

# GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE WITH FIREARMS IN MEXICO

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## Organizations:

Intersecta, Organización para la Igualdad, A.C. (Intersect, Organization for Equality)

Data Cívica, A.C. (Civic Data)

EQUIS Justicia para las Mujeres, A.C. (EQUIS Justice for Women)

Centro de Estudios Ecuménicos, A.C. (Center for Ecumenical Studies)

Translation: Stop Us Arms to México/Global Exchange, Intersecta

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# CREDITS

## TESTIFIERS

Gilberta Mendoza Salazar  
Kenya Cuevas  
María Fernanda Aquino  
Natalia Lane  
Rita Canto  
Rocío Suárez  
Susana Castro Mesa  
Verónica Cruz Sánchez  
Víctor Yunuen Mendoza Vivas  
Anonymous human rights defender

## INTERVIEWERS AND DEVELOPMENT OF CONTENTS

Adriana E. Ortega  
Candela Bastos Camus  
Estefanía Vela Barba  
Georgina Jiménez  
Kim Piaget  
Mariana López Zaldívar  
Mariana Orozco Ramírez  
Mónica Meltis Véjar  
Montserrat Martínez Téllez  
Sara San Martín Romero

## HOMICIDE DATA REVISION

Adriana E. Ortega  
María Fernanda Torres

## COLLABORATION WITH TRANSCRIPTS

Daira Arana Aguilar  
Eleazar Pérez Encino  
Leticia Cruz Ruíz  
Cinthya Vanessa López Sánchez

## SUPPORT FOR CONTACTING WITNESSES

Candela Bastos Camus  
Ericka Espinoza Vázquez  
Sandra Cardona

## TEXT REVISION COLLABORATION

Luz María Maceira Ochoa  
Wanda Berenice Muñoz Jaime  
Zarel León Segura  
Giselle Yañez Villaseñor

## PHOTOGRAPHS

Testifiers archives  
Marina San Martín, march on  
March 8, 2020  
Photographs taken from websites  
belonging to organizations and  
centers of testifiers

## CORRECTION OF STYLE

Laura Zúñiga Orta

## GRAPHIC DESIGN AND EDITORIAL ENGLISH VERSION

Osiris Mendoza Hernández

## TRANSLATION

Angélica Torres  
Cynthia Barboza  
Lesly Hernández  
Araceli San Martín

## TRANSLATION REVIEW

John Lindsay Poland  
Adriana E. Ortega  
Wanda B Muñoz Jaime  
Luz Cervantes  
Sara San Martín Romero

## GENERAL COORDINATION

Sara San Martín Romero

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**T**his study was carried out with the support and at the request of the organization IM Swedish Development Partner, with the aim of making visible to the international disarmament community, the impact of violence in the lives of women and the LGBTQI+<sup>1</sup> community in Mexico, as a factor of aggravation of gender violence.

The report was carried out with the experience and the recommendations of 11 people: women and members of the community LGBTQI+, survivors, relatives of victims, activists, or defenders working with gender-based violence related to firearms.

The organizations that primarily developed the study — EQUIS Justice for Women, A.C.; Intersects Organization for Equality, AC; Data Civica, A.C.; and the Center of Ecumenical Studies, A.C.— deeply thank the following people who allowed us to collect their words and experience regarding this problem:

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- **María Fernanda Aquino;** Chihuahua; litigation specialist on sexual and domestic violence cases.
- **Natalie Lane;** Mexico City; sexual violence survivor, threatened with a firearm, and activist for the rights of LGBTQI+ people and sex workers.
- **Rita Canto;** Mexico City; activist and independent researcher.
- **Rocío Suárez;** Mexico City; activist and general director of the Support Center for Trans Identities, A.C.
- **Susana Castro Mesa;** Acapulco Guerrero; activist for orphans whose mothers were murdered and the friend of a victim.
- **Verónica Cruz;** Guanajuato; activist, founder of the organization Las Libres.
- **Víctor Yunuen Mendoza Vivas;** Acapulco Guerrero; orphan son of Mariana Vivas who was murdered.
- **Anonymous human rights defender;** Mexico City; trial lawyer and, as the name by which she is referred to indicates, defender of women's human rights.

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<sup>1</sup> We will use the universal acronym LGBTQI+, which represents different gender identities and expressions, as well as sexual orientations: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex and other identities not included.

# INTRODUCTION

One of the objectives of the international agenda of Women, Peace, and Security (WPS Agenda) is to show how small arms and light weapons (SALW) promote dynamics of violence that destabilize national development, with devastating effects, marked and gender-differentiated for their societies.<sup>2</sup>

Within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2030 framework, the WPS Agenda calls for a global reduction in armed violence. This call responds to a concern of the international community, focused on how far we are from achieving the proposed objectives of reducing armed violence, given the current trends that persist in many countries<sup>3</sup>. In addition to the level of devastation that can be produced, armed conflict is the leading cause of violent death in the world. Indeed, SALW violence alone represents almost 50% of violent deaths that occur globally. When these figures are considered from a gender perspective, the call for their reduction becomes particularly urgent.

At the international level, there is a tendency for homicides of women to be perpetrated differently from those of men. This has been documented by the Office of the United Nations on Drugs and Crime, reporting that 82% of the victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) are women<sup>4</sup> who were killed by men with a firearm.<sup>5</sup> However, in the case of Mexico, the private sphere is not the only space where SALW is used to exercise gender violence: it also happens in the public sphere. Official data indicates that most murders of women that occur today are committed by armed groups in public.

Armed violence has also disproportionately permeated the LGBTQI+ community. Hate crime records compiled by civil society organizations indicate that the vast majority of victims of these incidents are trans women. Six out of 10 have been murdered at gunpoint, and in almost half of the cases, their bodies have been found exposed on public roads. It is worth mentioning that most of these women were engaged in sex work;<sup>6</sup> likewise, this type of violence is frequently perpetrated in the context of human trafficking and trafficking, where 70% of the victims are usually women and girls, according to UNODC<sup>7</sup> data.

The goal of this study is to understand the impact of firearms on the lives of women and the LGBTQI+ population in Mexico. To achieve this goal, the study analyzes 1) data produced by different surveys and registries, and 2) testimonies. Such testimonies were obtained from activists, survivors, and relatives of casualties of armed violence.

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2 Farr y Gebre-Wold, "Gender Perspectives on Small Arms"

3 Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, 2020

4 UNODC, "Global study on homicide 2019"

5 UNODC, "Global study on firearms trafficking 2020"

6 This information was taken from a database provided by the Letter S organization

7 No information available



# **1 WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT FIREARMS VIOLENCE IN MEXICO?**

# 1.1 FIREARMS AS PROTAGONISTS OF HOMICIDAL VIOLENCE

**M**exico is the sixth country with the most firearms in the world. The Small Arms Survey estimated that 15 million firearms are in circulation in Mexico<sup>8</sup> and another study suggests that there could have been as many as 24 million in the period 1990–2013.<sup>9</sup> Violence caused by firearms has caused great human loss and suffering in the lives of hundreds of thousands of Mexican men and women. The data presented here highlight the centrality that firearms have acquired in homicides in the country, affecting women, men, and the LGBTQI+ community.

## 1.1.1 ARMED HOMICIDES IN MEXICO

**T**he main objective of the mortality statistics published annually by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) is to record all deaths that occur in the country and the particularities of each one. This data set is one of the most reliable sources to account for the exponential increase in murders in recent years.

In general, if the last 22 years of information are analyzed, between 2000 and 2007 homicides had been showing a stable and even downward trend. However, after the implementation of the security

strategies of former President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa —including the militarization of the streets—, the murder rate increased almost three times between 2007 and 2011, going from 8.1 to 23.6 people per 100,00 inhabitants. In this sense, it is important to mention that these security strategies, especially militarization, have contributed to reaching historical highs of violence and human rights violations in Mexico.<sup>10</sup> From 2011 to 2014, the rate decreased at a constant rate, but rebounded again in 2018, with 27.9 people murdered per 100,000.<sup>11</sup> This rate was the highest recorded in the last four decades.<sup>12</sup> If the data is analyzed according to the sex of the victims, this growth has been uniform for both sexes.

In the case of men, the trend seen in the general population was similar; from 2007 to 2011 the murder rate increased 2.9 times, ending in 2018 with a rate of 50 homicides per 100,000 men. For women, the jump from 2007 to 2011 meant an increase of 2.3 times the initial rate, culminating in 5.6 homicides per 100,000 women in 2018.<sup>13</sup>

Other characteristics of homicides have been changing since 2007. One of the more notorious changes has been the way people have died, especially women. In the case of men, in the year 2000, the proportion of homicides caused by firearms was 53.7%; in 2010 it rose to 66.4 percent. For the last year of registration (2022), this trend has been preserved.

8 Weigen and Guevara, in Esparza, “The illicit trafficking of firearms to Mexico.”

9 Ibid.

10 To learn more, see: Intersects, “The Two Wars”

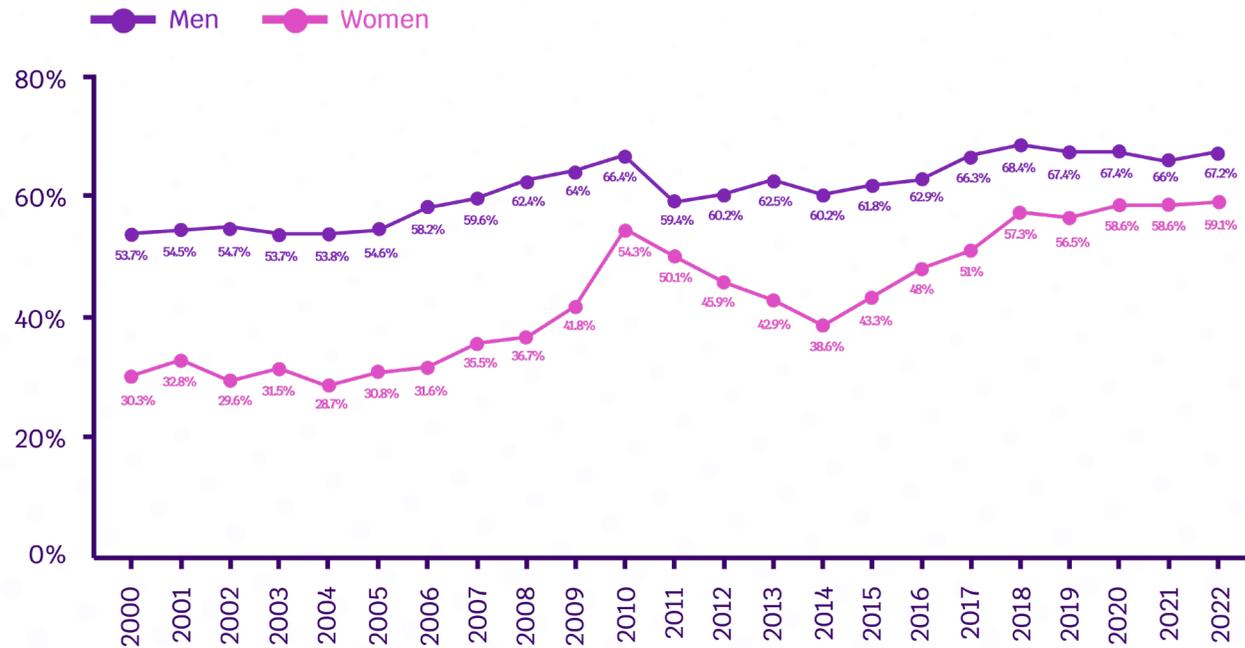
11 For the calculation of these rates, deaths occurring outside the country or in unidentified entities are omitted.

