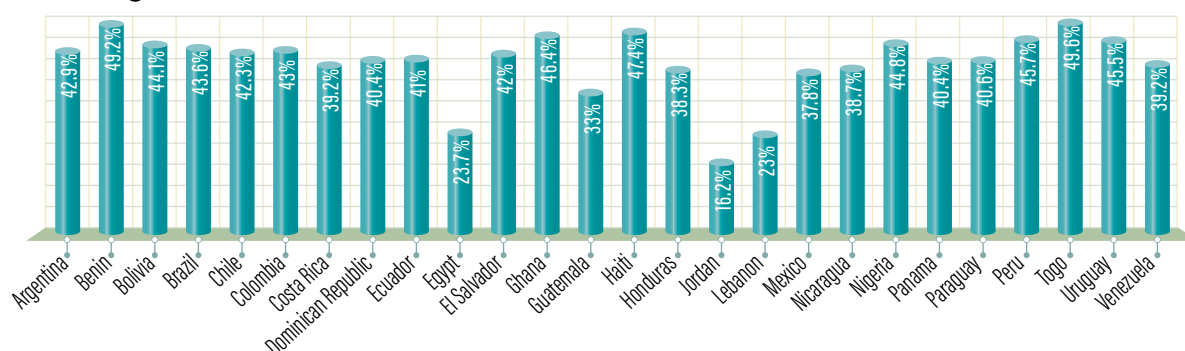
5 Department of Statistics for Jordan. (2020). *Employed Persons Age 15 + Years by Sex, Governorate & Nationality*. Available at: [http://www.dos.gov.jo/owa-user/owa/emp\\_unemp.show\\_tables1?lang=E&year1=2020&round=3&t\\_no=58](http://www.dos.gov.jo/owa-user/owa/emp_unemp.show_tables1?lang=E&year1=2020&round=3&t_no=58)

## Women as heads of households (%) across selected countries



**Sources:** CEPAL. (2019). Statistical Yearbook. Available at: <https://www.cepal.org/en/node/51194> The World Bank. (2019). Female headed households (% of households with a female head). Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.HOU.FEMA.ZS?end=2019&start=2019&view=map>

## Percentage of women in the work force



**Source:** African Statistical Yearbook 2020, African Development Bank Group (Benin, Egypt, Ghana, Togo, Nigeria); Department of Statistics of Jordan 2020 (Jordan); Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean 2020, CEPALSTAT (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela).

# Domestic Violence

According to the United Nations<sup>6</sup>, domestic violence is defined as “a pattern of behavior in any relation that is used to gain or maintain power or control over an intimate partner.” It is violence “perpetrated by a man or women solely in private space, mostly where the survivor lives.”<sup>7</sup>

Gender-based violence is “any form of violence inflicted against a person based on their gender identity or condition, whether male or female, both in the private and public domains.”<sup>8</sup>

During COVID-19 national lockdowns, countries across the world began recording concerning high numbers of domestic violence cases. This became a prominent issue which gained lots of media coverage and political attention throughout 2020. Domestic violence – coined the shadow pandemic by the UN – has been far-reaching and has not discriminated dependent on the wealth and development status of the country in question. Conversely, it penetrates (a variety of) households and affects women in the most intimate spheres of their lives. Even though greater efforts have been employed in recent years to highlight and reduce cases of domestic violence, it is only in the past year that the issue has gained significant momentum and governments are feeling the pressure to prioritise it in their political agendas.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations. *What is Domestic Abuse?* Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/what-is-domestic-abuse>.

<sup>7</sup> UNDP. (2017). *From Commitment to Action: Policies to End Violence Against Women in Latin America and the Caribbean. Regional Analysis Document.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

Twenty-three of the examined countries have national laws that prevent and respond to violence against women including domestic violence, femicide and sexual exploitation and abuse. These laws, though with important nuances, adopt the provisions of the Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Violence against Women (CEDAW), Inter-America Convention to Prevent, Eradicate and Punish Violence against Women and other national specific laws.

Country	Pertinent legislation	Institution in charge of response and prevention
Argentina	Law 26.485	Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity.
Bolivia	Law 348	Comprehensive Plurinational System of Prevention, Attention, Punishment and Eradication of Gender-Based Violence (dependent on Ministry of Justice).
Brazil	Law 11.340	Special Secretariat for Women's Policies.
Chile	Law 20.066	Ministry of Women and Gender Equality.
Colombia	Law 1257	The Council for Equality of Women in coordination with the Office of the Attorney General of the Nation and the Ombudsman's Office.
Costa Rica	Law 8589	National Institute of Women (INAMU).
Dominican Republic	Law 24-97	The Ministry of State for Women.
Ecuador	Law 103	National Council for Gender Equality.
El Salvador	Decree 520	The Salvadoran Institute for the Development of Women ISDEMU.
Guatemala	Decree 22	Presidential Secretariat for Women.
Honduras	Decree 132-97	National Institute for Women.
Mexico	General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence	National Institute for Women (INMUJERES).
Nicaragua	Act 779	Ministry of Women.
Panama	Law 38	National Institute of Women (INAMU).
Paraguay	Law 1.600 Law 5.777	The Ministry for Women of the Presidency of the Republic.
Peru	Law 30.364	The Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations.
Uruguay	Law 17.514 Law 19.580	National Institute of Women.
Venezuela	Law 38.668	The Ombudsman's Office, the National Institute of Women and state institutes.
Benin	Article 3 of Law 2011-26	The Ministry of Social Affairs and Microfinance.
Ghana	Domestic Violence Act 2007 (Act 732) and the Criminal Code (Amendment) Act introducing Section 69A Female Circumcision	Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection.
Nigeria	Section 34 (1) (a) Constitution of Nigeria, 1999 Section 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15 & 19 Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act Matrimonial Causes Act, 1970 Cap M7 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004	National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons NAPTIP (Prevention, Investigation and Prosecution). Nigeria Police Force (NPF) (Investigation and Prosecution). Federal and State Ministries of Justice (Prosecution).
Togo	Code Penal 2015	The Gender and Women's Rights Department.
Egypt	There is no specific article in the criminal law targeting the domestic violence. The following are articles which prohibit harming or beating another person: criminal law articles: 171, 161 repeated, 176, 240, 241, 242, 307, 308 are usually used to criminalize all sort of violence, including domestic violence, but there is no a dedicated law for the GBV in the private sphere or the domestic field.	National Council for Women.
Jordan	Law of Protection from Domestic Violence No (15) of 2017 Jordan Penal Code No (16) of 1960 and its amendments	Family Protection Department from the Public Security Directorate. Ministry of Social Development.

Source: own elaboration based on national legislation.



In the cases considered from West Africa, Ghana has a Domestic Violence Act (DVA), Nigeria – a violence against persons law, while Togo provides a generic violence against women and children's section in the penal code.<sup>9</sup> In the MENA region, Egypt relies on its criminal law to curb domestic and sexual violence. On the other hand, most of the Latin American countries have specific laws against domestic violence. For instance, Argentina's law creates an Observatory for monitoring, collecting, producing, recording, systematizing data and information on violence against women;<sup>10</sup> Brazil establishes a Court for Domestic and Family Violence against Women, whereas Bolivia has a "Comprehensive System for the Prevention, Attention, Punishment and Eradication of Gender-Based Violence"<sup>11</sup> that coordinates all actions and manages information on violence against women.

A comparison indicates that the nomenclatures of the laws in the Latin American countries are specific to violence against women, whereas some of the laws in the West African counterpart seem to be generic and cover violence against both men and women. For instance, Mexico has a "General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence". Ghana's law is focused on addressing domestic violence against women and children, whilst Jordan on the other hand has a "Law of Protection from Domestic Violence". On the other hand, Nigeria has a "Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act" which was initially proposed as a law to protect women against violence, but was rejected by parliament and adopted in the current form to accommodate women, men, girls and boys. At the sub-national level, Lagos is the only state in Nigeria with a "Protection against Domestic Violence" law.

### **Management of domestic violence during the pandemic**

The existence of laws which deal with domestic violence (in general or specific terms) is a fundamental underpinning for advancing gender rights across all the regions. Whilst this constitutes a starting point for many of the countries in question, there is also a need for these countries to create and adopt a standardized method for data collection. As it currently stands, many of these countries have a multitude of different organizations and institutions responsible for overseeing adherence to domestic violence laws, which means numerous bodies may be conducting research according to various methodologies and diverse data criteria.

Such varied approaches account for the disparity noted across different datasets for one specific country which results in confusion and makes it more complicated for countries to present a clear and comprehensive panoramic overview of the situation on the ground. This is especially true for federalist countries who have different approaches according to the specific self-governing authority. In this sense, fluid interinstitutional communication and the implementation of a standardized data collection process for domestic violence specifically (and SGBV broadly) would allow countries and regions to be better prepared to analyze the data at hand and would facilitate the effective and quick response necessary during crises and emergencies.

