GBV AoR HELPDESK

Gender Based Violence in Emergencies

Research Query: Learning Brief on Femicide in Emergencies

Kristine Anderson | October, 2022

Introduction

This report provides a practical overview of femicide in fragile and emergency settings, and the implications for GBViE practitioners. This document articulates how femicide is defined and conceptualized, provides a concise overview of different forms of femicide, and offers practical programmatic recommendations in terms of GBV prevention and response and advocacy. This document comes in the wake of growing global awareness of femicide, due primarily to the ongoing efforts of feminist activists to render this form of violence more visible, protect women and girls at risk, support surviving family members of femicide victims, and hold perpetrators accountable. This paper is intended as a practical and non-exhaustive resource for GBViE actors; links to further reading can be found throughout.

Part 1: Defining and Understanding Femicide

There is not a universal global definition of femicide, and varying definitions stem from different legal and sociological approaches employed across diverse contexts. A number of definitions have been articulated as the concept has evolved since the term emerged in the 1970's (*see Box 1 below)*. However, most definitions converge on the idea that **femicide is the killing of women and girls on the basis of their gender,** that is, *because they are women and girls*. According to this understanding, not all homicides of women and girls constitute femicide; rather, the gender element is the distinguishing factor. The gender element of this definition underscores how **femicide constitutes a form of gender-based violence**, the most extreme kind. Like all forms of GBV, femicide is rooted in inequality between women and men, the abuse of power, and a disregard for human rights.

Types of Femicide

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) classifies the following types of femicide:[1]

- **Intimate partner killing/Domestic killing:** The most common form of femicide in many settings according to available data, intimate partner killings encompass those perpetrated by a current or former intimate partner. Domestic homicides constitute killings perpetrated by family members other than an intimate partner, including parents, siblings, cousins, and other family members.
- **"Honor"-related killings:** Murders of women and girls perpetrated by a family member, intimate partner, or another person close to the victim in the aim of punishing the victim for their perceived shameful actions or misbehavior that

[1] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2019) *Global Study on Homicide: Gender-related killing of women and girls 2019*, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/gsh/Booklet_5.pdf. This document contains further descriptions of each type of femicide.

are seen to impact the family reputation or social standing. While many honor crimes remain hidden, such crimes have been often documented in Asia. Some survivors and persons working on violence against women and girls prefer to use the term "so-called honor killing" to recognize that these incidents are a skewed, false, and harmful perception of the concept of honor held by the perpetrator/s.

- **Dowry-related killings**: Killings of brides for the purpose of extorting or increasing their dowries, either via murder perpetrated often by a family member or via suicide following extreme poor treatment. Such killings are most often, but not exclusively, reported in South Asian countries.
- **Killings of women and girls in armed conflict**: Targeted killing of women and girls during armed conflict due specifically to their gender. This type of femicide has been observed alongside systematic sexual violence of women and girls intended to degrade a society or community. Such killings have been documented in Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the targeting of Yazidi women in Iraq.
- **Gender-based killing of indigenous women and girls:** Killings of indigenous women and girls occur in the context of larger patterns of systemic marginalization. These killings have been observed in multiple contexts, such as in Guatemala, when large numbers of indigenous Maya women were targeted during the country's civil war, and in Canada, where data indicate women and girls face higher rates of violence and murder.
- **Trafficking, gang violence, and other extreme forms of killing:** Murders of women and girls in the context of harsh social and political situations, including gang violence, human trafficking (especially trafficking for the purpose sexual exploitation), and organized crime. Situations of mass migration in which women are disproportionately targeted for sexual and violence and trafficking—such as in Libya—also fall under this category.
- **Killings due to sexual orientation or gender identity:** Murders committed on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, also known as gender bias or hate crimes.
- **Killings due to accusations of sorcery or witchcraft:** Murders of women and girls accused of sorcery have been documented in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific islands. Women and girls of marginalized status—whether due to age, race, ethnicity, marital status, social or economic status—are more likely to be targeted by witchcraft accusations.
- **Harmful cultural or traditional practices:** Killings in the context of harmful cultural or traditional practices against women and girls, including sex-selective abortion of females, female infanticide, and deaths due to female genital mutilation/cutting.
- **Killings of female sex workers:** Murders of female sex workers, often perpetrated by male clients or individuals involved in their exploitation. Female sex workers are at the highest risk of femicide in comparison to all other groups of women, though it is impossible to know how many sex workers are killed due to their marginalized and less visible status in most societies.[2]

[2] Salfati, C, James, A, and Ferguson, L, 2008. *Prostitute homicides: a descriptive study*. Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 23(4): 505-42, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/18319375/#:~:text=Abstract,such%2C%20many%20cases%20remain%20unsolved.

Box 1: Evolving Definitions of Femicide

While femicide is by no means a recent phenomenon, its conceptual grounding in gendered power dynamics dates to feminist activism and scholarship in the 1970's. Russell and Van de Ven, at the 1976 International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women, asserted that femicide has been happening throughout history, and "we must realize that a lot of homicide is in fact femicide. We must recognize the sexual politics of murder."[3] Radford and Russell later expanded the definition of femicide to recognize its roots in gender inequality and patriarchy, calling it "the misogynous killing of women by men motivated by hatred, contempt, pleasure, or a sense of ownership over women, rooted in historically unequal power relations between women and men."[4] The United Nations Secretary General in their 2006 study on all forms of violence against women adopted the definition of femicide as "the gender-based murder of women…because they are women," noting that murders of women are often distinctly different than murders of men, and like all forms of GBV are greatly underreported, and pointing out femicide's linkages to conflict-related violence, intimate partner violence, social conceptions of honor, and dowry crimes.[5] In the 1990's as killings of women in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico drew international attention, Marcela Lagarde advocated the terms "feminicidio" [in Spanish] "feminicide" [in English] be used, on the basis that this term captures the gender dimensions of femicide—as a hate crime often followed by impunity—rather than a mere killing of a woman or girl.[6] While definitions have evolved, femicide tends to be the more frequently used term, and it can *only* be understood in the context of inequality between men and women.

