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Measuring femicide: challenges and efforts to bolster the process in Latin America and the Caribbean



Gender Equality Observatory

for Latin America and the Caribbean

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Understanding femicide or “gender-based killing of women”¹ depends, to a large extent, on the existence of data deriving from detailed and reliable records that identify characteristics of the victim, the perpetrator, the relationship between the two, their environment, motivations and patterns of behaviour, among other factors.

The Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean has made progress in measuring femicide in the region and has gathered **reliable, verifiable** and **comparable information** from the countries, with a view to using it to design, implement and evaluate public policies on protection for victims of violence, prevention of femicide, reparation for dependent collateral victims, and punishment of perpetrators.

Given that regional comparability is a major problem, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) is encouraging the development of a **femicide registration system** in Latin American and Caribbean countries, to improve the quality of national data with a view to deepening the analysis of femicide and strengthening comparability.

“Information systems: transforming data into information, information into knowledge and knowledge into political decisions”

(Montevideo Strategy, pillar 9)

¹ United Nations, General recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19 (CEDAW/C/GC/35), 2017.

Regional femicide indicator

Corresponds to the annual total of gender-based killings of women. According to national laws, it is referred to as femicide, feminicide, or aggravated homicide due to gender.

The process of building the regional femicide indicator began in 2009 with official data on “women’s deaths at the hands of their current or former intimate partners”.

At the time, only four countries had codified femicide laws (the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Costa Rica in 2007; Colombia and Guatemala in 2008).

Agreements to move forward in the development of the femicide indicator were adopted at the following meetings:

- Meeting of Technical Experts on Gender Statistics for the Analysis of Indicators for the Gender Equality Observatory of Latin America and the Caribbean (Aguascalientes, Mexico, October 2008)
- Forty-second meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean (Santiago, December 2008)

By the end of 2015, most Latin American countries had codified femicide and adopted criminal code reforms. While parliamentary debates took place, the countries made progress in measurement, which allowed the Gender Equality Observatory of Latin America and the Caribbean to generate and disseminate national data for 15 Latin American countries and 3 Caribbean countries that year.

Regional femicide measurement

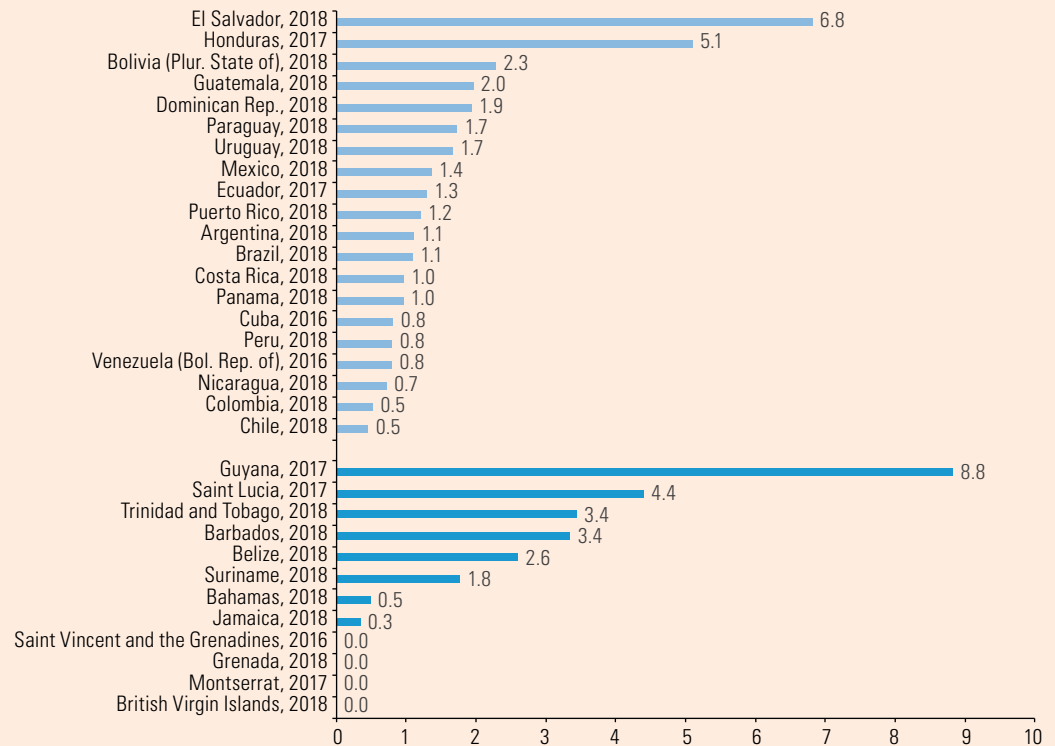
For an update of the indicator in 2019, the Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean received official figures from 16 Latin American countries and 9 Caribbean countries for 2018, including 10 countries which only provided data on women who had been murdered by their current or former intimate partners (the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Chile, Colombia, Grenada, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Puerto Rico and Suriname).