12 The national murder rate fell to 27.3 people per 100,000 inhabitants in 2019

13 To learn more, see: Civic Data and the Area of Sexual and Reproductive Rights (CIDE), “Keys to understand and prevent the murders of women.”

## PROPORTION OF HOMICIDES COMMITTED WITH FIREARMS IN MÉXICO

By year of occurrence and sex



Note: Deaths occurring outside the country or inside unidentified states are omitted

Source: Inegi mortality records, 2000–2022.

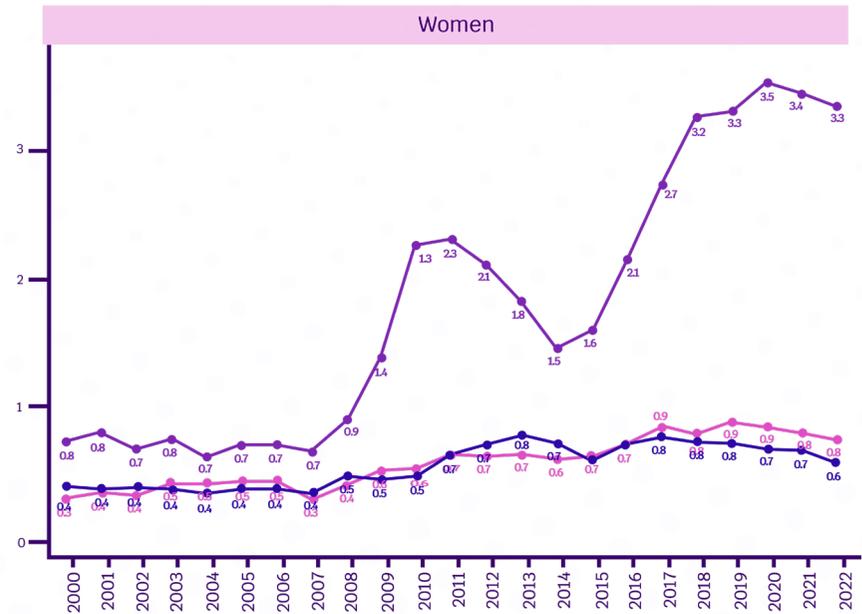
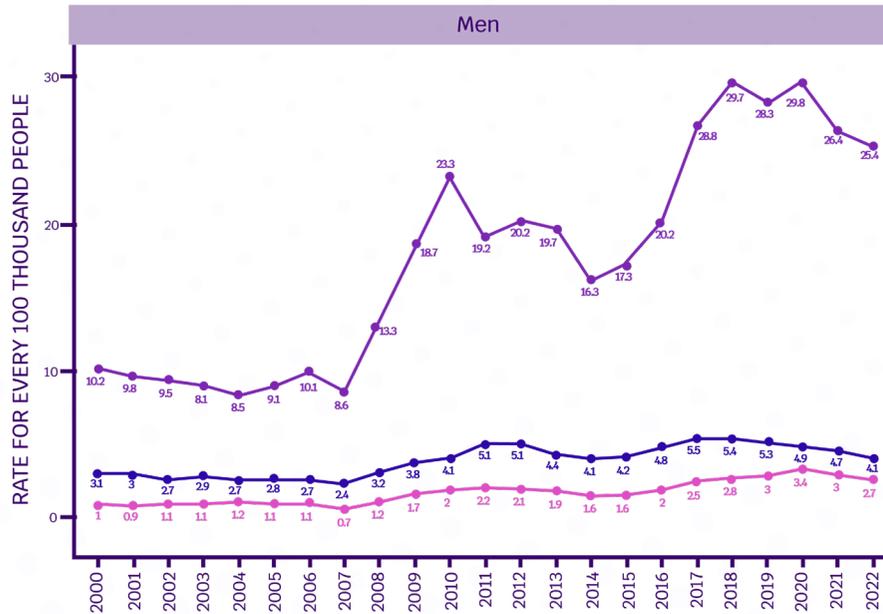
As for women, in the early 2000s, only three out of 10 died from firearms; in 2010 they came to represent 54.3 percent. The trend —unlike the case of men— indicates that the murders perpetrated by this mode have been steadily increasing since 2014. By 2019, almost six out of 10 women were killed with firearms. It should be noted that these patterns also follow the general trend of rising and falling homicide incidence over the years.

If the data is analyzed by sex and mode in which the murders occurred, some important clues can be observed. From the outset, armed violence is not new: men were already killed mostly with firearms; but among women, this was not exactly the case. If you look

at the rate by modes of occurrence, from 2000 to 2007, there was not much difference between the incidence with a knife, a firearm, and suffocation—the most common modes of homicide in women. Even from 2003 to 2006, suffocation turned out to be higher than murders with a knife. As it has been previously said, the trend for men in this same period indicates that, over the years, they are killed mostly with firearms. From 2000 to 2007, the rate of murders with a firearm triples the rate of those committed with a knife and is up to 10 times higher than the incidence of suffocation.

**HOMICIDES RATES IN MÉXICO WITH FIREARMS FROM 2000 TO 2022**  
By mode of occurrence and sex

● Surface ● Suffocation ● Blunt or sharp weapons



Note: Deaths occurring outside the country or inside unidentified states are omitted. Deaths occurring in unidentified places are omitted. Source: Inegi mortality records, 2000-2022.

Another pattern that stands out is the change in firearm murder rates for both men and women. From 2007 to 2019, the incidence of this type of murder has registered an increase of 318% for men, while in the case of women the increase was 357%.

The modes of occurrence are not the only characteristics that have changed: the locations where these events take place did too. In the case of men, records indicate that the most common place where they are killed with firearms is in public. From 2007 to 2010, the rate of murders with a firearm in public shot up from 5.7 to 14 homicides per 100,000 men.

The trend for women presents differences that are worth emphasizing: for example, in 2000, their homicides were perpetrated more inside the home. This pattern continued until 2008, when the number of armed homicides in public was also the norm for women. Compared with 2008, the incidence of homicides of women committed with weapons grew 4.5 times in 10 years. Another relevant detail that the records show is that armed violence in homes has also increased. The incidence rate tripled from 2007 to 2018.

# THE EXPERIENCES OF THE ACTIVISTS CONFIRM THE DATA

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*Femicides usually occurred in domestic settings. Currently, there is an increase in the number of victims in public spaces, particularly the display of bodies with signs of intense violence. However, the profile of the aggressor continues to be of someone related to the victim or within their personal circle. From the universe of femicides, there is an increase in those executed with a firearm, either as a cause of death or as part of the injuries found on the bodies.*

**An anonymous human rights defender**



*If we talk about the phenomenon of femicide and murders of women and homicides of women, in the last five years, they have been concentrated among young people, we did not see that between 2000 and 2005. [Then] they were mostly married women, [and the murderers] were the spouses. In Guanajuato, it was very clear [that] the origin of femicide was domestic violence, mainly in couples, and they were women between 30 and 40 years old or even older than 40: that was where it was most concentrated. But it has now been completely changed. Today, young women are being murdered in public spaces with firearms and their ages have been reversed.*

**Veronica's testimony**

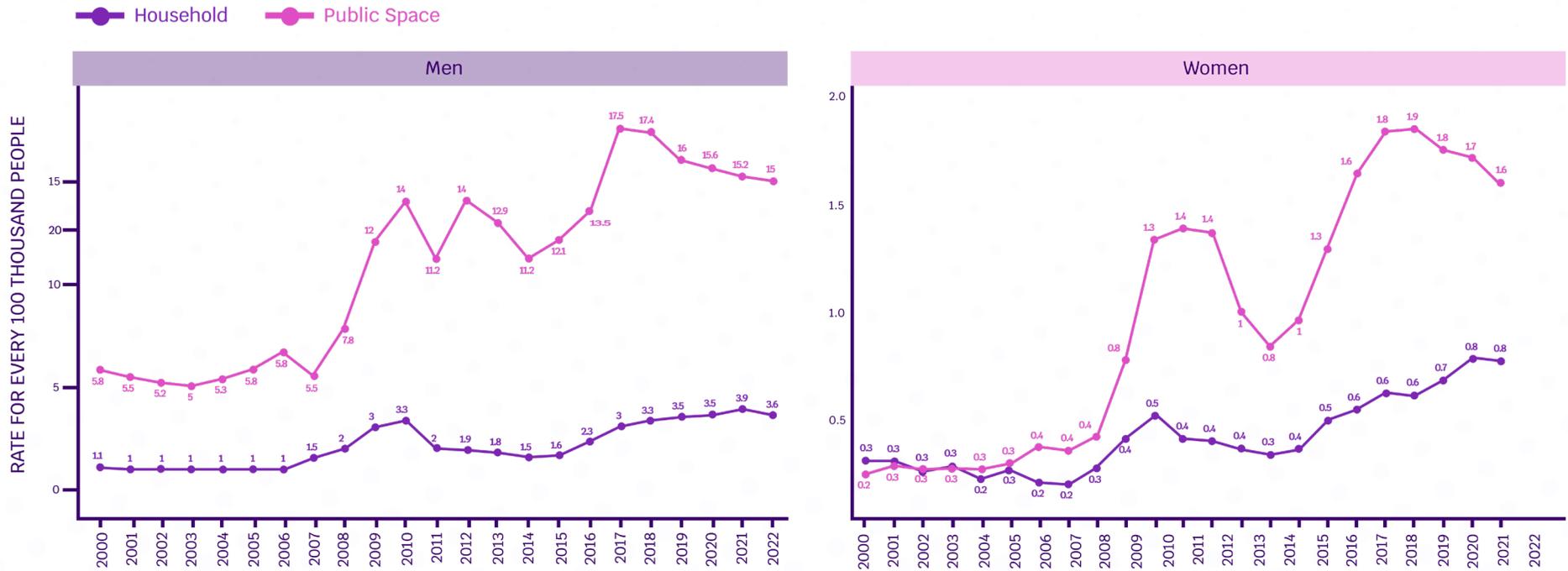


*Now we see that in young women there are a lot of femicides, from [women of] about 16 years to about 33-35 years.*

**Susi's testimony**

## HOMICIDES RATES IN MÉXICO WITH FIREARMS FROM 2000 TO 2022

By mode of occurrence and sex



Note: Deaths occurring outside the country or inside unidentified states are omitted. Deaths occurring in unidentified places are omitted. Source: Inegi mortality records, 2000-2022.