Part 2: Essential Facts on Femicide: What Available Data Shows

Data on Femicide is Patchy and Fraught with Challenges

Data on femicide—as with other forms of GBV—are incomplete and do not demonstrate the actual extent of prevalence. Killings that occur in domestic settings, as well as deaths of traditionally marginalized women and girls in public settings, are more likely to go unnoticed or unreported in comparison with other forms of homicide. It is also difficult to obtain comparative and generalizable data across contexts due to diverse legal understandings of killings of women and girls. For example, UNODC uses the term "female victims of homicide perpetrated by intimate partners or other family members." However, this term is not exhaustive since it does not capture all killings of women that fall under the label of femicide, such as homicides perpetrated outside the domestic sphere, for example killings of female sex workers or of women and girls in armed conflict. Additionally, statistics within a single context may differ according to the institution counting them: for example, in Guatemala in 2010, the country's forensic science institute counted 608 murdered women, a presidential commission on violence against women recorded 754, while a United Nations commission noted over 800 deaths.[7] Similarly, in Mexico, there are significant differences in how prosecutors across different states classify femicide, contributing to vastly different femicide rates across the country.[8] Additionally, disappearances and deaths of women and girls of traditionally marginalized social status —for example, female sex workers, trafficked women, women and girls with diverse SOGIESC—are also less likely to be noticed or counted, or they may disappear within aggregated homicide numbers. Additionally, there are limitations in how the available data is illustrating women and girls' experience of intersecting forms of oppression and how intersectionality is expressed through research processes and analysis. Consequently, femicide statistics should generally be seen as representing a portion of the problem.

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[3] Russell, D, and Van de Ven, N. eds. *Crimes Against Women: Proceedings of the International Tribunal.* Berkeley : Russell Publications, p. 104, available from http://www.dianarussell.com/f/Crimes_Against_Women_Tribunal.pdf. Russell acknowledges that the term « femicide » was coined by Carol Orlock.

[4] Radford, J. and Russell, D.E.H., eds. (1990). *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing*. Buckingham, Open University Press.

[5] United Nations General Assembly (6 July 2006). In-depth study on all forms of violence against women. Sixty-first session, page 66, https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/vaw/SGstudyvaw.htm#more.

[6] Organization of American States, Inter-American Commission of Women, Committee of Experts of the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI) Declaration on Femicide, 2008, https://www.oas.org/es/mesecvi/docs/declaracionfemicidio-en.pdf.

[7] Insight Crime (2011) "Murders Reveal Pattern of Femicides in Guatemala," https://insightcrime.org/news/analysis/murders-reveal-pattern-of-femicides-in-guatemala/.

[8] Data Civica and Intersecta (2021) *The importance of adequate data policies for femicides: Examples from Mexico*. Brief submitted to the Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, available from https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Women/SR/Femicide/2021-submissions/CSOs/mexico-data-civica.pdf

Despite these challenges with data, activists and researchers have found creative ways to improve data on femicide: in South Africa, for example, where routine criminal data sources do not track victim-perpetrator relationships, a team of researchers analyzed mortuary, autopsy, and police records in an effort to understand national mortality rates from IPV. Their initial research revealed high rates of femicides more generally, and that younger women and women of color are particularly affected.[9] Presently, there have now been three national femicide studies conducted in South Africa which allow for comparison across studies. A comparison of the three studies has shown that whilst South Africa continues to have a huge problem with femicide—with three women killed per day by an intimate partner—there has nonetheless been a sustained reduction in femicide over 18 years with a [continuous] downwards trend among women murdered by intimate partners. The authors of this research indicate that 'the efforts of the women's movement in South Africa and dedicated Government policies and programming to combat GBV are reaping a reduction in intimate femicide' and furthermore, 'indicates that tracking femicide is an effective tool for countries to monitor progress in their interventions to eradicate gender based violence.'[10] In an effort to rectify data concerns and provide a precise statistical definition to help countries record and process data, in 2022 UNODC and UN Women announced a new global framework for measuring gender-related killings (the term used by both institutions for/alongside femicide/feminicide) of women and girls.[11]

Gender Matters in Homicide Patterns

The global data that is available makes starkly clear the influence of gender on the experience, perpetration, and location of femicide/ homicide. Globally, men and boys account for the majority of homicide victims: according to UNODC, in 2020, 80 percent of homicide victims were men and boys, and only one tenth of homicides carried out in public settings targeted women. In contrast, women and girls are much more likely than men and boys to be killed *in domestic settings* by someone they know, such as by intimate partner, sibling, parent, or other family member. Illustrating this, in 2020, 58 percent of all killings globally perpetrated by intimate partners or other family members targeted women and girls. In this sense femicide is largely a crime of the domestic sphere, and often occurs following an escalating pattern of violence and abuse.[12]