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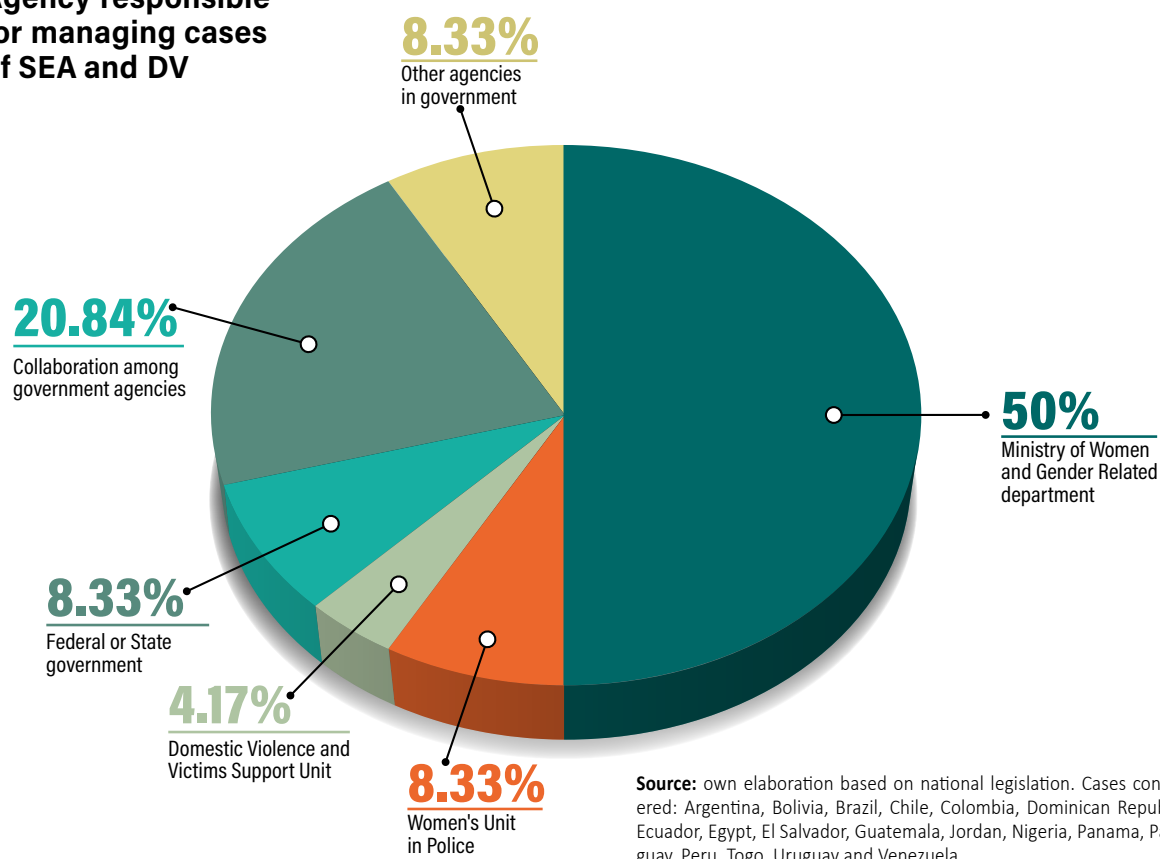
<sup>9</sup> Togo Penal Code: Article 232 – 242.

<sup>10</sup> Law of Integral Protection of Women of Argentina, 2009 Chapter IV. Similarly, the Observatory is established by the laws of Costa Rica.

<sup>11</sup> Comprehensive Law to Guarantee Women a Life Free of Violence" Supreme Decree No. 2145, October 14, 2014. Article 4.



## Agency responsible for managing cases of SEA and DV

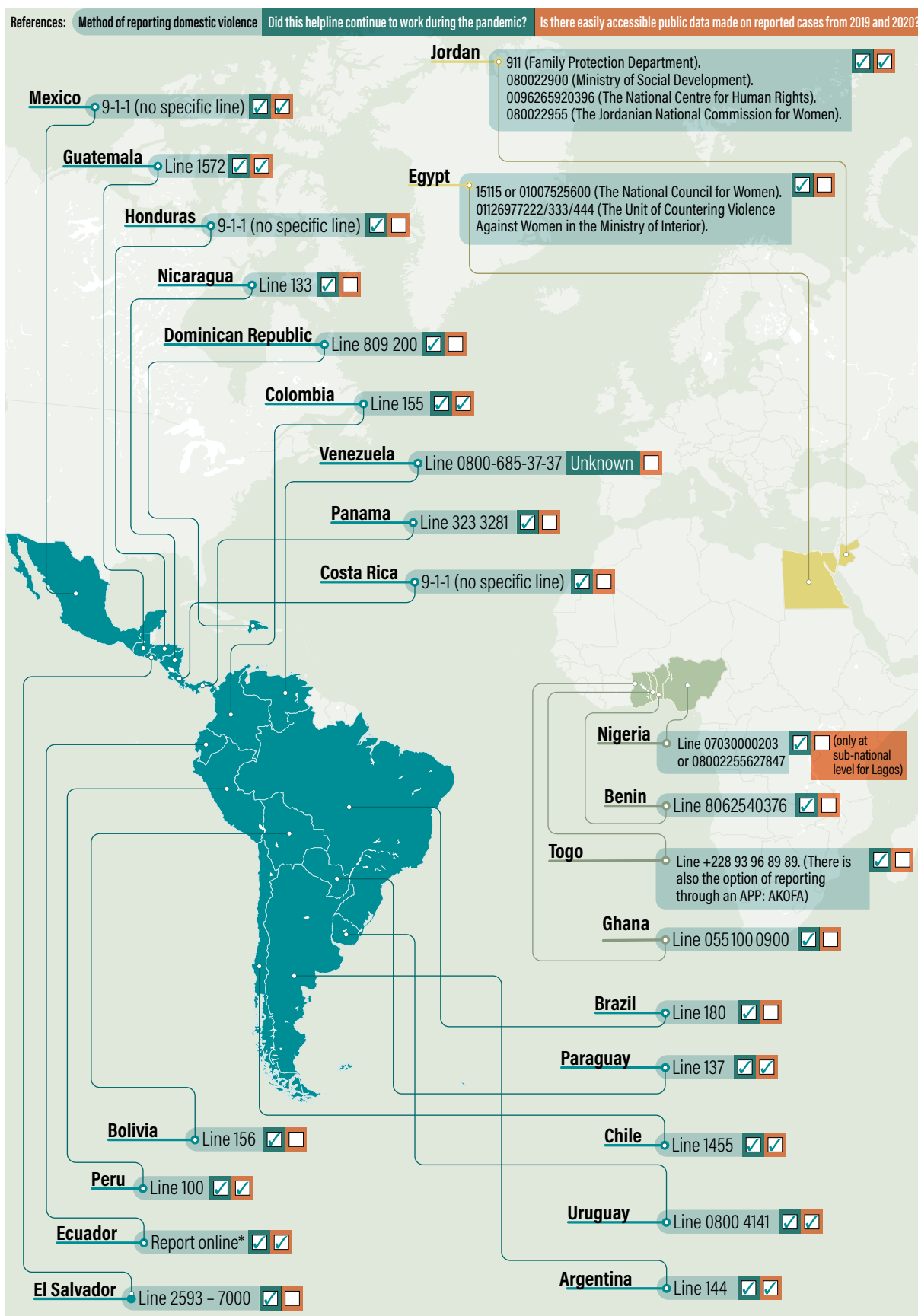


Fifty percent of the countries in focus prevent, manage and respond to sexual exploitation, abuse and domestic violence through the ministry of women and gender crime. In other instances, investigative or prosecuting agencies - such as the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit (DOVVSU) in Ghana, Women's Police Unit in Ecuador and the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) in Nigeria - manage domestic violence cases. In Lagos, Nigeria, the Domestic and Sexual Violence Response Team (DSVRT) has a mandate to respond to domestic violence cases only within the state. Countries such as Bolivia, Colombia, Egypt, Nicaragua, Nigeria and Venezuela provide for inter-agency collaboration between the ministries of women, justice, the Ombudsman and other agencies to curb the offence.

## Access to relevant organizations to report domestic violence

Due to the nature of sexual violence, stereotyping and re-victimization of persons violated, reporting of cases by survivors is often low or not reported at all. This trend is particularly relevant for domestic violence offences committed during national lockdowns. Women who are trapped in a private space with their abusers may be less likely to report instances of domestic violence for fear of repercussions. For this reason, the data collated and represented here may not necessarily be representative of the full situation and the actual figures could be considerably higher than those reported. As indicated in the table below, most of the countries analyzed in this research have a dedicated method (helpline, app or online system) for reporting instances of domestic violence specifically, whereas others rely on general emergency lines. Most of these lines have continued to be in operation during the pandemic.