The most recent data for 33 countries of the region show that more than **3,800 women** were murdered owing to their gender.

Four of the five **highest femicide rates in Latin America** were recorded in Central America and the Dominican Republic. In the **Caribbean subregion**, femicide rates are higher than 4 per 100,000 women in Guyana and Saint Lucia, according to data for the latest available year.

The **Gender Equality Observatory** for Latin America and the Caribbean has official data for 34 Latin American and Caribbean countries regarding **three indicators** which, taken altogether, convey the dynamics of **extreme violence** against women.

Latin America and the Caribbean (32 countries):
femicides, latest year available^{a, b}
(Per 100,000 women^c)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, on the basis of official sources.

^a Regional averages cannot be calculated owing to the heterogeneity of national data sources and methodologies.

^b Data refer to femicide except in the case of the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Puerto Rico, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Suriname, which only report on intimate partner femicide (i.e., committed by a current or former partner).

^c The calculation of the rate per 100,000 women for Saint Kitts and Nevis is not possible owing to the lack of population estimates. This country recorded two femicides in 2018.

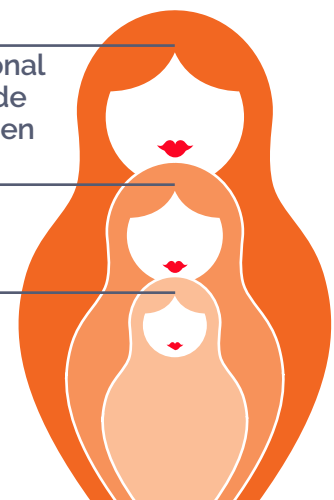
They include:

Intentional homicide of women

Femicide

Intimate femicide

(committed by women's current or former intimate partners)



Femicide indicator within the framework of the regional statistical follow-up of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Measuring the femicide indicator is crucial to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 16, particularly the following targets:

- 5.2 “Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation”
- 16.1 “Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere”

In light of the challenge of achieving the **2030 Agenda** for Sustainable Development, with its 17 goals and 169 targets, Latin America and the Caribbean, in 2018, prioritized a set of 154 indicators, including 30 complementary ones that delve deeper into issues of great import to the region.

The incorporation of the rate of femicide per 100,000 women as a complementary indicator among the region's prioritized indicators enables progress in the follow-up of extreme violence against women in the region and in States' responses in terms of the implementation of public prevention policies.



National femicide records in Latin America and the Caribbean

Official statistics on femicide in Latin American and Caribbean countries are produced by different State institutions, and in many cases, are defined within the framework of inter-agency coordination.

In more than half of the region's countries, the police, forensics institutes or ministries of the interior or public security are responsible for generating official data on femicides.

This is especially notable in the Caribbean, where the police are the source of information in 11 of the 12 countries that provide data.

In Brazil and Honduras, academic institutions process and publish information from the administrative records of ministries of public security and from the police and forensics institute, respectively.

In the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama, Peru and the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the public prosecutor's office and the attorney general's office are responsible for femicide records.

Latin America and the Caribbean (33 countries): institutions producing official femicide data



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, on the basis of official reports from the countries.

National femicide records in Latin America and the Caribbean

In some countries of the region, femicide figures are produced by more than one institution

Various actors are involved in femicide cases, for example the police, forensics institutes, public prosecutors and the judiciary. Therefore, it is imperative to define inter-agency protocols or agreements to establish criteria and clear statistical definitions for data collection and the standardization of records, in order to produce unique and consistent statistics and indicators.

National institutes of statistics, within the governing framework of national statistical systems, must standardize these administrative records to validate the data, especially in the context of global and regional processes relating to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Some countries do not consider all killings of women by their current or former partners to be femicides, even when there have been previous reports of domestic violence

If women are murdered by their current or former partners, these cases must be considered femicides, especially when there have been previous reports of violence committed by the partner or in cases involving separation or divorce.

Only a minority of countries in the region record gender-based killings of transsexual women or female sex workers as femicides

Prejudice and stigma continue to prevent some groups of women from being treated equally by mechanisms for the administration of justice.

The updating of femicide records on the basis of public prosecutor and police investigations and court decisions is still insufficient in most countries

Mechanisms to update figures are fundamental, to ensure that femicide records reflect inter-agency work on this subject and incorporate investigated and processed cases classified as femicide.

Femicide records in the region comply with different approaches

While some countries focus on legal codification, and only record cases that are explicitly considered femicides according to national laws, others adopt broader approaches which aim to shed light on all homicides of women owing to their gender.

Records on the violent deaths of women rarely include information on the victim's race, ethnicity, sexual identity or orientation, education level or place of residence

Knowledge of the sociodemographic profile of femicide victims is required for the development of focused and relevant public prevention policies.

In most countries of the region, femicide data is only disseminated once every year

This interval is very long, given the need to evaluate and design public policies based on these data.