Femicide Happens Everywhere

Femicide is not limited to specific regions or countries. According to UNODC, in 2020, Africa had the highest rate of gender-killings of women and girls in domestic settings with 2.7 killings committed per 100 000 women. This compares with 1.6 in Oceania, 1.4 in the Americas, 0.8 in Asia, and 0.7 in Europe. It is important to note that these statistics do not include femicides that occur *outside* of domestic settings due to a lack of generalizable global data, suggesting numbers of all types of femicide are likely higher. In countries where disaggregated data on femicide perpetrators are available, the numbers suggest the majority of femicides are perpetrated by a person known to the victim: for example, in Argentina in 2021, more than 75% of femicides were committed by a current or former intimate partner or family member, and only 1.2% were committed by a stranger.[13]

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[9] Abrahams, Naeemah, et.al. (2009) *Mortality of Women From Intimate Partner Violence in South Africa: A National Epidemiological Study,* Violence and Victims, Volume 24, Number 4, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/26754902_Mortality_of_Women_From_Intimate_Partner_Violence_in_South_Africa_A_National_Epidemiological_Study. and subsequently a presentation on *The decline of femicide in South Africa from three national femicide studies across 18 years* delivered a at the SVRI Forum (September, 2022) https://www.svriforum2022.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Naeemah-Abrahams-Femicide.pdf

[10] Abrahams, Naeemah, et al. *The decline of femicide in South Africa from three national femicide studies across 18 years* delivered a at the SVRI Forum (September, 2022) https://www.svriforum2022.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Naeemah-Abrahams-Femicide.pdf

[11] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (1-4 March 2022) Statistical framework for measuring the gender-related killings of women and girls (also referred to as "femicide/feminicide"), available from https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/53rd-session/documents/BG-3j-Crime&CriminalJusticeStats-E.pdf.

[12] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2019) *Global Study on Homicide: Gender-related killing of women and girls 2019*, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/gsh/Booklet_5.pdf.

[13] 39.5% of femicides were committed by intimate partners, 27% by former intimate partners, and 11.3% by relatives. 9.8% were committed by acquaintances, 1.2 % by a stranger, and 11.3% the perpetrator was not known. See Statistica, "Distribution of registered femicides in Argentina in

Impunity often Follows Femicide

Available information on convictions of femicide perpetrators suggest a high degree of impunity. In some cases, this occurs in the context of larger patterns of impunity for crime and failures of the justice system: in Mexico, for example, it is estimated that 93% of crimes go unpunished more largely.[14] However, impunity for femicide must be understood in the context of men's dominance over women, victim-blaming, and patriarchal biases in the police and justice systems. Additionally, underreporting of femicides creates more space for perpetrators to go unpunished.

COVID-19 and Femicide

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on femicide rates is not entirely known due to patchy data, though UNODC reports increases in the numbers of femicides in Western and Southern Europe, North America, Central America, and South America following the first part of the pandemic. Data available suggests that barriers to control the pandemic such as lockdowns led to an increase in IPV;[15] given that the majority of femicides are perpetrated by current or former intimate partners, it is possible that there is a concomitant rise in femicides, though more robust data would be needed to confirm this.

Part 3: Practical Considerations for GBViE Actors

Femicide constitutes a most extreme form of GBV, often occurring after a longstanding pattern of abuse and violence. According to available data, femicide often—though not exclusively— occurs within the home in the context of intimate partner or family relations. In response and prevention efforts, there should consequently be a focus on supporting survivors of IPV and other forms of GBV across all settings. However, efforts must take into account the diversity in survivors' situations, keeping in mind that for some survivors, abuse may occur in domestic settings, while for others, risks for femicide will be in the community and other external settings. As a cross-cutting consideration, all prevention and response efforts should take into account the intersectional risks faced by diverse groups of women and girls.

3.1 Reducing Femicide risks through GBV Response

Focus on IPV in Case Management

The majority of femicides are perpetrated by intimate partners, and therefore a strategic focus should be placed on supporting IPV survivors in response activities in all humanitarian settings, in order to support effective risk assessment and management. Relevant actions include:

- **Prioritize Safety Planning during Case Management of IPV:** For organizations carrying out case management, case workers (with the support of their supervisors) should **emphasize safety planning** during the case management implementation plan. This means working together with survivors to co-identify risk factors for escalation of violence patterns in general (including the IPV Risk Assessment tool discussed below), and to the point of femicide, and developing strategies for the survivor to mitigate these risks to the extent possible with the resources she has available. If relevant, GBV case workers may need to carry out case conferencing with other relevant actors to mitigate femicide risks in the plan (for example, with actors providing safe shelter if the survivor needs to quickly leave her home), with the survivor's consent and adhering to a survivor-centered approach. Case workers should always emphasize, during safety planning and case management with IPV survivors, that the survivor is not to blame for what is occurring to her, and that she can take steps to manage risks but does not control the perpetrator/s and should never blame herself.

2021, by perpetrator relationship," https://www.statista.com/statistics/1102282/share-femicides-argentina-perpetrator-relationship/.

[14] Kloppe-Santamaria, G. (7 April 2021). "Impunity and Police Brutality Characterize Rise in Femicides in Mexico," The Global Observatory, https://theglobalobservatory.org/2021/04/impunity-police-brutality-femicides-mexico/.

[15] UN Women (2021). Measuring the Shadow Pandemic: Violence Against Women During COVID-19, available from https://data.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/documents/Publications/Measuring-shadow-pandemic.pdf.