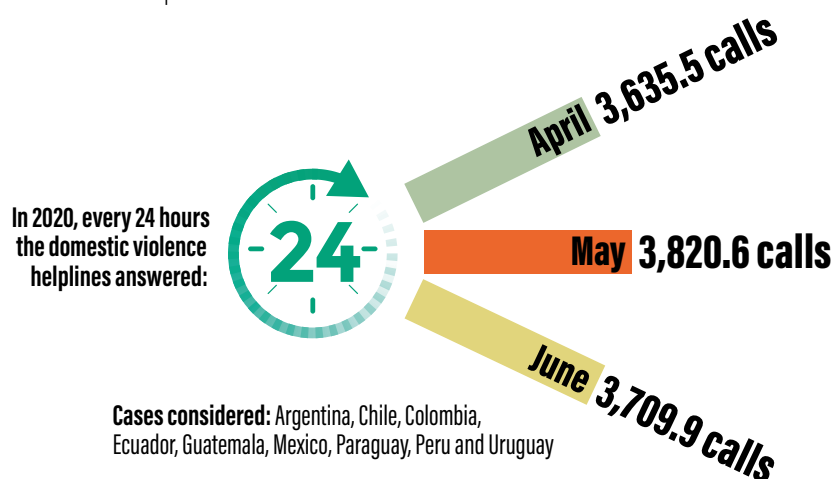
## Existing helplines for reporting gender-based violence



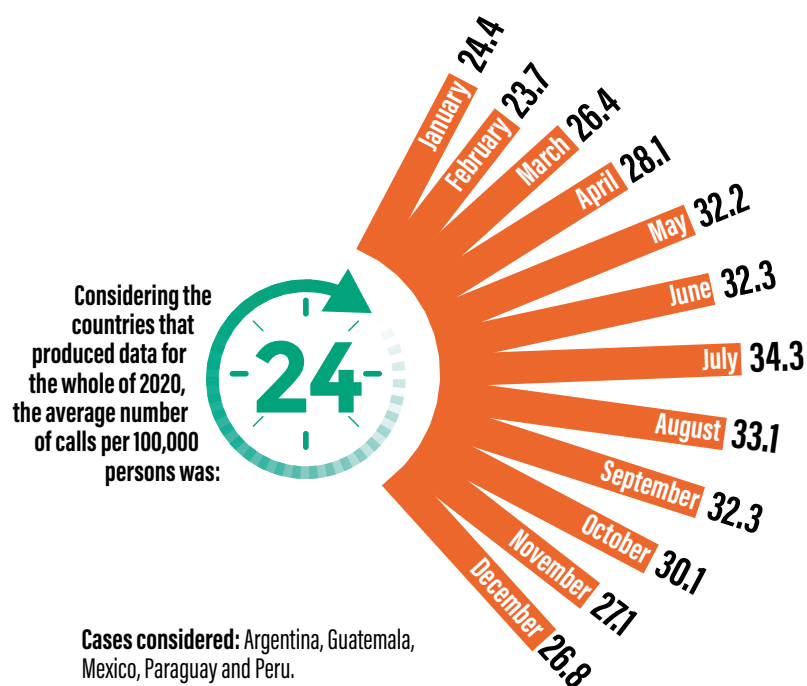
\*By going to page <https://www.fiscalia.gob.ec>, a form is filled with the necessary information to make the report and, it is established that, in less than 24 hours contact is established with the complainant.

Source: own elaboration based on public information.

When comparing available services across the selected countries, it becomes evident that most cases in Latin America and Africa have one dedicated helpline whilst in the countries selected from MENA, there are various institutions that manage a number of helplines. Such a situation may render the reporting process more complicated. Both Egypt and Jordan had helplines which continued to function during the pandemic. In particular, Egypt expanded the response capacities of its helplines and doubled the teams working in the complaint's bureau. Across civil society, NGOs activated further support lines to complement those made available by the government. These served to offer legal and psychological advice to women. There was also the possibility to access several online courses which would allow women to increase and enhance their resilience during times of emergency. Egypt's National Council for Women (NCW) has two helplines and the Ministry of Interior unit on Countering Crimes of Violence Against Women has three dedicated helplines and an email address to receive complaints of violence and discrimination against women. In Jordan, there are also several lines of assistance within the Department of Family Protection and several institutions, such as the Ministry of Social Development.

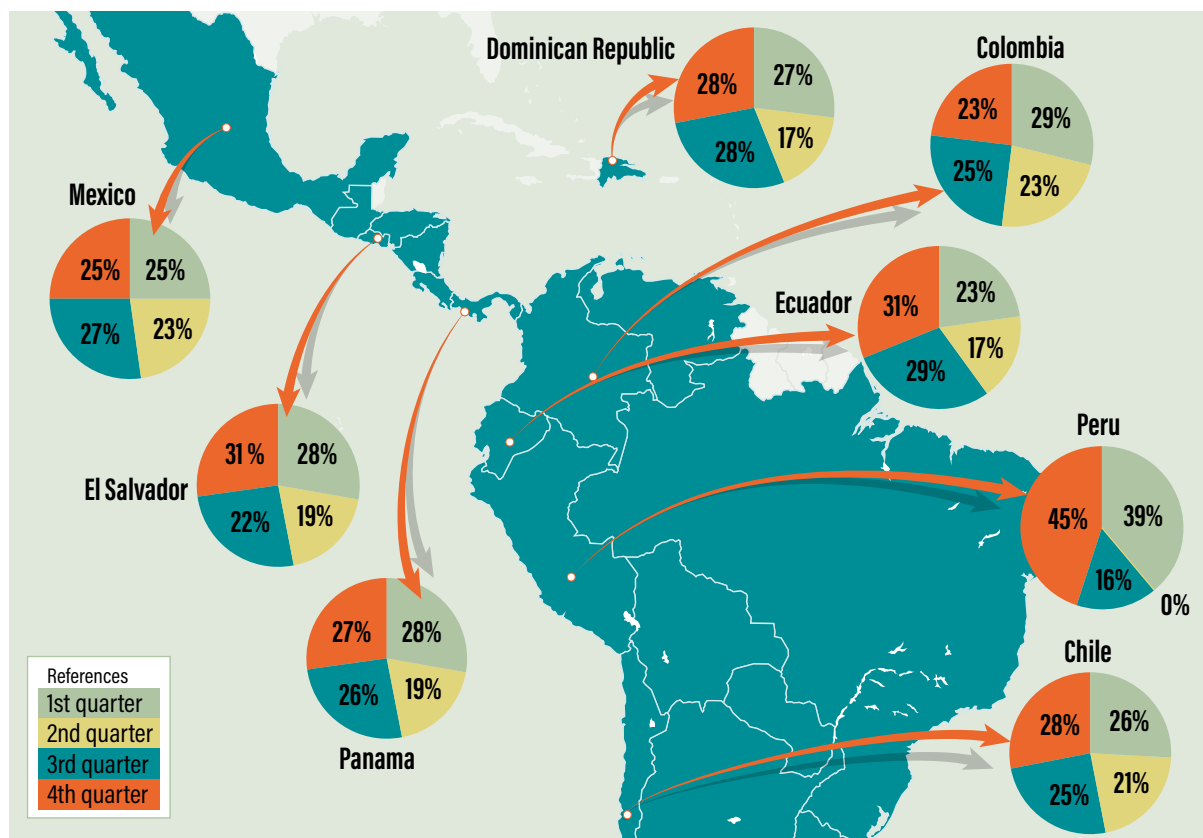


**Source:** Line 144, Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity (Argentina); Line 1455, Women's Ministry and Gender Equity, National Service for Women and Gender Equality (Chile); Line 155, Newsletter N° 34, Colombian women's observatory (Colombia); State Attorney General (Ecuador); Line 1572, Observatory of Women of the Public Ministry (Guatemala); Line 911, Secretariat of Security and Citizen Protection (Mexico); Line 137, Observatory of Women of the Ministry of Women (Paraguay); Line 100, Policy Monitoring and Evaluation Office, Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations (Peru); Line 0800 4141, Ministry of Social Development (Uruguay).



**Source:** Line 144, Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity (Argentina); Line 1572, Observatory of Women of the Public Ministry (Guatemala); Line 911, Secretariat of Security and Citizen Protection (Mexico); Line 137, Observatory of Women of the Ministry of Women (Paraguay); Line 100, Policy Monitoring and Evaluation Office, Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations (Peru).

## Confirmed cases of domestic violence in 2020



**Source:** Center for Crime Studies and Analysis (Chile); Ministry of National Defence, Criminal Investigation Direction (Colombia); General Prosecutor of Ecuador (Ecuador); General Prosecutor of the Republic (El Salvador); Secretariat of Security and Citizen Protection (Mexico); General Prosecutor of the Nation (Panama); Policy Monitoring and Evaluation Office, Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations (Peru); General Prosecutor of the Republic (Dominican Republic).

With regard to the countries selected from West Africa, in Ghana for example, a helpline was initially available within the Ghana Police Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit (DOVVSU), however due to limited resources it was suspended. The unit would usually reach-out to the public through social media platforms. The helpline was subsequently reactivated in 2020 through funds granted by UNFPA to tackle the increasing cases of sexual violence during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>12</sup> NAPTIP in Nigeria has a dual mandate of implementing the law prohibiting trafficking in persons and the VAPP Act. Both laws are independent of each other. The helpline available to the agency therefore attends to both types of offences. However sub-national collaborations such as the Mirabel Center and the DSVRT of Lagos State are more effective in responding to sexual violence.

Although some countries show variations - including decreases - in the number of cases of domestic violence, due to the scarcity of data and information, it would be inaccurate to fully confirm the existence of a decrease or an increase in the cases. At the same time, few countries publish the data and, as indicated above, the data may not be representative of the actual situation; many factors related to COVID-19, such as isolation, inadequate support programs for victims and the reallocation of government funds initially intended for gender-related issues, may be contributing to a decrease in the number of reported cases of domestic violence.

UNFPA West and Central Africa. (2020). *Ghana: UNFPA Supports DOVVSU to Activate Domestic Violence Hotline*. Available at: <https://wcaro.unfpa.org/en/news/ghana-unfpa-supports-dovvsu-activate-domestic-violence-hotline>.