Another dimension to consider is the behavior of firearm homicides at the state level. In most states, beginning in 2007, the proportion of homicides of both men and women increased, but the change is more noticeable in the case of women. Specifically, for the last year available —2022— you can see a dominant pattern: in 15 states, the murders of women perpetrated with firearms account for half or more of all these events.

Two of the states that stand out when observing these proportions are Colima and Zacatecas, where almost eight of each 10 women die from guns. Other regions that present a worrying proportion are Oaxaca, Guanajuato and Michoacán, where seven out of 10 women are killed like this; the same can be said for Chihuahua, Sonora, Guerrero, Morelos and Nuevo León, where around 60 to 66% of homicides are perpetrated in this way.

# PROPORTION OF HOMICIDES COMMITTED WITH FIREARMS IN MEXICO

## By state of occurrence and sex



Note: Deaths occurring outside the country or inside unidentified states are omitted.  
 Source: Inegi mortality records, 2000–2022.

**T**hanks to INEGI’s mortality records, specific characteristics of the victims can be known. In 2022, murder by firearm was the most common for female victims from ages 12 to 54—more than half of homicides happened this way. Women from age 20 to 54 years were the most affected: six out of 10 were killed in this way. Something else remarkable is that for girls aged from birth to 11 years old and women older than 65, the proportion declines significantly. Only three of every 10 in these age ranges died from a gunshot wound.

It is also possible to know whether the victim suffered domestic violence before their death.<sup>14</sup> Between 2003 and 2019, it was possible to collect information about this condition. The data revealed that women were disproportionately targeted: 45.9% of these murders were related to some incident of family violence, compared to only 11.1% of homicides of men.<sup>15</sup>

Although homicidal violence continues to disproportionately affect men, recent years have seen a considerable increase in murders of women. The Mortality Registries offer general indications in the changes of the manifestation of homicidal violence that deserve attention. On average, of 10 women who are murdered every day in Mexico, six die from a firearm.



*Femicides have increased a lot from 2010 till today because of the same issue of gender violence. Previously, it was only beatings against women. Now, violence against women involves gunshots. So now, the news is full of women that wake up with gunshots all the time. This form of violence involves the wife, ex-wife, the mother, or the mother-in-law. Men go to their house and kill them. Oftentimes, because these men are part of organized crime or gangs, they feel they can go and do away with them, disappear them. **Claudia’s testimony:***



*In present-day Guanajuato, killings with firearms are mostly the same for men and women. We have not found differences. There are very few cases where the body is half-naked or naked. Those cases almost always involve the bodies that are already charred. I don’t know about the rest of the country, but in the case of Guanajuato, sexual violence is rarely present. In years prior, sexual violence occurred because femicide involved the exposure of the body when they were thrown into places like garbage dumps. In those days, the husbands,*

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<sup>14</sup> It is important to mention that this variable has important limitations: the report, “Keys to Understand and Prevent the Murders of Women in Mexico” (2019), explores this data point between 2003 and 2017. In the case of men, whether domestic violence occurred before death was not recorded in 95.1% of deaths; for women, it was not specified in 91.1% of cases.

<sup>15</sup> This percentage does not include “unspecified” cases.

partners, or ex-partners were the ones who disposed of them because they were the murderers. Today, it has more to do with criminality due to the greater number of firearms available and more commonly in public spaces. The bodies of murdered men and women are more or less equally treated, and may be buried, dismembered, butchered. **Veronica's testimony:**

In other contexts, the assessment is different:



*In regards to armed violence in public spaces, the only difference between the murder of a man and a woman with a firearm is the way their bodies are displayed and where they are left, even those women killed by organized crime, or who are involved and are later killed. The bodies of men disappear, but women's bodies are always exhibited and they have messages. They are exposed [in a way] that it is clear that they were tortured before their murder. Although it does happen to men, most men are murdered quickly with a gunshot or they are killed in a confrontation. **Claudia's testimony***



*Violence has always been present. What happens is that it is not visible. Right now we are talking about the most recent murders, but we are not talking about the murders that were committed decades ago in Chiapas, before the Zapatista uprising. When one news organization reports a homicide case, there is interest from other media organizations and then they report more cases. Cases do not have a temporal logic, I think this has always been the case. What we are doing now is documenting them in a better way. We are probably reaching our peak because it seems that these last few years are the ones with a higher rate. **Rocio's testimony***

## 1.1.2 INVESTIGATIONS OF HOMICIDE AND FEMICIDE

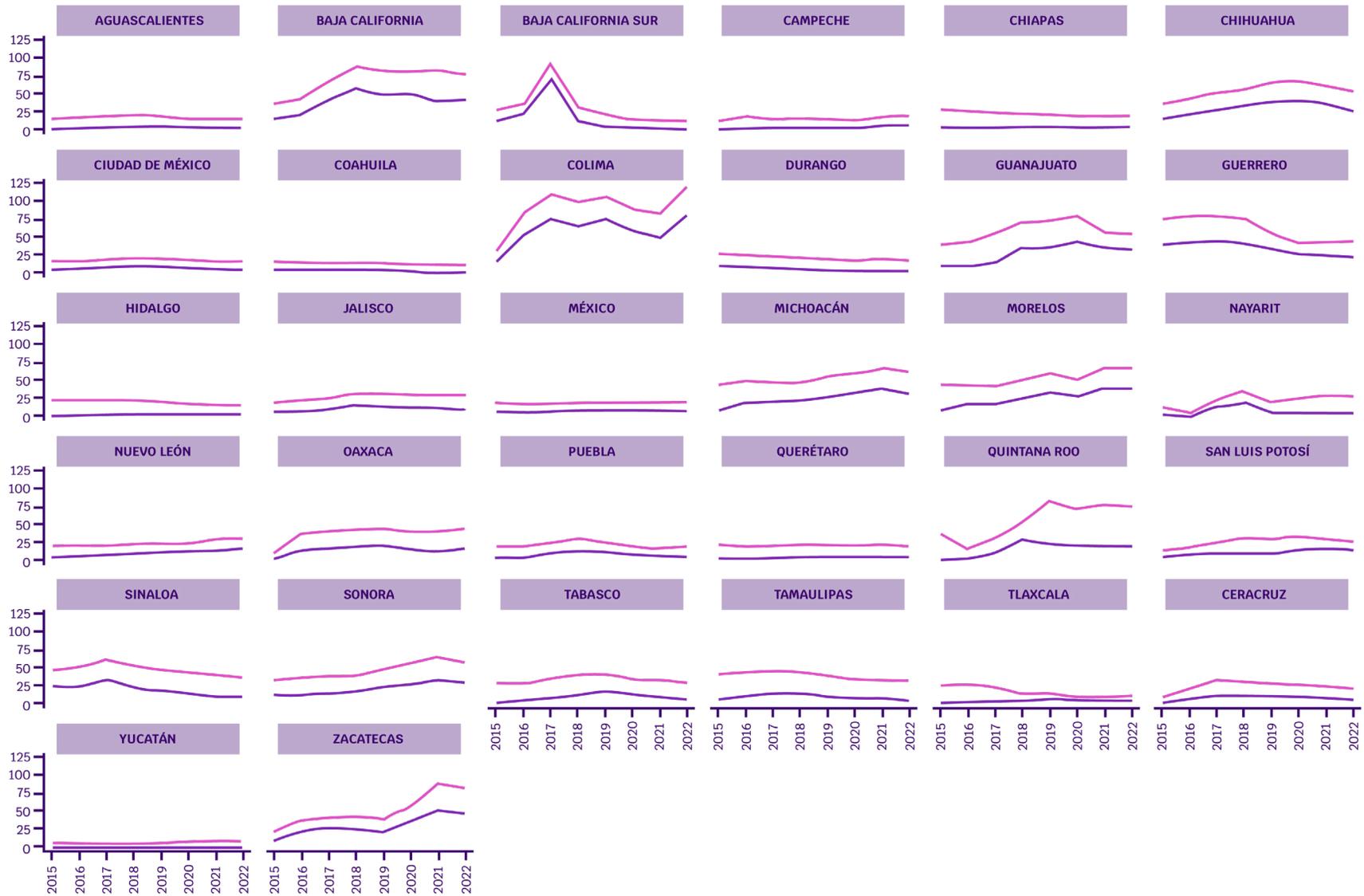
**F**or this section, we analyzed investigations of homicides, injuries, and femicides in Mexico from January 2015 to December 2022, registered in the database of the Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System. In these investigations, it was possible to see what proportion of crimes were committed with firearms.

First, as we've previously mentioned, the increase in intentional homicide rates in recent years is mostly due to homicides committed with a firearm. This is detected by analyzing how the trend has changed in the overall homicide rate, compared to the rate of homicides committed with a firearm. It is very easy to see that in most states, the overall homicide rate roughly follows the trend of the firearm homicide rate.

# THE ANNUAL RATE OF INVESTIGATIONS OPENED FOR HOMICIDE

Depending on how it was committed

● Rate with firearm    ● Total Rate



The relationship between the general homicide rate and the homicide rate committed with a firearm is not so evident in any of the other two crimes that are disaggregated in this way by the Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System. Although a clear relationship can be observed a clear relationship in femicide cases in states like Colima, Baja California, Nuevo León, Oaxaca, and Sinaloa, in the majority of states there are changes in the trend of femicide cases, which cannot be explained by femicides committed with firearms.