- **Specialized Training on IPV:** GBViE actors should also organize **specialized training on GBV case management of IPV** situations to expand further upon and beyond the essential Interagency GBV Case Management Guidelines training.[16] These trainings should place attention on the risk of femicide and the actions that case managers can take to mitigate femicide risks for clients. In particular, case managers must have a **strong understanding of how to conduct safety planning with survivors,** including providing realistic options for survivors who demonstrate a high risk of femicide. As a part of safety planning, case workers should learn to **integrate the IPV Risk Assessment tool** in the Interagency GBV Case Management Guidelines, to help both case managers and IPV survivors understand the risk that intimate partners will become more severely violent or try to kill them.[17]

- **Femicide should be factored for and integrated within standard operating procedures (SOPs):** At coordination levels, GBV sub-clusters should elaborate and roll out detailed **SOPs for IPV survivors** in general, including those at elevated risk of femicides. SOPs should clarify options available for women in crisis situations and those transitioning from abusive partnerships and/or domestic situations, including safe shelter options, economic empowerment, and organizations that provide free support for navigating the legal system. SOP should additionally articulate options for involving law enforcement and justice actors if these are functional in the particular setting, while also prioritizing safety of survivors and recognizing many women and girls may not wish to involve formal or informal justice actors.

- **Safe Shelters:** Safe shelters or alternative crisis accommodation, when implemented correctly, can be a lifesaving temporary form of protection to women and girls at high risk of femicide, and can assist a transition out of abusive domestic relationships.[18] A safe shelter should offer a protective, confidential environment for survivors and their dependents to stay for extended periods (short-to-medium term), be a location where they receive coordinated legal, medical, economic, and mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) services that will enable them to gain greater independence in the long-term.[19] As with all other GBV interventions, shelters should be focused on the survivor and their needs in order to provide survivor-centered care. A range of guidance already exists for establishing safe shelters.[20] However, GBViE actors should understand that in practice, safe shelters are difficult to implement and sustain in any setting and may be especially challenging during acute emergencies.

  Shelters need to be well-designed, including a long-term plan for how they will be managed and sustained from the beginning, so that safety and quality does not deteriorate over time and leave women and girls at risk of femicide exposed to even greater risks due to the actions of service providers and/or shelter management. This concern applies to all types of actors who provide safe shelters: state, civil actors, national and international non-governmental organizations, and United Nations. Response actors should therefore vet the safety and quality of available shelters prior to referring survivors or to seek guidance from relevant GBV subcluster leads or other local level coordination mechanisms where there is a need to establish further information about service delivery offered at a shelter, since identifying safe shelters is a complementary and important part of service mapping as well as safe referrals that coordination bodies should undertake. Another issue in relation to referring women

[16] GBVIMS Steering Committee (2017). Interagency Gender-based Violence Case Management Guidelines, available from http://www.gbvims.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/Interagency-GBV-Case-Management-Guidelines_Final_2017.pdf.

[17] The IPV Risk Assessment tool can be found on page 100 of the Interagency GBVIMS Case Management Guidelines. This tool should only be administered by trained case workers. It is based on the Danger Assessment developed by Campbell, which was in turn developed following consultations of women, shelter workers, law enforcement, and other experts in IPV. This tool can be found at https://www.dangerassessment.org/DA.aspx.

[18] United Nations Joint Global Programme on Essential Services for Women and Girls Subject to Violence (2015). E*ssential services package for women and girls subject to violence*, available from https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/12/essential-services-package-for-women-and-girls-subject-to-violence.

[19] United Nations Population Fund (2021). *Guidelines for the Management of Safe Shelters for GBV survivors in the English and Dutch-speaking Caribbean*, available from https://caribbean.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/managing_safe_shelters_for_survivors_of_gender_based_violence_gbv_in_the_caribbean_0.pdf.

[20] Safe shelters are a complex topic about which much has been written. See, for example, United Nations Joint Global Programme (2015).

and girls at risk of femicide -as part of their experiences of GBV- is to consider beyond the short-to-medium term need for shelter and crisis support, and to determine what additional types of support will be provided within the shelter environment. This can include carrying out ongoing risk assessments with survivors by trained case workers in order to establish whether safe transitions to semi-supervised/more independent accommodation for women and girls in situations where the risk of femicide and GBV from the known perpetrator does reduce or subside over time are a safe option. This is an important consideration so that women and girls do not feel trapped within a shelter, nor are they suddenly confronted with the expectation to move to fully independent living accommodation without support when threat/risk levels reduce. It is also important for women and girls for whom the threat/risk level of femicide does not reduce over longer periods of time to have opportunities for support and enrichment within the shelter environment so that it does not turn into a de facto prison. **In summary, ongoing support from case workers, supervisors, and as applicable, case conferencing to assess and manage risks and strengths is key.**

- **Avoid Mediation with Perpetrators:** In many contexts, it is the cultural norm to conduct mediation for cases of IPV. Case workers should understand the risks of mediation for the survivor and for other individuals involved and should be advised to **avoid mediation** in all IPV cases, including in those where there is a risk of femicide.[21]

Seek to Understand Contextually Specific Femicide Risks

Women and girls experience IPV in all humanitarian settings, and this will in most settings be likely the most common femicide risk, based on the available data. However, risk factors for other forms of femicide may not be uniform across contexts. Therefore, during GBV assessments, it is important to identify elevated risk factors for femicide across all types of GBV (see pages 1-2 for reference) that exist in the specific context and develop specific mitigation strategies for each risk. GBViE actors should prioritize collaboration with local women's groups, leaders, and/or organizations that have knowledge of femicide risks, and experience working with women, girls, and their family members.