## Data collection and management

While some countries have institutional structures to respond to domestic violence, others are struggling to manage the cases as they emerge. Some of the Latin American and MENA countries have data management systems in place.

### Levels of disaggregation of the information collected from helplines for Latin American countries

	Is it disaggregated according to the month?	Is it disaggregated according to the day?	Is it disaggregated according to the age of the victim?	Is it disaggregated according to the gender of the victim?	Is it disaggregated according to the type of violence the person has suffered?	Is it disaggregated according to the type of assistance provided to the person?	Is it disaggregated according to the type of relationship the perpetrator had with the victim?
Argentina							
Chile							
Colombia							
Ecuador							
Guatemala							
Mexico							
Paraguay							
Peru							
Uruguay							

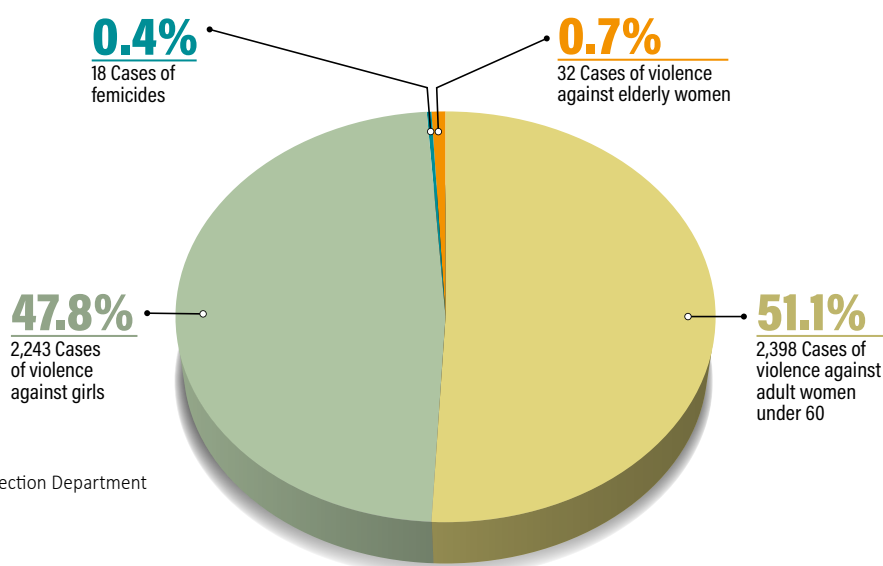
**Source:** Line 144, Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity (Argentina); Line 1455, Women's Ministry and Gender Equity, National Service for Women and Gender Equality (Chile); Line 155, Newsletter N° 34, Colombian women's observatory (Colombia); State Attorney General (Ecuador); Line 1572, Observatory of Women of the Public Ministry (Guatemala); Line 911, Secretariat of Security and Citizen Protection (Mexico); Line 137, Observatory of Women of the Ministry of Women (Paraguay); Line 100, Policy Monitoring and Evaluation Office, Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations (Peru); Line 0800 4141, Ministry of Social Development (Uruguay).

For instance, Uruguay, Peru, Paraguay, Guatemala, Ecuador, Colombia, Chile and Argentina have available and accessible data on domestic violence, which is managed by government agencies established by law. The diagram above indicates that collated data is disaggregated by year, month, days of collection (e.g Colombia); type of offence, gender and age of survivor (Peru), type of relation survivor had with perpetrator (in Guatemala and Paraguay) and type of assistance given to the survivor (e.g Colombia). This information is easily accessible online.

This was seldom the case in the West African states that were analyzed. Government response to sexual violence is either slow or not at all. Survivors are often subjected to undue hardships, bureaucratic processes, and complex criminal justice systems. Service delivery is therefore lagging in sexual violence response. Data on sexual violence cases is either non-existent, inaccessible, independently kept by different agencies, or the society and government are in denial that the crime exist. Because of these issues, dedicated helplines are either unavailable or not responded to when calls are made. In most instances, civil society organizations (CSOs) provide these services through donor support.

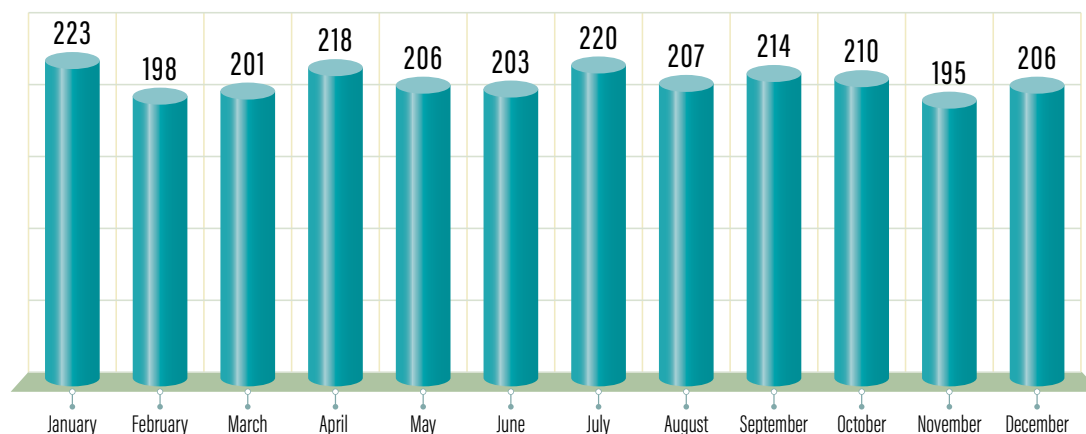
In Nigeria, data is collated and managed at national and sub-national level by organizations such as the DSVRT (consortium of government and CSOs) Mirabel center, other sexual assault referral centers (SARCs), state level government establishments or CSOs. The same applies in Ghana. For instance, available data for this research was based on a 2012 report by World Vision International.

### Jordan. Number of cases reported to Family Protection Department of Jordan - January to June 2020



Source: Family Protection Department of Jordan. (2020).

### DSVRT Lagos, Nigeria. Emotional abuse and intimate partner violence cases in Lagos state. January - December 2019



Source: Mirabel Sexual Assault Referral Centre. (2020). Emotional Abuse and Intimate Partner Violence Cases in Lagos State. Available at: <https://africaopendata.org/dataset/mirabel-sarc-stats-july-2013-april-2020/resource/f1da9d7c-4131-4fa1-92fd-50f0f00911d3>

Whilst the selected cases generally have some level of data of this nature available, the situation is extremely complicated when attempting to gain a general overview. This is because governments tend to disaggregate data according to different time intervals. For example, the table above illustrates that in Latin America, where the governments have been working with these issues for many years, still only a select number of countries publish data which shows the calls made to helplines on a monthly basis. Out of these same countries, only Argentina, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico and Paraguay provide this monthly data for both 2019 and 2020. This makes analysing the data at a regional level problematic.

## Is data concerning each country's helpline made public and readily available?



**Source:** Line 144, Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity (Argentina); Line 155, Newsletter N° 34, Colombian women's observatory (Colombia); State Attorney General (Ecuador); Line 1572, Observatory of Women of the Public Ministry (Guatemala); Line 911, Secretariat of Security and Citizen Protection (Mexico); Line 137, Observatory of Women of the Ministry of Women (Paraguay); Line 100, Policy Monitoring and Evaluation Office, Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations (Peru); Line 0800 4141, Ministry of Social Development (Uruguay).



## Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

Sexual exploitation is defined as “actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.”

Sexual abuse is “actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.”<sup>13</sup>

Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) are some of the major security challenges women, girls and boys experience in the world today. Sexual exploitation ranges from child sexual tourism, sexual harassment in schools, offices and public places and procurement of persons for sexual exploitation. Sexual abuse includes child abuse, rape, survival sex, conflict related sexual violence, sexual assault, defilement, female genital mutilation and sexual harassment.

In 2019 NAPTIP in Nigeria registered 19 cases of procurement of persons for sexual exploitation and 9 cases of sexual abuse. At the sub-national level, the Mirabel Center recorded 967 cases of sexual abuse in Lagos state with the highest being defilement of a child which had 781 cases. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) received 1,666 cases of sexual and gender-based violence through community monitoring in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states of Northeast Nigeria, which is the region facing insurgency, terrorism and counter-terrorism efforts. Forced marriages, physical assault, rape, survival sex, denial of resources, sexual assault were the major types of cases reported in the conflict area.

The Ghanaian DVA provides for a national plan of action and reporting on sexual violence issues to the government.<sup>14</sup> In a similar manner, the Nigerian VAPP requires that a register of sexual offenders be maintained and made accessible to the public.<sup>15</sup> Although these provisions exist, documentation and accessible data on sexual violence in both countries is still a major challenge. Furthermore, a peculiar trend in conflict areas of West Africa which needs to be highlighted and addressed, is survival sex wherein IDPs, particularly women and girls, resort to exchanging sex for food to survive in camps.