In this sense, although it is important to take into account the availability and concentration of firearms in each geographical region over time, we also need to consider how criminal law is being applied in each entity. For example, María Fernanda, from the Women's Human Rights Center, A.C. (Cedehm), indicates that Chihuahua has had several cases of judicial officials incorrectly classifying clear cases of femicide. Many times, these judicial officials are linked with aggressors who are in some way tied to organized crime.



*There is this idea that if she was involved with a drug trafficker, the crime is not femicide, but rather a homicide because it is for drug trafficking reasons, regardless of the thousands of offenses related to gender. However, because the context was related to armed violence, there were no gender grounds.*

**María Fernanda**

Although the data provided by the Executive Secretariat of the National Public Security System provide an up-to-date look at the incidence of lethal violence with firearms, it is also necessary to take into account the limitations of law enforcement institutions.

# THE ANNUAL RATE OF INVESTIGATIONS OPENED FOR FEMICIDE

Depending on how it was committed

● Rate with firearm    ● Total Rate



## 1.1.3 COMMUNITY HOMICIDES LGBTQI+, ACCORDING TO LETRA S DATA

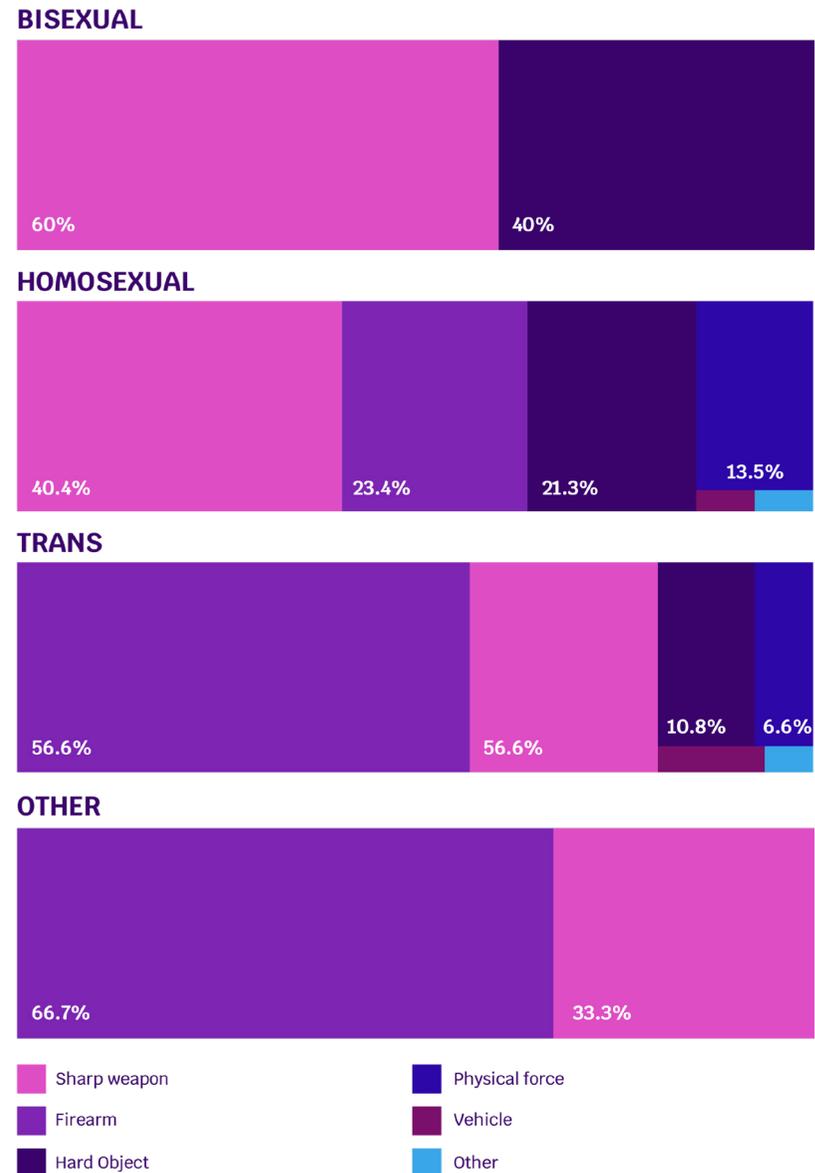
According to Rocío, regarding violence experienced by the LGBTQI+ community, trans-women - not all, but the most insecure - are the most vulnerable to violence:



*Economically insecure women who work in [the] street, sex workers, are the most vulnerable group before social violence and before the institutional violence of the police. I also think this has to do with intention because whoever brings a firearm does not bring it to scare women, they come to commit an act of aggression. Rocío*

According to the database of the Letter S organization, Rocío's impressions are correct. First of all, if we compare with which firearm the victims of hate crimes were killed according to their identity, we will see that while 56.6% of trans people were killed with firearms, that is, more than half, only 23.4% of homosexual people were killed in the same way.<sup>16</sup>

Figure 7. With what types of firearms were people from the LGBTQI+ community murdered? (In hate crimes registered by the Letter S database, according to their identity)



Source: Letra S database for crimes registered from 2017 to 2019

<sup>16</sup> Most of the people that the organization Letter S registers here as trans are trans women, there is only a record in the base of a murdered trans man.

If we compare the variable for the conditions in which the bodies of the victims were found, we will see that while 46.4% of the bodies of trans people were shot, only 22.3% of the bodies of homosexual people were found like this. Homosexual people are more frequently killed with knives. The percentages of the two variables do not coincide completely because in some cases there is no information about the firearm that was used.

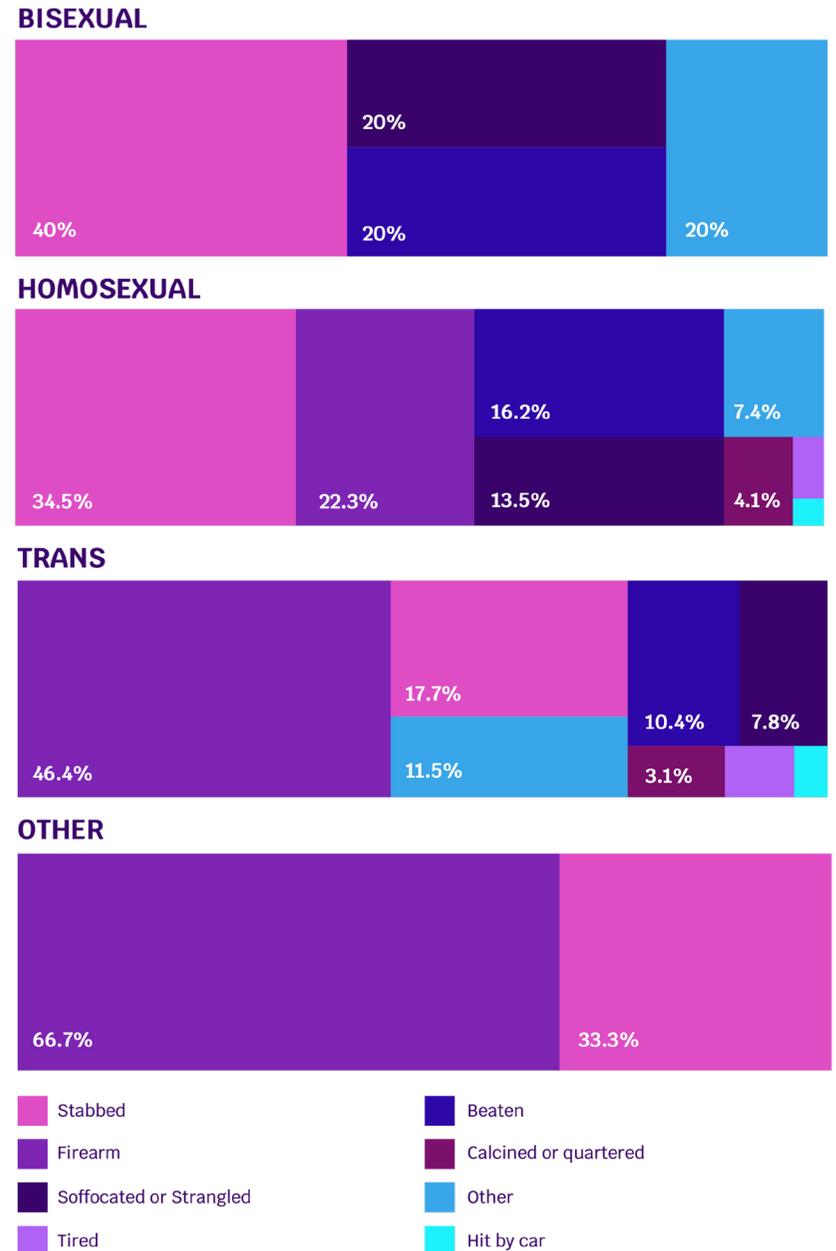
Likewise, when analyzing the occupation of the victims, we see that while 44% of the murdered trans people were sex workers while none of the other groups were. The lowest proportion of murdered trans people involved employees and stylists. See figure 9.

Finally, if we see where the bodies have been found, we notice that while 46.6% of murdered trans women were found on public roads, this was only the case in 23.2% of cases of homosexual people. Likewise, 43.7% of homosexual people were murdered in the home and only 19.4% of trans women were murdered there. The characteristics of homicides against trans people are similar to those of generalized violence because they are committed with firearms on public roads. Rocío comments about this:



*Chihuahua and Veracruz are two of the states with the highest documented murders. They are areas where we know that there is a strong presence of organized crime. The cartel members are not transphobic, the reason for the high levels of violence has to do with the fact that their female partners find themselves in zones of sex work on [the] street, so they are in a situation of greater vulnerability because there are things like the collection of quotas and drug money*

Figure 8. In what state did they find the bodies of murdered LGBTQI+ people? (In hate crimes registered by the Letter S database, according to their identity)



also no witnesses who can act in their defense or testify about these situations. So we see that it is important to visualize this situation because there is an issue of social violence that occurs through this medium and that has a direct impact on the victims. **Rocio**

The case of trans people is an example of how armed violence can affect certain groups of people within the community differently. Generalized violence puts us all in a more vulnerable situation, however, it leaves the members of this community most at risk, who work on the street and at night, in a more dangerous situation.