Ensure Support for Surviving Loved Ones When a Femicide Occurs

Femicides are a shock to families and communities and have reverberating impacts on larger social networks. Children, family members, and friends of the victims of femicide are likely to experience intense grief and other emotions following the violent death of their loved one; some may additionally face social stigma, threats to their safety, and loss of livelihood or educational opportunities. Therefore, when femicide occurs, response actors should carry out the following actions:

- **Prioritize Safety:** After a femicide occurs, it is critical to determine if family or friends connected to the victim are also in danger themselves, and to support them with safety options, as soon as possible. Children of femicide victims are acutely affected, and it is essential to work with Child Protection actors in cases when there are minors affected by the femicide, who may need to be placed in alternative care. Children will also require age-appropriate psychosocial support, and many will require specialized psychological support.
- **MHPSS and Grief Counselling:** Work with MHPSS actors to provide referral options for loved ones that are impacted by femicide, recognizing that they may need more intensive or individualized support due to the intense grief, feelings of guilt, and social stigma that may arise from losing a loved one to femicide.
- **Referrals to Legal Options:** Surviving loved ones may wish to pursue prosecution of the perpetrator may need referrals to competent legal services that will help them navigate their options. GBViE actors should identify the legal options available where surviving loved ones can be referred, but also be sure to set realistic expectations given that justice systems may be deficient or demonstrate a patriarchal bias. Surviving loved ones should also never be pressured to pursue legal options if they do not wish, particularly when there is a risk of reprisal by the perpetrator(s).

[21] Consult the Interagency GBVIMS Case Management Guidelines for more information on the risks associated with mediation of IPV cases, found on page 106. http://www.gbvims.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/Interagency-GBV-Case-Management-Guidelines_Final_2017.pdf

- **Referrals to Livelihood Support:** Surviving loved ones may also require practical support in the wake of femicide, particularly those who suffer interruptions in livelihoods or education. In such cases, survivors should be referred to relevant livelihood services.
- **Consider ways to honor the victim's life and memory:** Work with surviving loved ones to support them (with their consent) to commemorate the memory of the victim's life in a way that is respectful and meaningful. This may include ensuring the victim's death is not forgotten and is marked and recorded as femicide, provided doing so does not create significant safety risks for surviving loved ones: [22]

3.2 Prevention of Femicide

Preventing femicide entails short-term efforts in the form of contextually relevant mitigation measures, and long-term efforts that will address the root causes of GBV and transform harmful social norms that enable, sustain, and perpetuate violence against women and girls.

Prioritize collaboration with local women's groups and organizations: Actions on preventing and responding to femicide has been driven forward almost entirely due to women's activism (see Latin America case study below). Local women's organizations with knowledge and experience working in GBV and femicide should therefore be empowered and resourced to lead on advocacy and prevention measures.

Train and sensitize primary health staff as first points of entry: The World Health Organization recommends training and sensitizing health staff to better understand IPV and other forms of GBV, and to identify when patients are at risk of increased violence, including femicide. While there are some controversies surrounding GBV screening by health staff given the potential risk for harm to survivors and increased staff workload,[23] competent screenings by primary health care providers can be a critical way to identify and then support GBV survivors (including those at risk of femicide) who might otherwise be unaware of service options, or afraid to seek out help.[24] The GBV sub-cluster should collaborate with the Health cluster to undertake trainings of healthcare workers.

Advocacy to and training of police and justice actors when relevant: In settings in which the police and the justice system are adequately functional, conducting advocacy for the full and fair enforcement of existing laws and frameworks protecting women and girls, as well as capacity-building of security and justice actors in GBV, may be relevant. However, any work with police or justice actors in emergency settings should be done with careful consideration and caution. In most global settings, police and justice systems reflect a strong patriarchal bias, and many GBV survivors and surviving loved ones may not feel comfortable working with them. GBViE actors who choose to work with law enforcement or justice actors in humanitarian settings should be aware of their limitations and be careful that collaboration does not compromise their humanitarian neutrality.

Conduct advocacy for preventative policy and legislation and implement plans for its effective implementation for women and girls' safety and protection: In settings where the justice and legal systems are functional, consider advocating for increased and/or improved legislation providing mechanisms for holding perpetrators of femicide accountable and upholding the rights of GBV survivors. Actors can additionally consider statutory supports for non-abusive surviving family members of femicide victims, for example, financial assistance funding schemes; financial assistance for caregivers of children of femicide victims (such as foster care families or those who adopt children). However, it is essential to keep in mind that even the most progressive and comprehensive legislation alone cannot

[22] Ecuador provides an example of a formal initiative carried out to commemorate femicide victims' lives, creating "life maps" that mark spaces where the victim lived her life, in order to honor the victim while also bringing awareness and humanizing the issue. See Femicide detectives: 'Counting bodies is the best place to start." BBC News, 8 March 2022, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-60653099. There are also additional examples from Turkey and South Africa shared in the article.

[23] International Rescue Committee (n.d.) *Screening for Gender-based Violence in Primary Health Facilities in Humanitarian Settings; Implementation Guidelines and Recommendations for IRC Programs*, available from https://gbvresponders.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/GBV-Screening-implementation-guide.pdf.

[24] Ibid.

drastically change the harmful norms driving GBV (see the case study below on Latin America). Consequently, any policy and legislative advocacy must be accompanied by gender-transformative interventions to change harmful social norms.