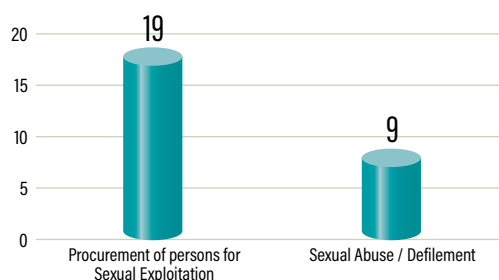
13 World Health Organization. *Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: Prevent and Protect: What You Need to Know*. Available at: [https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/documents/ethics/sexual-exploitation-and-abuse-pamphlet-en.pdf?sfvrsn=409b4d89\\_2](https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/documents/ethics/sexual-exploitation-and-abuse-pamphlet-en.pdf?sfvrsn=409b4d89_2).

14 Domestic Violence Act, 2007 Ghana, Section 37.

15 Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act, 2015 Nigeria, Section 1 (4).

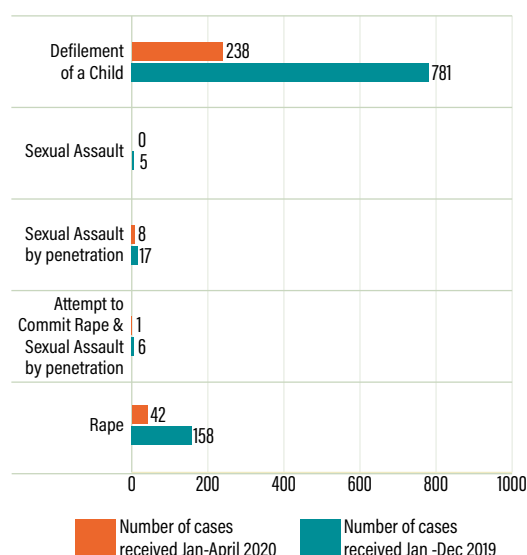
### NAPTIP - Nigeria

#### Number of cases received by type of case - 2019



### Mirabel Center - Nigeria

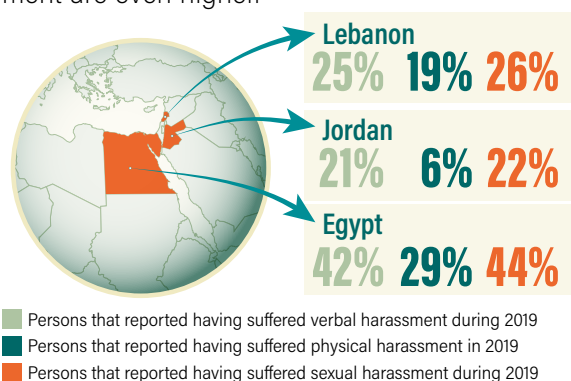
#### Number of sexual abuse cases received by year



**Sources:** The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons. (2019). Data Analysis by Research and Programme Development Department. Available at: <https://www.naptip.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/2019-Data-Analysis.pdf>; The Ministry of the Woman and Vulnerable Populations. (2020). Statistics from the Women Emergency Center. Available at: <https://www.mimp.gob.pe/omep/estadisticas-violencia.php>.

A common trend observed across certain Latin American countries is the tendency to generalize SEA complaints as sexual and/or domestic violence; such countries include – but are not limited to – Colombia, Guatemala and Paraguay. This may be due to ambiguity regarding definitions and it means specific instances may not be properly accounted for and, consequently, the most effective response cannot be taken. With that being said, the observatories and ministries of women / gender in some countries have been successful in recording, analyzing and updating data of this nature even throughout the pandemic. For example, Peru received a total of over 8,000 cases of sexual cases within the first to third quarter of 2020. Over 42,000 cases of psychological violence were reported within the same period. In addition, all countries in this region have developed and implemented to some extent a program to address and mitigate these types of offences. However, there is still a lot of progress to be made so that governments can begin to comprehensively register data of this kind. For example, there has been limited research into the issue of public sexual harassment and the corresponding statistics are not available despite it being one of the common forms of violence that women continue to suffer all over the region.

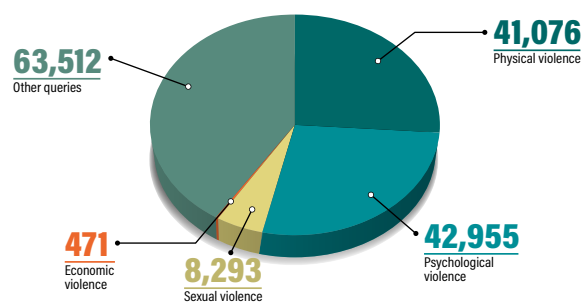
A report published in 2019 found that sexual harassment is prevalent across the MENA region with verbal sexual harassment and physical sexual harassment in public places being particularly common. For the case of Egypt, 29% of respondents reported being physically harassed often, sometimes or rarely in the previous 12 months. This figure stood at 19% for Lebanon and 6% for Jordan. The instances of verbal sexual harassment are even higher.<sup>16</sup>



**Sources:** Arab barometer. Sexual Harassment and Domestic Violence in the Middle East and North Africa, December 2019. Available at: <https://www.arabbarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/Sexual-Harassment-Domestic-Violence-Arab-Citizens-Public-Opinion-2019.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Arab Barometer. (2019). *Sexual Harassment and Domestic Violence in the Middle East and North Africa*. Available at: <https://www.arabbarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/Sexual-Harassment-Domestic-Violence-Arab-Citizens-Public-Opinion-2019.pdf>

### Peru. Types of gender violence\*, 2020



\*where women constitute a victim in 86% of the cases considered above for Peru.

**Sources:** The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons. (2019). Data Analysis by Research and Programme Development Department. Available at: <https://www.naptip.gov.pe/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/2019-Data-Analysis.pdf>; The Ministry of the Woman and Vulnerable Populations. (2020). Statistics from the Women Emergency Center. Available at: <https://www.mimp.gob.pe/ompe/estadisticas-violencia.php>

During 2019, the Al Quds Center for Political Studies worked on a Survey study on the phenomenon of harassment in Jordan, and got the following results:



**76.3%** of the female respondents reported having suffered physical harassment.

**77.8%** of the female respondents reported having suffered verbal or non-physical harassment.

**Sources:** Al Quds Center for Political Studies. "Survey study on the phenomenon of harassment in Jordan and causes of its denial attitudes and trends".

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## Final Observations

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Generally, the research has observed certain similarities and trends across the three regions:

### **1** | Existence of legal frameworks on domestic violence and sexual abuse and exploitation with minimal impact.

A commonality across the regions is the existence of laws that protect survivors and victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse and exploitation. The laws, which are nuanced and context specific, criminalize these offences and prescribe punishments for them. Domestic violence laws in Latin America tend to specifically identify women and girls as the victims.

### **2** | The Ministry of Women or Gender is generally responsible for managing sexual violence.

As seen across the cases, the Ministry of Women or Gender is generally the agency responsible for responding to domestic violence and sexual abuse. However, in certain countries, the Women's Police Unit is responsible for managing these types of cases and other countries instead adopt an interagency approach to manage sexual violence. In other cases, although not directly responsible, the Ministries of Security and Justice and the prosecutors have been involved in the response to certain SGBV crimes.

### **3** | Reporting of sexual violence is increasing.

There has been a progressive increase in number of calls registered for sexual violence. The reason could either be as a result of an increased in the number of sexual violence cases in the country, increased public awareness, or a more effective response by relevant organizations. Globally, sexual gender-based violence heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **4** | Certain types of violence might be more peculiar in specific regions.

According to the data, it seems that certain types of GBV are more common dependent on the region. For example, the data analyzed implies that cases of femicide are more typical in Latin America and MENA meanwhile in the West African region, it seems that child abuse, defilement of children, rape and sexual exploitation are more apparent. A peculiar trend in conflict areas of this region is survival sex wherein IDPs, particularly females, trade sex for food to survive in camps.

However, despite appearing this way, it is extremely complicated to fully confirm these hypotheses. Due to the various security challenges, that are differentiated dependent on the region, it is a possibility that certain types of violence are indeed more characteristic of particular regions. Although, due to varied methods of data collection and nuances in legislation, the data produced is heterogeneous and, therefore, difficult to compare. In this regard, it would be worth examining in greater detail whether certain offences are indeed more typical in some regions.

Whilst femicide is a phenomenon more frequently associated with Latin America, this is predominantly because legislation has been amended and imposed to specifically criminalise femicides. Consequently, this allows certain data related to femicide offences to be collected and analyzed. Therefore, an increase in instances of femicide in the country itself or compared with other countries might simply indicate that the phenomenon is beginning to be measured and reported through more systematic and efficient methods. Another reason for the seemingly significant amount of femicides reported in Latin America compared to other regions might be related to the fact that this sort of offence is being generalized and categorized with other crimes in the other countries selected from MENA and West Africa. The final data produced is shaped by whether specific information is available in the first place to be collected and analyzed as well as the extent of the quality and periodicity of that initial information.

## **5** | Data Management.

The purpose of responding to sexual violence issues is to ensure the crime is curbed as much as possible and eventually eradicated. An adequate response would increase both public trust and the willingness of survivors to report and, consequently, would serve to deter repeat offences. Therefore, the aim of response to sexual violence is not solely for data collection, however, data collection is important for an effective and efficient response to the menace. Effective and efficient responses must be based on facts. Facts on the situation can only be obtained when data is properly collected, managed and used to respond to the issues.