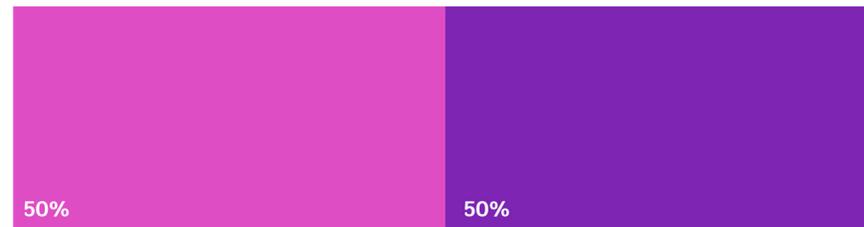
There is a very strong problem with violence against women. The trans community experiences the most violence within the LGBTQI+ community. Trans women tend to live in highly marginalized neighborhoods where the community recognizes them and calls them by their name. They get together to gossip, to cut their hair, but there is also transphobia. **Claudia**



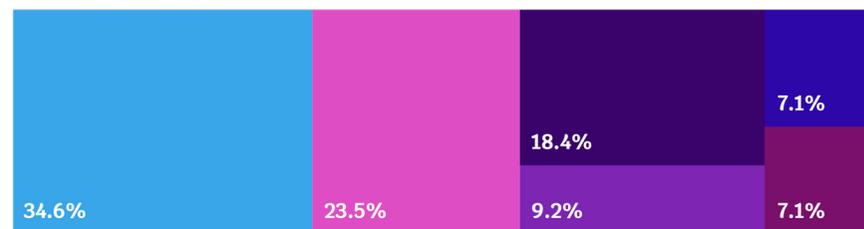
Two or three years ago, I created a comparative study of the murders of LGBTQI+ people in the country, reviewing documents from the Letter S database. The difference in the instruments used to murder gay people and trans people is remarkable. Most of the murders of trans people are with firearms, while in the case of gay people, the causes of death are through other instruments such as suffocation. Trans populations are more exposed to violence through the police and also through individuals. **Rocio**

**Figure 9. What was the occupation of LGBTQI+ people who were murdered? In hate crimes registered by Letter S database, according to their identity**

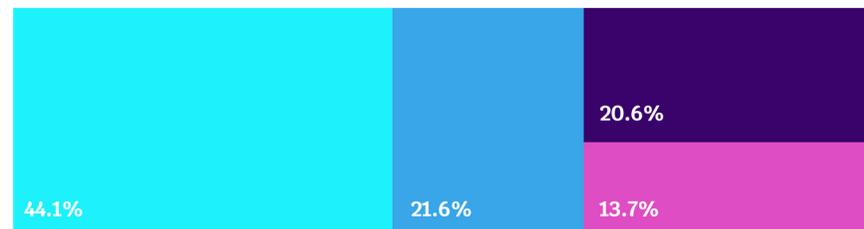
**BISEXUAL**



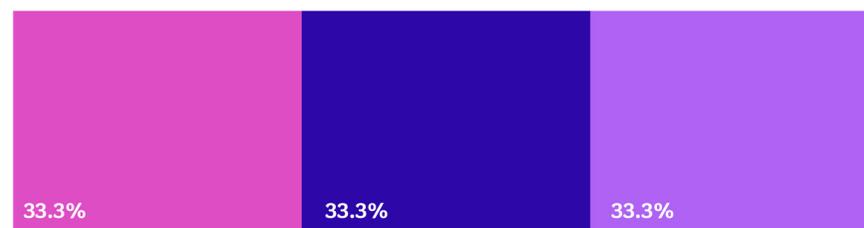
**HOMOSEXUAL**



**TRANS**



**OTHER**



- Employee (a) (public and private)
- Entrepreneur
- Student
- Teacher
- Stylist and Hairdresser
- Other
- Merchand (Formal/Informal)
- Sexual Worker



In Guanajuato, there have been some cases [of homicides of people from the LGBTQI+ community], and there has been more protest or more symbolic protests about these cases because they are always because of hate and discrimination. However, we have not found a distinction during the murder that tells us that it was for that reason.

**Verónica**

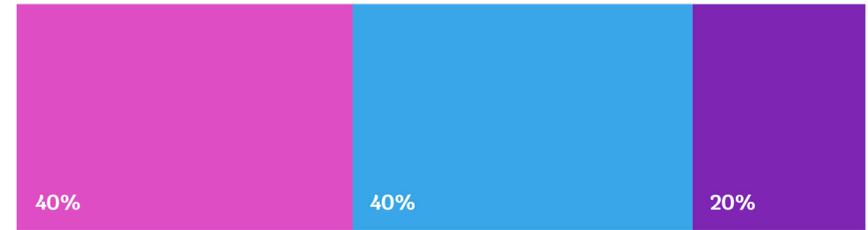
**There is also a lack of understanding by the authorities on the specific needs for trans people who have been victims of violence or fatalities:**



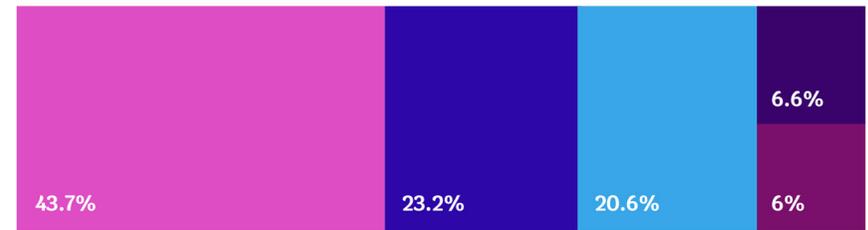
I think that only women who are survivors of sexual abuse or rape actually understand. In my case, it was something very difficult because it was not only the issue of having to constantly repeat everything that had happened but because there is a very strong cis-sexist bias. This is because they say: “you are not a woman,” so they do not treat you like one. A trans woman is treated with prejudice. At that time, I had not changed my legal name, my documents, so doctors would speak about me under the other name, under the previous name. Fortunately, the medical examiner who treated me was a doctor, but the treatment was extremely cruel, it was inhuman, cold, impersonal, not very empathetic, not very sensitive. In the psychological realm, they always look for you to be the good victim. They expect that you cry, that you bawl, that you show yourself weak, that you show your vulnerability. **Natalia**

**Figure 10. Where did they find the bodies of people from the LGBTQI+ community who were murdered? (In hate crimes registered by the Letter S database, according to their identity)**

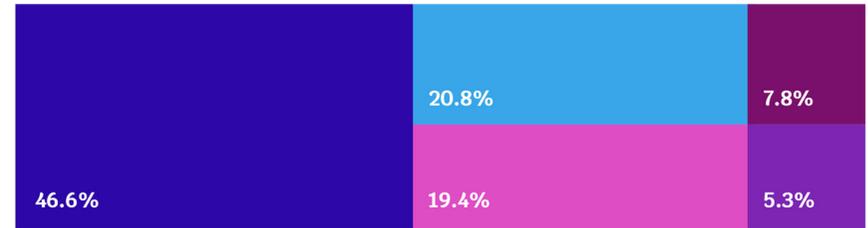
**BISEXUAL**



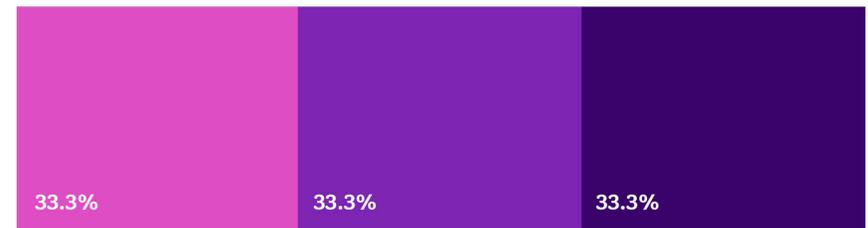
**HOMOSEXUAL**



**TRANS**



**OTHER**





In the prosecutor's offices, the security elements and those who monitor the prosecution of the case often do not understand the gender identity of the person or the perceived gender. Instead, they only focus on the homicide and not on the reasons that led to it.

**Anonymous Human Rights Defender**

Recently, there was a case where a trans woman was murdered. However, when the Ministry of Public Security arrived at the scene, they did not recognize her gender identity. They identified her as male. Afterward, the homicide investigation unit began investigating her homicide. Later, the investigative police realized that the person was trans. It was not till then that the police requested the help of the femicide special prosecutors. This lack of coordination indicates the need for coordination.

Initially, a trans-femicide investigation unit was created so all cases related to trans-femicides are investigated in this unit. The punishment for this type of crime is pending. The trans community hopes that an initiative is created to strengthen the investigator's understanding of trans-femicides.

The investigation documents and the preliminary investigations helped us extract data. A colleague who belongs to the trans community works in the prosecutor's office. The people who hired her hoped that she would correctly apply the rights of the people of the community since it is necessary to identify reasons that are related to gender, misogyny, and transphobia. Within this office, there is an investigation unit for trans femicide cases.

On the other hand, it is also an issue with the city police because they still lack training in the matter. If it is difficult with femicides and much more so with women from the trans community.

## 1.2 OTHER TYPES OF CRIMES AND AGGRESSIONS COMMITTED WITH FIREARMS

For the last several years, homicidal violence in Mexico has been carried out with firearms. However, they have also been used to carry out other forms of violence. This section presents an analysis of two surveys that allow us to understand what other types of crimes and aggressions against women have been carried out with firearms.

### 1.2.1 ARMED VIOLENCE IN EVERY AREA OF WOMEN'S LIVES

The National Survey on the Dynamics of Household Relationships (Endireh) is one of the main sources of information for understanding the rates of violence against women over 15 years of age throughout the country. In the 2021 edition, specific sections were included to characterize the aggressions suffered by women in their daily environments and within their relationships.

The data shows that approximately 687,223 women were victims of domestic violence. These women have been threatened by their partners with a sharp object or firearm at some point of their relationship. In 2020, 28,178 of these women reported having been injured with a firearm.