Consider how to implement economic empowerment programming for women and life-skills programming for adolescent girls in emergencies: Economic dependence keeps many women and girls attached to abusive partners or other family members. Women-focused economic empowerment interventions such as the Economic and Social Empowerment (EA$E) developed by the International Rescue Committee can be helpful in reducing economic risk factors for violence. GBViE actors considering economic empowerment programming should conduct a comprehensive assessment including risk/benefit analysis, to ensure that potential benefits outweigh the risks of implementation. as it can be challenging to safely implement full economic empowerment program in emergency settings. For example, it is important not to inadvertently elevate risk factors for femicide, such as, business set-up grants focused on a location if it is unsafe for women and girls to remain in that location due to targeting and killings of women and girls due to conflict Similarly, for adolescent girls it is important to consider delivery of life-skills programming such as the IRC's Girl Shine life skills intervention package[25] which aim to build girls' protective assets and life skills and increase their social support networks, as well as to engage caregivers and other individuals who have influence on their lives. Given their complexity, such programs should be implemented by trained and technically competent agencies.[26]

Implement primary prevention interventions that engage men and boys, but that are accountable to women: Vetted, gender-transformative interventions that tackle harmful norms that drive GBV are to be prioritized by actors with the operational and technical capacity to undertake such programming. These should target adult men and adolescent boys. However, most intervention packages targeting men and boys require more extended periods of time, relatively stable populations, and security conditions that enable regular gatherings, as well as a significant investment in staffing time and capacity, all of which may be difficult during acute emergencies. Such interventions that have shown positive results in changing norms include SASA!, SASA! Together[27] and Communities Care.[28] However, it can be challenging to effectively and safely operationalize such approaches, due to the considerable technical capacity needed, resourcing requirements and such interventions must balance scale and scope with the need for quality. There are fewer approaches that can be fully employed during acute emergencies or periods of high population movement, though the IRC's EMPOWER approach offers a framework for establishing immediate GBV risk mitigation and initial prevention during the first three months of an emergency, and setting the scene for longer-term prevention efforts when these become possible.[29]

Raise Awareness about Femicide Among other GBViE and Humanitarian Actors: It is important to raise awareness about femicide alongside other forms of GBV within the humanitarian system. Utilize different forums and events to raise awareness: for example, working with sector leads and working groups to present on femicide and other forms of GBV during cluster/working group meetings, as well as specific campaigns. For example, in 2021 the theme of the 16 Days of Activism for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls was focused on ending femicide.[30]

Never work with perpetrators: Throughout all prevention and mitigation actions, GBViE actors should never work with perpetrators or implement interventions engaging perpetrators. Such interventions can create safety risks to GBV survivors and other family members and have overwhelmingly not demonstrated positive outcomes.[31]

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[25] The Girl Shine life skills curriculum and resource package can be found at https://gbvresponders.org/adolescent-girls/girl-shine/.
[26] EA$E tools and resources are available from https://gbvresponders.org/empowerment/ease-approach/.
[27] SASA! Tools and resources can be found at https://raisingvoices.org/women/the-sasa-approach/sasa-together/.
[28] Information on the Communities Care intervention can be found on the UNICEF website here: https://www.unicef.org/documents/communities-care and Sophie Read-Hamilton and Mendy Marsh *The Communities Care programme: Changing Social Norms to End Violence Against Women and Girls in Conflict Affected Communities in Gender and Development vol.24, 2016 – issue 2* at: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13552074.2016.1195579.
[29] The EMPOWER package is available at https://gbvresponders.org/empower/.
[30] For more information, see the website at https://16dayscampaign.org/.
[31] For an overview on perpetrator intervention programs, see GBV AoR Help Desk (n.d.) Evidence Digest on Perpetrator Intervention Programmes in Emergencies, available from https://gbvguidelines.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/perpetrator-programming-evidence-digest_final-1.pdf.

3.3 Recording and Learning from Femicide

Tracking and recording data on femicide incidents—when safe to do so—can be crucial for preventing further harm towards the surviving family/associates of the victim(s), or potential future partners of a perpetrator who committed an IPV-related femicide. It is also important in order to contribute to research, evidence, and learning which can support and progress GBV response and prevention efforts.

Where femicide victims were accessing GBV response e.g., case management services it is important that—where safe to do so—confidential and secure case files are updated to provide a summary narrative of the circumstances that led to the killing. It is also important that any known risk factors for surviving relatives/associates at risk are summarized and linked to and flagged within the case file and case file management system so that relevant linkages (for example, information about perpetrator profile) can be made to support safety of these family/associates' moving forwards. In situations where multiple organizations were engaged in supporting the victim prior to the killing, a debrief case conference to discuss, again, if safe to do so, document (if this data can be collected and stored safely and confidentially) any learning could be considered and convened provided this confirms to these three criteria i) the documentation is likely to benefit collective practice-based learning that is action-oriented to specifically improve femicide and GBV prevention and response efforts, and ii) it respects the agency and self-determination of the victim and does not become a forum for victim blaming, iii) it considers the safety (physical and psychological) of all those participating and is not blame-oriented. Those developing GBV SoPs in emergency settings may consider documenting a contextually safe and feasible approach to take within these documents. Understanding missed opportunities for preventative action or contributing risk factors (known or unknown) prior to the killing, as well as respecting the voice, needs, and wishes of grieving surviving close family members is also essential to such processes.