When compared across the countries researched, data management on sexual violence is very poor in the West African region. Where available, it is mostly generated by CSOs and from donor funds. The impact of government in data management of SGBV cases in the sub-region is minimal. During the research process, data was not readily accessible from government agencies and reference was mostly made to data generated by CSOs. A complex bureaucratic process is a major reason why data from governments sometimes cannot be obtained.

On the other hand, data management has been made feasible within some of the Latin American countries through the existence of legal frameworks and dedicated observatories; and this data is easily accessible online.

## 6 | Data disaggregation.

Most countries disaggregate according to time intervals (months, years) and the type of offence committed. However, only a select number of countries thoroughly disaggregate domestic violence data and important details such as the gender of the victim and the relationship between the survivor and the perpetrator are often overlooked.

## 7 | Existence of helplines.

The existence of dedicated helplines to report and/ or provide assistance represents an advance in government policies on the matter. However, there is a risk of promoting this class of actions as politically correct; the mechanisms and the resources of these still need to be evaluated. For example, these services should be widely advertised and easily accessible from internet search engines. In several instances throughout this research, time had to be invested into looking for the existence of these services, and for someone who is in a situation of immediate danger this is inadequate.

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## Conclusion

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Domestic violence, sexual exploitation and abuse are crimes that threaten the life and rights of women. Women, girls, boys and persons with disabilities are the everyday survivors of these crimes. Yet, they have the right to enjoy their existence in societies that secure their dignity and lives.

It therefore behooves on governments in the MENA region, Latin America and West Africa to ensure that their countries adequately protect people against sexual violence. Existing and intended laws that criminalize sexual violence must be fully and effectively maintained. The following are some policy recommendations to this end:

### **1** | Improve and re-strategize response to SEA and DV by government agencies according to local context.

There is a need for all countries to re-strategize the response approach to managing sexual violence. One area could be to ensure adequate, speedy trial and conviction of perpetrators which can deter future offenders. There is also the possibility to learn lessons from other regions and adapt these to local contexts.

### **2** | Establish effective and accessible data systems for managing sexual violence.

The management of sexual violence must aim at encouraging people to report by providing easy to reach helplines, community outreach and trained personnel that would adequately receive the cases and respond therein. In doing so, governments must facilitate the establishment of a standardized data collection process which would allow a clear and comprehensive overview of the situation at a national level. This means countries and regions would be better prepared to analyze data and give the appropriate and quick response necessary during a pandemic. With that being said, such a responsibility should not be left to CSOs alone; instead, institutions should work together through fluid communication to pull resources in the most effective and efficient way possible. Some concrete lessons about data management can be shared by Latin America. Argentina, Mexico and Peru – to cite some examples – produce disaggregated data which proves beneficial to highlighting worrying trends. Nonetheless, data management in Latin American countries is not perfect and more support should be given to institutions to strengthen their data handling capacities.

### **3** | All governments should enact and regulate a specific law on domestic violence and sexual exploitation and abuse.

There is a need for all countries analyzed to enact and/ or regulate a law which deals with domestic violence and sexual exploitation and abuse and domesticates the CEDAW. The provisions in the penal code are not adequate enough and thus relying on them, to curb

certain forms of crimes, is unfair to its citizens, particularly vulnerable groups. Countries should aim to specify laws further and specifically identify women and girls in the legislation, if not already done so.

## **4** Countries should adequately identify, prevent and curb femicides.

The number of femicides is alarming and needs to be prevented by the state, citizens, communities and other relevant stakeholders. This violates the rights of females to life. The disparity in data available regarding femicide offences indicates the need for governments and society to have increased understanding of these crimes. Governments should develop and implement specific legislation which criminalises these offences. In doing so, they can shine a light on the prevalence of these crimes. This would facilitate a systematic and efficient method of collecting and analysing the reported data which would expectedly result in more appropriate responses and the improved protection of victims. Consequently, in these cases, pressure should be applied to governments to develop the appropriate and relevant legislation.

## **5** In times of emergencies, countries should categorize SGBV service providers as first responders.

Owing to the inability of governments in different countries to categorize SGBV service providers as first responders during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, the cases of sexual violence increased across the world. Governments should endeavor to mainstream response to sexual violence in line with any other type of emergency. This will ensure availability of service providers at such times.

## **6** Encourage and foster a collective response across all relevant parties.

Response to sexual violence should be carried out collectively by community members, government, non-governmental organizations, development partners, and faith-based organizations. Grass-root organizations particularly should be empowered and supported financially so they are able to identify the needs of local women and work closely with government institutions to provide adequate support dependent on the specific case.

Whilst some positive developments have been discernible throughout the pandemic, the recent data illuminates that domestic violence and sexual exploitation and abuse are far from resolved. The most concerning revelation is that in the most fragile states, where instances of SGBV tend to be more frequent, there is a sufficient lack of legislative infrastructure and financial means to support institutions in their attempts to hold perpetrators to account.



# Egypt: A Few Steps Forward in Countering SGBV<sup>1</sup>

**RABHA ALLAM**

Researcher, Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies (ACPSS)



Violence against women takes different forms; domestic violence includes assaults on women committed by their relatives or partners within the family space, female genital mutilation as well as depriving females from education, work and inheritance or forcing them into arranged marriages. As for the violence against women in the public sphere, it occurs mostly in the streets, public transportation, work or education facilities. Yet, sexual harassment is the most visible form of violence as it is widely spread and unexpectedly affects women in public spaces. Therefore, the State has recently focused on fighting this type of violence against women due to its prevalence in public spaces especially in huge protests in the post 2011 era.

## Measuring the level of SGBV

It is extremely difficult to assess the exact level of SGBV in Egypt. Despite the wide range of reports trying to grasp the exact numbers of assaults, they are unable to present the real picture. Most of the reports rely on wide surveys that depend mainly on the survivor's ability to report the assault, yet usually a considerable tranche of survivors cannot immediately report what they have faced. Therefore, when dealing with the current data of SGBV in Egypt, we must understand that these numbers are only showing part of the reality. The actual situation might be much more complicated than the statistics suggest. According to the survey of the economic cost of gender-based violence in Egypt in 2015<sup>2</sup>, 7.8 million women and girls were subject to different forms of violence in the previous year, both in the public and the private sphere. 1.7 million women and girls were subject to sexual harassment on a constant basis in public transportation during that same year. Meanwhile, almost 139 thousand working women faced some sort of violence in their place of work, which constitutes 3.7 % of the female working force. And almost 16 thousand girls, aged 18 or over, were subject to sexual harassment in their place of education (schools or universities) which corresponds to 1.3% of all female students for this age segment; while 2.5 million women and girls faced sexual harassment from strangers on the streets in the same year. Also, in 2015, 75 thousand women and girls reported to the police for crimes related to SGBV. Comparing this reporting rate with the approximate numbers collected from the above mentioned official nationwide survey, we realize that the degree of reporting to the police for SGBV crimes is not that high. Hence, there is a reporting gap that needs to be filled with trust and firm procedures in order to encourage survivors to report and facilitate the prosecution of offenders.

Moreover, when economic costs of violence against women were measured, very alerting findings popped up. Total cost of all types of SGBV on the economy amounted to 312.5 million USD in 2015

<sup>1</sup> An adjusted Arabic version of this article was published in the social periodical magazine adjunct to Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies "Egyptian Affairs"/"Ahwal Masriya", January 2021, issue # 79.

<sup>2</sup> CAPMAS and NCW. (2015). *Survey of the Economic Cost of Gender-based Violence in Egypt*. Available at: <http://www.enow.gov.eg/ReportDetail/38>

which corresponds to 0.1% of GDP of the same year. This number includes the direct and indirect costs of SGBV repercussions, namely the extra time and cost women and girls spend in order to take alternative routes to and from work and school; they opt for alternative private transportation to avoid public transportation, and the number also takes into account the costs of medical and psychological care after the occurrence of the SGBV incidents. All these statistics are based on the nationwide survey of the population that took place in 2014, hence, there is a solid possibility that the actual numbers have increased during the past six years. Therefore, the national institutions were urged to formulate several strategies to deal with this growing danger and address its roots.

## Political Response to the SGBV

On the political level, the State has put the protection from SGBV at the top of its national agenda to promote women's rights. Taskforces within the government were formed to study the root causes of SGBV and the needed reforms in policy and legislations to counter its spread.<sup>3</sup> New units to promote gender equality were established in different ministries especially in the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Interior. Dedicated units to fight SGBV were also established in Egyptian universities in order to provide early alerts of incidents taking place among students. The National Council for Women (NCW) has led a series of workshops with UN agencies, official institutions and local civil society in order to formulate national strategies addressing the main challenges facing women's rights and safety. The National Strategy to counter the violence against women was developed in June 2015. And in 2017, the government developed a national vision for 2030, where an entire chapter was dedicated to women empowerment in fulfilling the sustainable development goals. This vision promised to lower most of the statistics of SGBV to reach almost 0% by 2030.<sup>4</sup> The 2030 vision reflected the State's commitment to motivate all of its resources in order to change the social, structural, and legal contexts that stimulated violence against women in the first place.