## The collected testimonies illustrate this:



Today you find women who say: “I’m not leaving him because he has a gun under the bed” or “I don’t leave him because he is working for the mafia and has firearms in the house.” So, access to firearms has affected the rate of violence. Perpetrators usually say things like, “because she cheated on me or she left me.” Sometimes perpetrators will pay someone to kill her and leave her there. **Susana**



People also tell us: “he doesn’t have firearms,” but his cousin is from La Línea. In other words, if the aggressor is not the one who has the firearm, he is related to people who do have firearms and who can represent a risk. They will say things like, “if you don’t stay with me, I’ll tell [name of a dangerous person]. So many of them decide to stay in the face of these threats. If the aggressor in himself is not the risk, the context of the aggressor can be. **María Fernanda**

In regards to other areas of women's lives, in 2020 around 570,065 of them said they had been attacked or assaulted with knives or firearms within their community context. Additionally, 136,481 women experienced violence within the family environment in which violence was perpetrated by parents, brothers/sisters, extended family, and politicians. Also, 12,187 women experienced violence in educational settings while 30,287 experienced violence in a work setting.

The Endireh survey reveals the characteristics of the perpetrators as well as the places where the events took place. The data shows that 89.7% are unknown to the victim, 4.5% are acquaintances, and 3.5% are neighbors. As for the place where these attacks take place, seven out of 10 women report having been attacked on the street or in a park, followed by public transport with 18.8 percent.

In the family-related cases, more than half of the incidents, about 52.8% were perpetrated by a member of the nuclear family of the affected person. This involved their parents, sisters or brothers, or even daughters or sons. Extended family members such as in-laws, sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law, mothers-in-law, or fathers-in-law were also perpetrators. Almost six out of 10 aggressions occurred within the women’s own home. This makes sense when seeing the concentration of the people identified as responsible for the attacks. Secondly, the home of one of their relatives is noted and finally, various public places are also mentioned.

When analyzing the characteristics of assaults by firearms in educational settings and the community setting, most of those identified as perpetrators are unknown to the victim. In this sense, when looking at where the incidents take place, almost half occur within school facilities. To a lesser extent, public places and private homes are mentioned.



*The assassinations in Mexican schools and universities also appeared in interviews. The violence in these spaces has increased in the last decade which makes young people the primary affected age group of homicidal violence and femicide in the country. The patterns for this type of violence are reflected in the university population. Impunity and the inability to respond to and eradicate violence against women remains a problem in education institutions. Aidee's aunt, a student who was assassinated in The National Autonomous University of Mexico said, "She was a good student and she liked it a lot, and she was against violence. On her social media posts, she would write about violence against women. She also was against violence and was in favor of fighting for justice, especially in her school.*

**Gilberta**

In regards to the work environment, unknown people are also identified as actors of this form of violence by 47.1%. Secondly, similar to the patterns seen in the school environments, 23.7% of co-workers and other individuals in work settings are perpetrators of violence. About 12% of those who commit acts of violence are supervisors or have high-ranking job positions.

What do these patterns reveal? That most of the armed violence reported in the Endireh survey happens in the communities where women live. The victims of these attacks have likely experienced them in a context of criminal violence. These types of incidents could also be occurring in school and work settings where those responsible are "unknown." The violence that women experience in more intimate settings and with people with whom they live daily is also worrying.

Such is the case of violence reported in family settings, where most of the perpetrators are members of the nuclear family of victims. Likewise, a significant proportion of school and work colleagues are identified as aggressors. In this sense, not all violence is exercised in the context of a sexual-affective relationship. There is a wide variety of actors involved in this type of aggression, so they must be taken into account.

## 1.2.2 OTHER CRIMES COMMITTED WITH FIREARMS

In Mexico, there are two main sources of information regarding criminal incidence: the SESNSP and the National Survey of Victimization and Perception of Public Security (Envipe). The data from the Executive Secretariat reflects the number of investigation files that have been initiated in each state for different crimes. Envipe, on the other hand, seeks to obtain information that allows estimates of the prevalence of crime that has affected the population, without there having been a formal complaint involved.

One of the peculiarities that Envipe demonstrates is how these crimes are committed. The data from the 2011 survey shows that the way in which crimes are experienced is different. Generally speaking, more than half of the crimes reported as for men were committed by armed individuals or groups with the highest incidence in 2013, the year in which six out of 10 crimes occurred in this way. In the case of women, the proportion is reduced by around 20%, and as in men, the year in which the highest incidence was reported was 2013. Four out of 10 crimes reported by women were committed with a firearm.

If this incidence is analyzed by a rate of per 100,000 inhabitants, there is a difference when the sex of the victim is taken into account. From 2016 to 2018 there was an increase of almost 20% in the crime rate

committed at gunpoint against women; as for 2022, around 27.2% of such cases were carried out this way, which means a small decrease from 2018 (around 6%). The most common crimes are usually robbery or assault on the street or public transport, followed by verbal threats, physical injuries, other types of theft—including vehicle theft and home-room robbery, and to a much lesser extent sexual crimes and kidnapping.

What the data indicates for all the crimes mentioned in the survey and by the general trend is that men report having experienced armed violence to a greater extent when they are victims of it. The data shows that around five out of 10 of reported robberies involving a male victim were committed at gunpoint. When the victim is female, three out of 10 of reported robberies were committed at gunpoint. On the other hand, if we look at the incidence of crimes such as kidnapping, we can see a greater disparity between the sex of the victims. This trend begins to be seen more clearly as of 2011. Almost eight out of every 10 men kidnapped were kidnapped by armed groups, while two out of every 10 women experienced this same situation. On this, the interviewee's comment:



I am surprised by the number of firearms in Mexico City, the number of crimes that occur because a person has a firearm. **Anonymous human rights defender**



The boys commented that the firearms were sold by the police for 1,500, 2,000, or 3,000 pesos. This was considered a men's issue. They also mentioned the length and cost of each firearm they would buy.

The nine-millimeter one cost 5,000 pesos; the 22 millimeters cost 2,000 pesos; the 32 millimeters cost 2,500 pesos. These firearms cost the lives of the girl and boys who are around when these armed fights take place. The community has become so accustomed to seeing armed men with firearms, it does not bother them. **Claudia**

In general, the trend shown by the data is that from 2011 the proportion of armed crimes has remained stable for both men and women. In 2018, 45.6% of crimes are committed with a firearm. This shows that most incidents tend to occur in the street or on public transport. Therefore, around 82.9% of the crimes committed with firearms occurred in public settings. Although most victims of armed violence are men, there has been a considerable increase in the number of women who report having been victims of this type of crime.

**This is also reflected in the testimonials:**



*In all cases of violence, firearms are always involved and this is very worrying. You may be minding your own business, but you may happen to be in a place where someone owns an illegal firearm and you may not know what to do. In all parts of Mexico, some people get firearms illegally.* **Víctor**



*In the last two years, the use of drugs by the aggressor and those who have firearms or any type of firearm, has increased according to the risk assessment.* **María Fernanda**

As previously mentioned, the SESNSP shows the open investigation files for each crime that was reported, but it does not provide information for all crimes that occurred. Crimes that are reported only constitute 10% of all the crimes that occur. Another limitation with the SESNP data is that it only divides some crimes by modality. Therefore, it is not possible to know what proportion of crimes have been carried out with firearms. In the previous section, we saw that a good part of the femicides and homicides registered by the Secretariat are committed with firearms. However, in crimes involving injuries, the same does not occur. The rate of injuries committed with a firearm does not explain the total rate of injuries committed. Although most homicides and some femicides are committed with firearms, most injuries in the country are not.

This trend is also observed if a relation is made between the annual municipal rate of each crime with the same rate of the crime committed with a firearm. So, we will notice that in several municipalities of the country there is a very clear relationship between the number of femicides and homicides that exist and the number of homicides and femicides committed with a firearm. The same does not happen with injuries.

Some of the interviews carried out show that people often refuse to file a complaint because they know that doing so will not necessarily guarantee them justice. Several testimonies highlight the deficiencies regarding the investigation processes, the files, the follow-up of cases, and the great impunity:

“

*As of today the culprit has not been found. They want to blame*

*a person who was supposedly stealing around. First, they said it was a stray bullet, then they wanted to blame someone else. No matter how much the [victim] young woman from an indigenous population asks for justice, nothing has been done. There is a lot of manipulation of parents by the campus authorities and there is a lack of responsibility by the UNAM as well. **Gilberta***

“

*We do not have confidence in the institutions and the administration of justice. We do not have confidence in the Public Ministries or the prosecutor's offices. That is why we prefer to leave it aside. **Natalia***

In the previous section, we saw how some people in the LGBTQI+ community, such as trans women are more vulnerable to gun violence. When sex workers suffer an attack and notify the police or public ministries, they are usually exhorted. These authorities usually reach an agreement with the aggressors, so that the cases do not advance to a trial. Natalie shares:

“

*If a colleague accuses a client of robbery or rape, there will always be a bias. The police will even encourage her not to report it. That's what happened to me, but we'll get to that. [...] I do see a differentiated treatment between the police elements when they deal with the complaint of a cis woman to that of a trans woman sex worker. They do not act in accordance with protocols if it is a trans woman. Trans women are always "misgendered" and called the wrong pronouns. They encourage you not to report, to "leave it that way." There is also a stereotype that working trans women are the ones who steal the most. **Natalia***

## 1.2.3 WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT THE FIREARMS THAT MEXICO IMPORTS AND EXPORTS

Although we know that the majority of homicides and an important part of the crimes in Mexico are committed with firearms, we have almost no information about where the firearms come from. During this exercise, some interviewees mentioned that they have noticed an increase in the circulation of firearms, but do not know where these firearms originate. Others have discussed the possibility that the new firearms come from the state security forces themselves. We suspect that the type of firearm used could help us determine the type of aggressor.



*After documenting all the cases of murders of women, in the last 20 years, it is evident that this phenomenon has evolved. One of the ways we explain this phenomenon is because most civilians have guns. The second reason for this phenomenon is that criminal groups obtain access to guns that are meant for the exclusive use of the army. The third way it has evolved is because the same firearm is used in several murders. The circulation of criminal and organized crime firearms is mainly what we have in Guanajuato as well as drug sales, drug dealing, and a massive circulation of firearms among criminals. **Veronica***

It is very likely that many of the firearms used in most homicides and crimes are illegal. However, this part of the report reviews the information available on the firearms that Mexico legally imports and exports. The Arms Trade Treaty is an important parameter since it forces the Mexican government to submit reports to the Arms Trade

Treaty secretariat on the transfers that have occurred.<sup>17,18,19</sup> The fact that countries make their transfers public allows us to see whether there is compliance with what is stipulated in the Arms Trade Treaty on imports<sup>20</sup> or exports<sup>21</sup> and with the prohibition of trade if the Security Council of the United Nations (UN)<sup>22</sup> indicates that there is a risk of committing an international crime.<sup>23</sup>

Although these reports give countries several freedoms, like the right not to make sensitive information public for national security reasons,<sup>24</sup> some countries reflect the purchases and sales in monetary terms while others release the amount of merchandise that was traded.<sup>25</sup> Countries also are monitored by civil society using the ATT Monitor.<sup>26</sup> This monitor finds discrepancies in the reports of each State.