In stable, non-emergency settings, comprehensive homicide/femicide review processes,[32] femicide watches/observatories,[33] and femicide national research studies are some of the ways in which killings of women and girls have been reviewed, documented, and learning generated to inform individual agency and inter-agency learning with the objective of improving practice from a range of state and non-state agencies engaging with survivors and perpetrators. For example, in South Africa, comparative data analysis from three national studies conducted since 1999[34] has contributed to the development of socio-ecological model indicating the drivers of femicide, a data-informed theory of change for femicide prevention, and the setting of femicide prevention strategic priorities. This experience from South Africa demonstrates how learning from existing data that has been collected and practically applying it to survivor focused action is highly useful for understanding and preventing femicide. In emergency settings where large-scale femicide studies, national observatories or full scale femicide review processes are likely to be unfeasible, unrealistic, or are potentially unsafe (for example, if a state actor is engaging in, or complicit, with killings of women and girls in armed conflict or killings of indigenous women) then it is still nonetheless critical for GBViE actors and coordination mechanisms to carefully consider what is safe, feasible, and realistic in terms of gathering femicide data and evidence (qualitative and quantitative) which honors and records women and girls' lives and which shows respect to the victim's bereaved family members.

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[32] For example, the UK established domestic violence homicide reviews (note these would not cover all types of femicide defined in this paper) on a statutory legal basis under the Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act (2004) and has since established multiagency statutory guidance for the conduct of these reviews.
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/revised-statutory-guidance-for-the-conduct-of-domestic-homicide-reviews (HMG Home Office, 2016).

[33] In 2015, the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences, called for a femicide watch/observatories on gender related killings and her 2016 report (A/71/398) laid out the modalities for establishing such a mechanism. In 2021, she provided an updated report (A/76/312) on the progress of these and within the report states that 'The overall aim of the femicide watch prevention initiative is to contribute to the prevention of femicide or intentional gender-related killings of women and girls through the collection of comparable data at the national, regional and global levels and to contribute to the prevention of these killings through analyses of cases by national multidisciplinary bodies (observatories on femicide or violence against women).'

[34] Abrahams, Naeemah, et al. *The decline of femicide in South Africa from three national femicide studies across 18 years* delivered a at the SVRI Forum (September, 2022) https://www.svriforum2022.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Naeemah-Abrahams-Femicide.pdf

Part 4: Case Study: Feminist Activism to Counter GBV and Femicide in Latin America

In recent decades, feminist activists in many countries in Latin America have brought attention to femicide and other forms of GBV, and driven community- and national-level efforts to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls. It is due to women's continued activism that this region has seen more movement in policy and legislation in comparison to other contexts where femicide is prevalent. While the approach to countering femicide has not been uniform across the region, multi-dimensional strategies to counter GBV tend to converge around the following actions:

1. **Efforts to render public spaces safer:** After research found women and girls experienced harassment and other forms of GBV when moving about in public space, cities undertook territorial or urban upgrading that aimed to mitigate risks of violence in public, such as street lighting, public telephones, increased police presence, and women-only public transit. Importantly, efforts were taken to better integrate women into decision-making in urban planning and public transit.
2. **Public awareness-raising:** Governments and civil society actors have carried out multi-level efforts to raise awareness of rights and to increase their civic participation, including through media campaigns, trainings, etc.
3. **Improving resources for GBV survivors and women at risk:** Improving access to safe shelters and economic opportunities to improve resilience of women and reduce dependence on partners.
4. **Policy and Legislation:** Activists in the region have pushed for the passage of legislation on GBV more broadly, and on femicide specifically. Policy responses have evolved over time: a first generation of laws enacted in the 1990's after the passage of the Convention of Belém do Pará often focused on domestic violence, while a second generation of laws demonstrate improved awareness of intersectional risks faced by diverse women and girls and have called out specific types of violence.[35] To date, more than 90% of the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have passed some form of legislation addressing violence against women and girls, and some of these countries' more recent legislation takes into account the increase in the types of situations (apart from IPV) that can lead to femicide, such as drug trafficking, cyber-crime, and armed conflict—all forms of violence that have been on the rise in the region.

These measures constitute a significant achievement for feminist activists in the region, who continue to fight femicide. While it is not possible to know the full **outcomes** of these multi-dimensional efforts due to aforementioned challenges with data and the diversity of contexts in the region, the following trends bear mentioning:

- **A modest reduction in femicides committed in the public sphere in some countries:** According to UNODC, in some countries in South America, femicides perpetrated outside the home decreased by 20 per cent from 2017 to 2020, while femicides within the domestic sphere remained stable.[36] These numbers suggest that positive policy interventions may help curb violence in the public sphere to an extent, but not necessarily in the domestic sphere where the majority of femicides are perpetrated. For example, El Salvador and Honduras recorded minor reductions in femicides since 2015, attributed in part to the passage of GBV legislation. In El Salvador, the appointment of a special unit to investigate GBV has been noted as a success factor. In all cases, legislation has not been fully implemented in the 17 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean that have passed legislation.
- **Increased femicide and/or increased reporting in other countries:** Reductions in reported femicides in the public sphere have not been uniform in the region, though again, data challenges render conclusions difficult. In Mexico, for example, the number of reported femicides increased by 135% between 2015 and 2021. While media often point to a rise in criminality and insecurity in the country (and it is true that the rise in femicides has been in pace with the rise in homicides in general), it bears mentioning that 1 in 5 femicides occur in the domestic sphere, in comparison with 1 in 13 for male homicide victims.[37] This increase may simply be that more femicides that previously went unnoticed are now being reported and named as femicide: McGinnis et al. argue that

[35] UN Women (2017). *From Commitment to Action: Policies to End Violence Against Women in Latin America and the Caribbea*n, available from https://oig.cepal.org/sites/default/files/from_commitment_to_action_policies_to_end_vaw_in_latin_america_and_the_caribbean.pdf.
[36] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2021). *Killings of women and girls by their intimate partner or other family members*, https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/crime/UN_BriefFem_251121.pdf.
[37] Adams, O. (2022). "Understanding the dynamics of femicide in Mexico." Vision of Humanity, available from https://www.visionofhumanity.org/understanding-the-dynamics-of-femicide-of-mexico/