On the legal level, an amendment to the criminal law (306 a, b) was approved in 2014 to maximize the punishment to SGBV perpetrators of incidents occurring in real life or virtually.<sup>5</sup> This legal reform came as a direct result of the fatal assault that occurred in Tahrir Square amongst a large crowd of people celebrating the results of the presidential elections in 2014. Hence, the president Abdel Fattah al-Sisi promised, whilst visiting the survivor at the hospital, to take all the required protection measures to prevent the reoccurrence of these assaults in the Egyptian streets. Since then, dozens of perpetrators of SGBV were prosecuted according to this newly amended law.<sup>6</sup>

## The missing link

A huge gap existed between the State policies for countering SGBV and the society's engagement in this regard. Despite all the measures taken by the NCW to engage with the society in promoting awareness for women's rights and protection, the problem remained and the level of reporting for related crimes is still very low compared to the reality. The complaints office adjunct to the NCW has received

3 National Council for Women. (2015). *National Strategy to Counter Violence against Women*, p.15.

4 National Council for Women. (2017). *National Strategy for Empowerment of the Egyptian Women 2030*. Available at: <http://ncw.gov.eg/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/final-version-national-strategy-for-the-empowerment-of-egyptian-women-2030.pdf>

5 Ver el marco legislativo para los delitos de violencia contra la mujer publicados por la NCW. "El marco legislativo penal egipcio para los delitos de violencia contra la mujer más importantes" Disponible en: <http://ncw.gov.eg/>

6 France 24. (2016). "Contrarrestar el acoso sexual en Egipto: victoria tras años de resistencia" en Árabe. Disponible en: <https://www.france24.com>

only eight thousand complaints in 2018.<sup>7</sup> Yet the NCW has successfully reached out to almost 17 million women and girls over three years through door-to-door awareness campaigns in local communities. However, given the cultural context disfavoring women, a serious problem such as SGBV cannot be easily addressed within the limited timeframe mentioned in the related national strategies. Civil society's initiatives should be a key player when it comes to vitalizing the already established legal framework and official policies. But since the civil society organizations are challenged by several problems regarding their existence and legalization, its mission regarding women protection is not ideal.

Yet, in summer of 2020, the missing link was amazingly created when a public account on Instagram platform started to post dozens of stories about a serial perpetrator of sexual assaults against his female colleagues at school and university. The Instagram account that took the name of "Assault police"<sup>8</sup> received complaints from dozens of girls who survived different degrees of sexual assault over the course of several years, whether in real life or through online blackmailing.<sup>9</sup> These incidents, that amounted to almost a hundred, were committed by the same person and all occurred in a school, a university and a compound ranked among the most expensive and privileged in Egypt. And the assaulted girls belonged to the most favored and protected social class in Cairo. Therefore, these stories revealed the low degree of safety and protection that girls endured despite their social and education level. One would imagine that girls coming from low-income families would be more likely to endure more assaults and incidents of harassment of that kind.

This campaign launched by the above-mentioned Instagram account revealed multiple facts about SGBV in Egypt; when survivors are confident that their identities will remain confidential, they are more encouraged to report the violence they have faced even years ago. The account run by young girls and boys in their teens and early twenties aimed only at beginning to expose that specific perpetrator in order to prevent repeat offences and protect potential victims in the future. But the range of outreach this account created has expanded and attracted the attention of the international media and the local authorities.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the bureau of the general attorney (BGA) investigated the testimonials published on the social media and ordered the arrest of the perpetrator. Afterwards, the BGA issued public statements encouraging the assaulted girls to file official complaints so that the perpetrator can be prosecuted. To this end, a new law was issued in July 2020 to guarantee the complete confidentiality regarding the survivors' identities to prevent any further pressure or harassment they might face if their identities were disclosed to the media.<sup>11</sup> This new law granted survivors the protection they needed against the demonizing campaigns they usually face when reporting about sexual assaults. In a social context, where survivors are usually blamed for their own assaults, confidentiality plays an important role in encouraging them to report and prosecute their offenders. Moreover, the complaints office of the NCW backed the survivors and offered legal and psychological support throughout the process of reporting to the BGA.

Additionally, the new law encouraged other survivors to file complaints against their offenders and urged the BGA to investigate old incidents that dated back at least seven years. Accordingly, the ac-

7 Consejo Nacional de la Mujer. (2020). *"El esfuerzo de Egipto para empoderar a la mujer egipcia 2014-2020"*, Disponible en: <http://ncw.gov.eg>

8 Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/assaultpolice/>

9 Laila Mohammed. (2020). *"Sexual Harassment in Egypt a crisis searching for a cure"*, in Arab news. Available at: <https://arab.news/6fqs6>

10 Sudarsan Raghvan. (2020). *"Egypt's Women Are Rising up Against Sexual Violence Others Are Still Being Jailed for TikToks"*, *The Washington Post*, July 30th. Available at: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/egypt-women-are-rising-up-against-sexual-violence-others-are-still-being-jailed-for-tik-toks/2020/07/30/8514c3ba-c78e-11ea-a9d3-74640f25b953\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/egypt-women-are-rising-up-against-sexual-violence-others-are-still-being-jailed-for-tik-toks/2020/07/30/8514c3ba-c78e-11ea-a9d3-74640f25b953_story.html)

11 Hesham Kamel. (2020). *"A new legal amendment to guarantee the confidentiality of victims' identity in crimes of rape and harassment"*, *Legal Agenda*, September 9th (in Arabic). Available at: <https://legal-agenda.com>

count “Assault Police”-which reported new incidents and exposed new perpetrators- was targeted and shut down several times by people supporting the perpetrators. The identities of the young administrators of the account were disclosed in order to put pressure on them and urge them to stop their campaigns. Nevertheless, the account was recreated again and expanded its outreach and developed its agenda to include all aspects of SGBV.

The inspiration that this account has created and the positive interaction it initiated with the authorities has largely impacted the public debate about SGBV in Egypt. It created a wave of new reform in favor of women's rights and protection. Religious institutions issued several statements to back the survivors and encouraged them to file complaints and fear no shame in this regard. Educational institutions published new guidelines of protection and code of conduct regarding SGBV.<sup>12</sup> A new generation of defenders of women's rights were born due to this Instagram campaign which was considered to be the Egyptian chapter of the worldwide campaign “Me too”. Yet, more challenges remain standing and impeding the improvement of women's conditions in Egypt, especially when it comes to family and personal status laws and domestic violence. The social debate about these issues is still on-going and extending to new spaces and women's rights are still at the top of the political agenda nowadays.

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<sup>12</sup>BBC . (2020). “*Egypt Sex Attacks fuel Feminist Revolution*”, October 26th. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-54643463>



The concept of gender in Africa has misconceptions of women being in control and taking over the affairs of what is termed “a man’s responsibilities”. The deep patriarchal nature that exists in African countries is drawn from entrenched cultures and traditions that have existed for centuries. While men and women have different opportunities and experiences, the marginalization of women in decision-making positions has created certain economic, political and social barriers which inhibit the progress and development of Africa.

Women continue to face resistance in reaching their potential due to institutional failure to embrace gender diversity. With this slow progress, Africa will need at least 140 years to close the gender gap<sup>2</sup>. Already the financing gap that exists between men and women is averaged at US\$42 billion, with 70% of women being excluded.

Most African countries are signatories to international conventions and protocols like the Maputo Protocol on the Rights of Women and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality as adopted by the African Union<sup>3</sup>. Also, non-discrimination is a recognized principle in their constitutions<sup>4</sup> however, the implementation and activation of these existing policies requires change across institutions and individuals; it tends to be difficult to bring about such change due to male dominated environments<sup>5</sup>.

Progress has been made in countries such as Rwanda and Tanzania in addressing discriminatory policies through the introduction of legislative and constitutional requirements for the inclusion of women in governance. Rwanda holds a global record with over 60% of its parliament made up of women<sup>6</sup>. The representation of women in cabinets and ministries has also grown from 4% to 20% over the last few years<sup>7</sup>. In this regard, Africa has fared better than most European countries.

Closely related is the number of women that have become presidents in Liberia, Malawi, Mauritius and Ethiopia who have all made their marks at a difficult time in history. Whilst such developments are regarded as progressive and positive in terms of commitment to gender equality, it remains too early to judge the impact of these policies on Africa’s development.<sup>8</sup>

1 With contributions from Valkamiya Ahamdu Haruna.

2 Akintayo et al. (2019). “*The power of parity: Advancing women’s equality in Africa*”. Available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/gender-equality/the-power-of-parity-advancing-womens-equality-in-africa>

3 UNESCO. (2017). “*UNESCO and Gender Equality in Sub-Saharan Africa*”. Available at: [http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/AFR/images/3781\\_15\\_E\\_web.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/AFR/images/3781_15_E_web.pdf)

4 African Development Bank Group. (2015). “*Empowering African Women: An Agenda for Action*”. Available at: [https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/African\\_Gender\\_Equality\\_Index\\_2015-EN.pdf](https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/African_Gender_Equality_Index_2015-EN.pdf)

5 Ibrahim et al. (2015). “*Integrating Gender in Security Sector Reform and Governance*”. Toolkit for Security Sector Reform and Governance in West Africa. Available at: <https://issat.dcaf.ch/download/112394/2038474/SSRG-West-Africa-Toolkit-Tool-8-EN.pdf>

6 African Development Bank Group. (2015). “*Empowering African Women: An Agenda for Action*”. Available at: [https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/African\\_Gender\\_Equality\\_Index\\_2015-EN.pdf](https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/African_Gender_Equality_Index_2015-EN.pdf)

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

These representations have influence on the world stage but do not always transform into the desired change and address the gaps in the under representation of women in decision-making.