In this report, we emphasize the findings of the ATT Monitor with regard to Mexico during the 2017–2020 period. Even though the Arms Trade Treaty became effective in December 2014. The first report by the ATT monitor is from December 2015. This report notes the provisions of the

17 Mexico was the sixth country to ratify the Arms Trade Treaty on the 23 of September of 2013; see “State Parties to the Att”

18 The Arms Trade Treaty, art. 13.1

19 Ibid., art. 13.3.

20 Ibid., art. 8.

21 Ibid., art. 7.

22 Ibid., art. 6.1

23 Ibid., art. 6.3

24 Ibid., art. 13.3

25 “Imports of SWAL in 2015”

26 See: “Control Arms”

Arms Trade Treaty that the country had already met.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, the first report on the transactions of 2015 is presented in the 2016 report.

In the 2016 report, Mexico indicates that it did not have any exports<sup>28</sup> and did not include additional information on whether the exports referred to direct sales<sup>29</sup> and transit, transshipment, or brokerage activities.<sup>30</sup> Even so, it was possible to detect that there were no discrepancies regarding the transfers reported by other countries, so it can be assumed that no merchandise left Mexico.<sup>31</sup> Regarding imports for the same period, Mexico indicated having acquired 2,020 assault rifles from Italy, of the Beretta brand. However, Italy did not report this transaction.<sup>32</sup>

Additionally, the 2017 ATT Monitor highlights that to assess the risk that these firearms may have in Mexico, one should reference indicators constructed by civil society in the world, such as the World Press Freedom Classification (Reporters Without Borders), the World Index of Internal Security and Police (International Association of Science Police and the Institute for Economics and Peace) or the Rule of Law Index (World Justice Project), among others. In the aforementioned documents, worrying characteristics have been identified about Mexico in terms of the institutional violence that is exercised against journalists. By not ensuring

their integrity and allowing continuous murders of those who dedicate themselves to that profession, it shows the lack of legitimacy of the police who are meant to respond to internal security issues as well as the lack of effective and impartial criminal justice.<sup>33</sup>

In this regard, Mexico is among the lowest places in the classifications provided by these indicators, which position it as 88 out of 113 countries in terms of effective access to justice.<sup>34</sup> It was one of the worst evaluated,<sup>35</sup> even within Latin America and taking into account the average income of the country.<sup>36</sup> Regarding the issue of freedom of the press, Mexico ranked 147th out of 180 countries evaluated.<sup>37</sup> Currently, it is number 143 which means that it is one of the most dangerous places in the world and the most dangerous in the region to practice journalism. This is because of the high levels of violence and because of the impunity that exists. Finally, in matters of public security, Mexico is one of the five worst countries scored worldwide because of the high presence of corruption and lack of legitimacy was found in the actions of the authorities in this sector.<sup>38</sup>

In the 2018 ATT Monitor, the contextual circumstances stand out because they allow for the diversion of equipment and ammunition in the Central American region with Mexico.<sup>39</sup> Legal arm purchases are

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27 Mexican Government, "Initial report on measures undertaken"

28 ATT Monitor Report 2017, 35.

29 Ibid., p.38.

30 Activities that form part of the arms transfer, in accordance to articles 9 and 10 of the TCA

31 ATT Monitor Report 2017, 47.

32 Ibid., p.46

33 Control Arms Secretariat "Informe 2017 del Monitor del TCA," 71 and 74

34 World Justice Project, the WJP Rule of Law Index 2016, 7.

35 The eight indicators were: countering governmental power, absence of corruption, open government- this component was the best rated in Mexico- fundamental rights, order and security, kept promises, civic justice and criminal justice. Go to : World Justice Project, the WJP Rule of Law Index 2016, 26.

36 World Justice Project, the WJP Rule of Law Index 2016, 11.

37 "World Press Freedom Index 2017"

38 Abdelmottlep, "World Internal Security & Police Index 2016," 34.

39 That is to say, that those weapons that come from the United States, pass by Mexico and arrive in Central America. For more information, go to: Goodman, "US Firearms trafficking to Guatemala and Mexico," Parson and Weigend, "Beyond our borders"

made in the U.S. and then they are illegally smuggled into Mexico.<sup>40</sup> About 70% of the firearms of illegal origin that were recovered between 2009 and 2014, originated from the U.S.<sup>41</sup> Another issue that persists is that arms are trafficked in parts and components and they end up being assembled in Mexico with pieces of artisanal origin.<sup>42</sup> In addition to this, it is observed that the theft of inventory from warehouses controlled by the public security forces and the military is common,<sup>43</sup> as well as that from private security corporations.<sup>44</sup>

Regarding transfers, it is possible to observe that Mexico has become one of the best clients of the Czech Republic because it has acquired 28% of its small arms and light firearms exports.<sup>45</sup> The same can be said of Italy where 38% of their exports are exported to Mexico.<sup>46</sup> Slovakia sends 24% of exports to Mexico.<sup>47</sup> However, there is a significant discrepancy in this business.<sup>48</sup> Mexico only reported having bought 12 revolvers and automatic pistols, while Slovakia reports having shipped 14,502 units of this type.<sup>49</sup>

However, Austria is the country that supplies the smallest arms to Mexico which represents 34% of total Mexican purchases from abroad. Followed by Italy and the United States. For large-caliber guns, the

United States remains Mexico's largest supplier.<sup>50</sup> The aforementioned information is relevant in terms of the Arms Trade Treaty because of the 12 countries with which Mexico trades, nine are part of the treaty. The provisions on the evaluation of the conditions that increase gun transactions are of vital importance and should be given special attention.

In the analysis of the transactions of the 2019 ATT Monitor, the data on imports of small arms and light firearms from 2017 stand out as important findings. We see that Mexico establishes itself as Italy's largest buyer of this kind of equipment worldwide, monopolizing 29% of its total merchandise during that year.<sup>51</sup> We also see how Italy surpassed Austria as Mexico's main supplier of small arms.<sup>52</sup>

Purchases from Slovakia also decreased to 7% of the total merchandise exports.<sup>53</sup> In this case, there was a significant discrepancy in the transactions: Mexico separated the revolvers acquired according to caliber (159 artifacts) while Slovakia indicated them in a single category (6,310 devices).<sup>54</sup>

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40 "Control Arms Secretariat," 106.

41 GAD Highlights, "Firearms trafficking: U.S. efforts."

42 Olson, "Los carteles traen armas por partes."

43 Att Monitor Report 2018, 107.

44 Kinoshian and Bosworth, "Security for sale, challenges and good practicing"

45 Att Monitor Report 2018, 46.

46 Ibid., 56.

47 Ibid., 76.

48 Although it is possible that the discrepancies correspond to differences in methodology to register transactions, the disparity is significant enough to stop paying attention

49 ATT Monitor Report 2018, 86.

50 Ibid, 63

51 ATT Monitor Report 2019, 67.

52 Ibid, 75.

53 Ibid, 90.

54 Ibid, 101.

Regarding imports of large-scale conventional equipment, Mexico continued to buy from the United States, adding 127 missiles and missile launchers.<sup>55</sup>

On the other hand, it is from this review that it is noted that Mexico has never included information in the ammunition category which is not mandatory. However, it has decided to direct its efforts to identify the corporation who will be the end-user such as the armed forces, public security, sports activities, or private security.

Something else that stands out is that from 2017, Mexico began to register its exports of small arms and light firearms (defined as physical transfers that crossed Mexican borders)<sup>56</sup> which are of a sporting nature. According to the data, 52% of the sales went to the United States when it was still a part of the treaty. Guatemala received 14% of Mexican exports as part of the Arms Trade Treaty. Canada which joined the agreement in 2019 received 14% of merchandise from Mexico.<sup>57</sup>

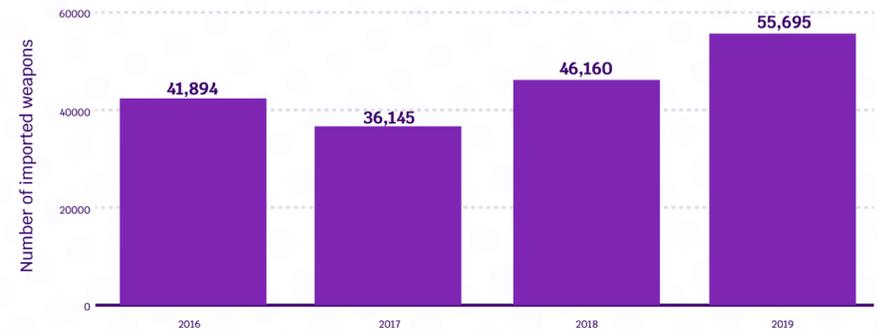
Based on the latest annual report for Mexico, the first thing that stands out is that the Mexican government stated that commercial data would be excluded from the public version of the report for national security reasons.<sup>58</sup> This stands out because Mexico has been part of and has led the working groups on transparency in Arms Trade Treaty meetings.<sup>59</sup> In regards to general transactions, it is noteworthy

that in 2017, the report includes information on Mexican exports while the 2018 report indicates that it did not sell any equipment. The same happens with regard to the acquisition of heavy conventional firearms, which is reported in 2017, but not in 2018, this suggests that sensitive data is not being included in the reports.<sup>60</sup>

Regarding imports, Italy has Mexico as its second-best client for small arms because it sold it 32% of its exports. In turn, Mexico has also made Italy its second-best supplier, displaced by Israel, from where it imports 40% of its purchases while the United States continues to be in third place.<sup>61</sup>

If one counts the net number of small arms acquired by Mexico, one does not see a significant variation.