Mexican states with special prosecutors for gender-related crimes are more likely to investigate femicides, suggesting that policy and legislative action render femicides more visible.[38]

- **Legislative and policy strides are important, but not without limitations:** The enactment of legislation across the region represents a significant step forward for women's rights activists in bringing visibility to the problem and seeking to protect women. Enactment of legislation specifically around femicide in many countries has helped raise awareness of GBV and affirmed state obligations to prevent violence and hold perpetrators accountable. In particular, the appointment of special units and prosecutors for gender-related crimes (including femicide), seems to have increased the reporting of femicide and the number of cases investigated. Yet the Latin American case also demonstrates the limitations of legislations: while important, laws largely do not address the root cause of violence against women and girls, gender inequality. Even in countries where legislative and criminal justice reforms have been enacted, feminists point to shortcomings in how gender-related cases of violence are handled, as the justice system continues to reflect a patriarchal mentality.[39] Low confidence in the justice system and a long history of impunity deter survivors and families from reporting violence. Briefly illustrating this, of the 67% of women in El Salvador who have suffered violence, only 6% reported to the authorities.[40]

Part 5: Key Takeaways for GBViE Actors

Femicide represents the most extreme form of GBV, and occurs in all settings, most often occurring in the context of intimate or family relationships. GBViE actors in humanitarian settings should therefore—as with other types of GBV—assume that the risk of femicide exists, even in the absence of clear data on femicide trends. Consequently, GBViE actors should take actions to respond and prevent IPV and to mitigate other contextual risks for femicide that are identified in a particular setting. Importantly, GBViE actors should also recognize that there are limitations to what they can do in settings where the justice system is not functional. In such cases, the emphasis should be on ensuring the availability of life-saving interventions for IPV survivors and other women and girls demonstrating a risk other forms of femicide identified in the context. GBViE actors should also record data on femicide incidents – in situations where it is safe to do so- and seek to learn and implement lessons from any missed opportunities for action to prevent harm.

GBViE actors should always be guided by local and national women's groups and organizations with knowledge and experience working on femicide. The case study provided from Latin America demonstrates the critical importance of feminist activism in increasing the visibility of violence against women and girls and pushing for changes at different levels of society to support survivors and hold states accountable to protecting their citizens and upholding justice. It also makes clear the importance of legislative and criminal justice reform to address femicide, but also the shortcomings when root causes of violence remain unaddressed.

[38] McGinnis, T.D., Ferreira, O. R., and Shirk, D. A. (2022) Analyzing the Problem of Femicide in Mexico: The Role of Special Prosecutors in Combatting Violence Against Women. Justice in Mexico Working Paper Series, Volume 19, No. 2, Mexico Institute, https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/220710_FEMICIDE_WKPP_Final.pdf

[39] See, for example, Joseph, J. (2017) *Victims of Femicide in Latin America: Legal and Criminal Justice Responses*, Temida, vol. 20, br. 1, 3-21, available from http://www.doiserbia.nb.rs/img/doi/1450-6637/2017/1450-66371701003J.pdf

[40] Mobilia K. (2020). *Salvation for the Women of El Salvador: Recognizing a Violation of International Human Rights for the Sake of Ending Femicide*, 43 Fordham International 1329, available from https://ir.lawnet.fordham.edu/ilj/vol43/iss5/6/.

Annex 1: Table: International and Regional Normative Frameworks

Femicide, as an extreme form of GBV, is implicit or explicitly referenced in frameworks addressing GBV and violence against women and girls more broadly, which are relevant for humanitarian settings.

International-Level	
Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)	An international bill of rights adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly. CEDAW recognizes that discrimination against women includes GBV. General Recommendation No. 35 calls out the need to collect information on femicide, among other forms of GBV.
United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325	The landmark resolution adopted by the UN Security Council in 2000 "Calls on all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence."
Vienna Declaration on Femicide	This 2012 petition specifically urges UN member states to address femicide.
UN General Assembly Resolution 68/191	A resolution passed in 2013 on "Taking action against gender-related killing of women and girls," calls out femicide and feminicide specifically.
United Nations Security Council Resolution 2467	A resolution on sexual violence in armed conflict adopted by the UN Security council in 2019, affirming a survivor-centered approach to addressing conflict-related sexual violence in all UN peace-making, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding initiatives.
Regional-Level	
Convention of **Belém do Pará (Latin America)**	A 1995 International human rights instrument adopted by the Inter-American Commission of Women of the Organization of American States. It is a legally binding international treaty criminalizing all forms of violence against women, especially sexual violence. All but two of the member states have either signed and ratified or acceded to the Convention. The Convention distinguished between different spheres where VAWG occurs within the family or in an interpersonal relationship, and in the community/public sphere.
Maputo Protocol **(African Union)**	A human rights instrument adopted in 2003, guarantees extensive rights to African women and girls and includes provisions on harmful traditional practices and violence against women and girls, though does not mention femicide specifically.
Istanbul Convention **(Europe)**	A 2011 treaty focused exclusively on eliminating VAWG, encompasses prevention, protection, and prosecution of those accused of perpetrating violence against women and girls, though it does not name femicide specifically.

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The GBV AoR Helpdesk

You can contact the GBV AoR Helpdesk by emailing us at:
enquiries@gbviehelpdesk.org.uk

The Helpdesk is available 09.00 to 17.30 GMT Monday to Friday.

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