Africa still has one of the highest mortality rates in the world, averaging four times any global standard. Women still face challenges through education, digital and economic inclusion and gender-based violence. On education, there is a lack of parity between men and women in attending schools, universities and colleges<sup>9</sup>. Women are often used as economic support to the family; early marriage and long hours of domestic activities can have significant repercussions on the health and education of women.

The African Development Bank (AfDB) has a new Gender Strategy for 2021-2025 with commitments towards gender equality and women's empowerment. The strategy seeks to strengthen key sectors in the continent that will provide equal access and opportunities to men, women, girls and boys - regardless of their background – so that they can benefit from productive resources and supportive services.<sup>10</sup>

The future of Africa rests on the decisions of today. It is estimated that the population of Africa will double by 2050 and the continent will experience rapid growth. The potential of gender parity is needed in all parts of society from community level to the highest seat of governance. In this regard, the potential of women must be unleashed for Africa to attain its full potential as a prosperous continent.

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9 African Development Bank Group. (2020). *"Africa Gender Index Report 2019 - Analytical report"*. Available at: <https://www.afdb.org/en/documents/africa-gender-index-report-2019-analytical-report>

10 African Development Bank Group. (2021). *"African Development Bank Board approves a new Gender Strategy for 2021-2025."* Available at: <https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/press-releases/african-development-bank-board-approves-new-gender-strategy-2021-2025-40153>



## Introduction

The protection of information and resources used for its management, is an issue that requires attention and concern for individuals as well as all types of organizations. The accelerated growth of threats, linked to both technical progress and the emergence of new opportunities, constitutes an imperative call to action at all levels, in order to seriously seek solutions that will mitigate the consequent risks.

Particularly during 2020, the harmful effects of covid-19 were reflected equally in both the physical environment and cyberspace. In effect, the impact of the materialization of threats such as ransomware, grooming and phishing, has increased during the pandemic. This was mainly due to the restriction of movement of people, both in the work and social environment, and the urgency with which the resulting problems had to be resolved.

In the context of the accelerated digitization brought by the pandemic, the centrality of cybersecurity for individuals, organizations and states is becoming increasingly evident. However, perhaps due to its novel nature and its constant evolution, there is still no international consensus regarding its conceptualization and the dimension of its scope.

ISO/IEC 27032:2012<sup>1</sup>, the international organization for standardization (ISO) provides guidelines to improve the state of cybersecurity. It defines cybersecurity as the preservation in cyberspace of three properties of information: confidentiality, integrity and availability. In a side note, it extends this scope to authenticity, primary responsibility ("accountability"), non-repudiation and the reliability of information. We could say, using simple language, that cybersecurity deals with the protection of information in any format and medium, and with the defense of the rights of people and organizations in virtual environments, characterized by high connectivity between devices and entities.

As well as ambiguity surrounding the definition of cybersecurity, there is also no clarity regarding its scope. While part of the bibliography mostly concerns preventive aspects related to the resilience of technological systems and infrastructures, other authors assign it a more comprehensive dimension which includes the prosecution of cybercrime, the scope of the police and judicial forces, and cyber defense as a field of action of the Armed Forces.

The truth is that this discipline requires a multifaceted approach that covers not only technological aspects, but also legal, cultural and educational aspects among others.

At the organizational level, the centrality of cybersecurity for the business becomes more and more important every day and is strongly linked to the governance of information and processes. Carrying out cybersecurity functions also requires multiple skills and competencies and the requirement to constantly keep up to date on a diversity of topics and situations.

<sup>1</sup> ISO/IEC 27032:2012 "Information technologies – Security techniques – Guidelines for Cybersecurity"



## The role of women in cybersecurity

Whether due to structural or historical inequalities, women are strongly underrepresented in this field equally in both the debates and the decision-making processes related to cybersecurity and cyber defense in the international arena.

As stated in the study "Why Gender Matters in international Cybersecurity" carried out by "Women's International League for Peace and Freedom" and "Association for Progressive Communications": "Gender matters in international cybersecurity. It shapes and influences online behavior; determines access and power; and is a factor of vulnerability. Much of what is known about gender and cybernetics comes from gender studies related to online violence and gender inequality in the ICT sector. Less is known about how malicious international cyber operations between states affect people differently based on gender or other characteristics that may put them in positions of vulnerability."

A 2017 report<sup>2</sup> by PWC (a UK consulting firm), based on interviews with 2,000 outstanding British students, indicated that only 3% of the participants stated that their first choice was a professional career in the area of 'STEM'. 78% could not name a relevant female figure to work in this field of action, while only 5% of management positions in the sector were held by women at that time.

In the field of information and communication technologies, most global studies place women at participation levels of between 15 and 20%, in all related professions.

In the field of cybersecurity specifically, according to figures from the International Information Systems Security Certification Consortium<sup>3</sup>, (ISC)2, that are based on a study carried out in 2019, women who work in cybersecurity represent only 24% of the total workforce globally. In 2017, this proportion amounted to 11%. Although, it should be noted that the 13 percentage disparity was due to a difference in the methodology used in the survey which had broadened the range of disciplines and incorporated (in addition to computer science) others such as law, communication, education and organizational management.

Finally, an American academic study<sup>4</sup> concerning the low participation of women in cybersecurity in the USA found that stereotypes and biases negatively influence women who work in this profession; it also identified that early exposure to cybersecurity is key when it comes to generating interest in women and finally the study confirmed that men occupy most of the key positions that influence the entry of professionals to workplaces in this field.

## International Perspective

Since 1998, under the topic "Advancement of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in the context of international security", the United Nations have handled issues that concern cybersecurity, the application of international law in cyberspace, cyber defense, norms, rules and principles that should guide the responsible behavior of States in cyberspace, the protection of critical infrastructures and others. The main objective is to prevent conflicts or threats that, through the use of cyberspace as a means or objective, could put international peace and security at risk.

According to the study "Gender in Cyber Diplomacy" carried out by the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), across the 6 Groups of Government Experts on the advancement of

<sup>2</sup> PwC. (2017). "Time to close the gender gap". Available at: <https://www.pwc.co.uk/who-we-are/women-in-technology/time-to-close-the-gender-gap.html>

<sup>3</sup> (ISC)2. (2018). "Women in cybersecurity". Available at: <https://www.isc2.org/-/media/ISC2/Research/ISC2-Women-in-Cybersecurity-Report.ashx>

<sup>4</sup> Sturhonda, J. (2019). "The underrepresentation of females in the united states cybersecurity workforce: a multiple-case study". Available at: <https://search.proquest.com/openview/524ae453b5af718568bcf782065a4817/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>

ICT in the context of international security (GGE) that have been convened in the last 15 years, women have only represented an average of 20.2% of the participants. Only 10% of women were in the 1st GEG and this amount increased to 20% in the 5th GEG. This figure has only been surpassed in the 6th GEG -being close to 40% - in line with the commitment expressed by the UN Secretary General to achieve gender parity "in all the panels, boards and groups of experts established under its auspices in the field of disarmament" as contained in Action 37 of its 2018 Agenda for Disarmament<sup>5</sup>.

At the 1st session of the United Nations Open Ended Working Group (OEWG) on the advancement of ICT in the context of international security in September 2019, 32% were women and 68% were men and only 24% of the delegations were headed by women. At the 2nd session of the OEWG in February 2020, the proportion was 39% women and 61% men, and 119 statements (out of a total of 280) were delivered by women.

## Conclusion

It is necessary to recognize that technology reflects the values and biases of those who develop it. Consequently, failing to reverse trends that show a gender bias inevitably carries the risk of further consolidating, and even amplifying, the stereotypes and inequalities that exist today.

On the other hand, gender diversity is a means of increasing the plurality of perspectives. Various studies have shown that decision-making bodies diverse in composition are more effective in terms of risk assessment and problem solving because they perform more careful information processing. In the field of international peace and security, UN WOMEN has highlighted that the significant participation of women in the negotiation tables allows organizations to reach more lasting and sustainable agreements.

Women face different threats in the context of cybersecurity and can therefore contribute their visions and priorities to the discussions. In this context, it is necessary to understand the causes and consequences of gender gaps in the field of cybersecurity, both at a technical and decision-making level, as well as in international and regional cybersecurity forums. Only in this way can effective actions be developed to address and overcome them.

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<sup>5</sup> The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research. (2019). "Gender in Cyber Diplomacy Factsheet". Available at: [https://www.unidir.org/sites/default/files/2019-2/Gender%20in%20Cyber%20Diplomacy\\_Factsheet.pdf](https://www.unidir.org/sites/default/files/2019-2/Gender%20in%20Cyber%20Diplomacy_Factsheet.pdf)

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# Responses to Domestic Violence and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

Latin America, MENA and West Africa

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*Newsletter coordinator:*

Barbara Shitnaan Maigari

*Main Researchers:*

Stephanie Wallace

Rodrigo Sánchez

*Researchers*

Elom Khaunbiow

ASSN – African Security Sector Network

Hala Salem

Al Quds Center for Political Studies

Janet Abubakkar

ASSN – African Security Sector Network

Rabha Allam

Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies

*General Coordination:*

Samanta Kussrow

*General advisory:*

Marcela Donadio

*Graphic design:*

Rubén Longas

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