Figure 11: Small and light arms imported by Mexico. Per year



Elaboration based on the 2018, 2019 and 2020 ATT Monitor Report

55 Ibid, 75.

56 Mexican Government “ Informe anual sobre las exportaciones 2019.”

57 Ibid, 81.

58 Mexican Government “Informe anual sobre las exportaciones 2019”

59 ATT Monitor Report 2020, 14.

60 Ibid, 81.

61 Ibid.

However, as we previously discussed, certain contextual circumstances are subject to transaction reviews, such as the data already noted on the conditions of impunity, corruption, and lack of trust in public security authorities. In addition to this, there is a long history of human rights violations. In particular, violence against women is linked to the militarization of the security strategy. These problems occurred between 2007 and 2018 and we present them in this report.<sup>62</sup>

In this regard, actions have been taken in Germany against the company Heckler & Kloch. German authorities placed an embargo on the sale of their firearms to certain Mexican states (Chihuahua, Jalisco, Chiapas, and Guerrero) because of the high levels of armed violence in those places during the last decade. Specifically, the firearms used by the Iguala police forces on the night of September 26, 2014, in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero where 43 students disappeared, came from a transaction between this German company and Mexico.

When the provisions of the embargo were violated, those responsible for the transaction with the company Heckler & Kloch were brought to trial.<sup>63</sup> The content of the aforementioned regulation is part of the harmonization of the German legal framework which is what is established by the Arms Trade Treaty in its article 7 on exports and its national arms trade policy.<sup>64</sup> Although the legal procedure was carried out to assess the infraction of German law and not for violating an international treaty, this type of action opens the space for the review of the conditions of armed violence and human rights violations in other countries, taking into account which populations will be most affected by the structural differences of the societies to which they trade.<sup>65</sup>

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62 See also: Intersect, “Las dos guerras.”

63 Knight, “Heckler & Koch’s illegal arms.”

64 See: Bryk and Schliemann, “Arms trade and corporate responsibility.”

65 On other similar exercises, see: Martínez, “El Tratado de Comercio de Armas en el conflicto Armenia-Azerbaijan”



# 2 TESTIMONIES

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Women and members of the LGBTIQ+ Community, Survivors, Family Members of the Victims, Activists or Defenders who work with Gender - based Violence with Firearms

# KENYA CUEVAS

Activist for the rights of the LGBTT population and sex workers. She is the director of the trans-feminist organization “Paola Buenrostro” Home (Casa de las Muñecas Tiresias), the first refuge for transwomen in Mexico. She is a survivor of violence and friend of Paola, who was assassinated by a firearm. *Mexico City*

Foto: Blued



**B**efore the murder of Paola Buenrostro in September of 2016, I had already briefly begun practicing activism. I was released from jail in 2010, but even before that I volunteered my time taking care of persons with HIV who lived in dormitory 10. During that period I became part of two civil society organizations: PCI Mexico and Movimiento Mexicano de Ciudadanía Positiva- with prevention of HIV and in rapid test application. We delivered condoms and supplies in areas where civil society is not present. Overall I took care of people with terminal illnesses. I wasn't familiar with thanatology prior to at the time, inevitably I was doing a job relating to thanatology. After being released from jail, PCI Mexico hired me for a project of Global Fund, and worked in 2011 and 2012 on subjects relating to malaria, tuberculosis and HIV. There they train me a bit more with Make Sense in human rights, and I begin to integrate myself in the world of human rights. However, I also had to do sex work because I did not have a stable job. I would dedicate my weekends to sex work, during the week I would train, and I began to accompany sex workers, my peers.

I considered myself to be an empowered woman because I did not live in a hotel anymore, I no longer consumed drugs, I decided to have emotional stability within an independence, I mean, I fought to quit sex work, in fact, I tried (to work) in various factories, it was a lot of work and little pay, it wasn't enough. So I decide again to go to sex work in 2016.

Paola arrives (in 2011) to Mexico, she meets a girl in Garibaldi, who is a mutual friend. In those two years I lived in Garibaldi Plaza, and I opened a location [for sex work] in Mexico City, along with another colleague. Paola begins getting attached to the service. One day she went to work and passed by the point and I told Paola: “I offer you to go to another place, where there is a different type of sex work, and you don't need to be with la mona to get picked up.” So I took her to Puente de Alvarado, and we worked there for several years. We saw each other every week and during the week we ate together. It was a

beautiful friendship. Just three days before September 30 of 2016, I dreamt that they shot me in that corner. I woke up scared, with a lot of anxiety, but I did not grasp that it was a presentiment. I was going to work those days, I get ready, did my makeup, got dressed, everything, it was already night, I was about to go and when I got to the door I said, “no, it’s better I don’t go. I’ll go tomorrow.” That’s how I was until the 30th, I got ready but I did not go out. The day I went, Paola exchanged words with one of the other girls, who complained to me. So I tell her “let’s see, Paola. Why are you fighting, or why are you firing these girls?” and she turns and tells me, “Ay mana, lets not fight tonight, this night is very sad!” So I tell her: “Ay! You are like this because you do not have anise? Let’s go, I have 50 pesos, let’s go get an anise drink.” We went to the liquor store, we bought two drinks and returned to the point. When we got back, she still said “cheers” to me and then there was already a client. And that’s how Paola got in the car, I heard her screams, I ran to the vehicle, and when I got to the window, the man shoots, and my friend faints in his arms and well, he looks at me and points the gun at me, and well he fires the casing but the bullet did not come out. At that moment I began to maneuver so the car wouldn’t get away. A cop car passed by, immediately they hop out and see him with a gun in his hand, my friend in the car and all the shots fired, no? Well now, we arrived at the prosecutor’s office, and well since then is when I started to speak out, about hate crimes, about how there is violence in justice administration institutions, and how these cases are criminalized.

Two weeks before they killed a colleague whose name was Natasha at her house, just in front of the San Carlos Museum. They had also robbed several girls. Just in that month all that violence was triggered, but the fear did not come from there because I have normalized that since the 80s, that is, *it’s always happened to us. I had no other choice. If real justice had been carried out, I would not have gone beyond being a friend who helped bury her*, but as it was [receiving] a lot of refusal, criminalization, violation of my rights—which is proven with a local recommendation [CDHDF, 02/2019] towards the prosecution—, well, this triggers me to anger and rage, right? And the way I explode is by demonstrating with Paola’s coffin.

Hate crimes, crimes against us, the violence, even rapes, they’ve always happened, nothing more than what was visualized. So *what Paola comes to do through the exposure of her body is tell society and authorities “that’s how they kill us and you guys couldn’t care less,” no?, and they let the murderers go free, no?* So I think that this left many things in academia, in research, civil organizations like in funders, because now everything is directed towards trans people. I am not saying there was no work done by these civil organizations before, I recognize all that work, but they were not listened to.

Apart from Paola’s case, I handle several hate crime cases. I started fighting to receive these bodies. I have around four to five (investigation) cases that I follow up on, support for the families like indirect victims of the

prosecutor's office, at the Forensic Sciences Institute. In fact I even demand governments to pay for funeral services, that they support the victims. The families, when you tell them, "Everything is already paid for. Where will the wake be? Tell me," they turn to look at you and say: "Thank you, because I didn't have a penny" or "because I didn't even know what to do." I have learned as a victim, as a witness, but also as a person. I have a case where [the family] told me: "You know what? It's good that he's already dead, and I'm not interested!" That's when you realize the violence they experienced with their families.

With COVID an important wave of hate crimes arose. I think this greatly influenced people's depression and it triggered prejudices, social, structural and even family anger. The violence generated has a lot to do with transphobia, homophobia, lesbophobia, etc. But there are never arrests, nor criminal profiles within these cases. This is an indication that the violence is generated by the institution and also has an impact on society, because society also says: "he killed a trans man and they did not arrest him," and yes, it is very easy to kill a trans woman in this country.

Many aggressions we have are from couples, and that is generated through lack of affections. Data tells us how it is a vicious cycle: the social negatives that LGBT people have impact lives. In other words, there is no education, there is no housing, there is no health, there is nothing, so we only have one alternative, which is the only one that society leaves us, which is sex work. So in that life of solitude, violence and darkness, well, you get used to a level of life of violence, right?

Truth be told there are still many challenges to overcome, there are many resistances from many sectors in society, that is, not only one. I think we need to create strategies to have this empathy with society, for this reason I am generating via my empowering job, education and integration to society and to social spheres to trans women through a shelter.

Also, well now let my phrase remain: "Let our revenge be being happy." ("Ahora nuestra venganza será ser felices.")

A portrait of Natalia Lane, a woman with long dark hair, smiling. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent purple filter. The background of the entire page is a textured, purple-toned image of a person's face.

# NATALIA LANE

*Trans woman, sex worker and activist for human rights for the LGBTQ+ community and sex workers. She is a consultative assembly member of the Council to Prevent and Eliminate Discrimination in Mexico City (Copred), and a survivor of sexual violence, coerced with a firearm. Mexico City*

I have been an independent sex worker for a little over 10 years, and I am a trans woman. I started my transition at about 18 years old, I have a little over 12 years of transition. I am part of an organization from civil society that is called Support Center for Trans Identities (CAIT), that works in the defense and promotion of trans women's human rights, especially sex workers, and cuts across this work in the areas of health, security and access to justice.

2016 was a symbolic year for the battle of trans activists in Mexico because they killed two fellow women: Paola Ledesma and Alessa Flores; there was a week in between femicide and femicide. This generated a series of mobilizations by fellow activists such as Kenya Cuevas, transgender youth, queers - that's how they position themselves -, gender dissidents and that they sought to make visible the issue of transfemicides or murders of trans women in Mexico City, particularly.

Trans woman are going through not only a gender identity issue, but also issues of economic insecurity, of ethnicity, of migration, of reproductive and sexual health, but also integral health. [We are trying to] help mitigate the differentiated impacts the pandemic had on groups of sexual workers, especially older women, migrant women and women living with HIV. Since hostels were closed, fellow sex workers - and there I include myself- had to carry out service in public, in clients' cars and the parks. And even if sex work is not considered a crime or administrative offence in Mexico City, that generates criminalizing practices and extortion from the "pigs" (police) against sex workers or clients, they tell them they will take them to the prosecutor's office. And those "pigs" have never stopped doing that, they have no idea, they do not know their own rules, so, obviously, they will always have a bias against sex workers. If a colleague accuses a client of robbery or rape, well there will always be a bias, in fact the police will always tell them not to report. I even see different treatment when they deal with a complaint from a sex worker cis woman than a sex

worker who is a trans woman, they will not act according to protocol. They always “misgenderize” transwomen, they use the wrong pronouns, they encourage us to not report, to “leave it like that,” and yes there is prejudice that we are the ones who always steal more. This means that justice will always operate in an unidirectional way, to criminalize sex workers and take them to jail. However when a trans woman sex worker reports a crime - like my case - or reports an assault, the situation is impossible even before you get to the prosecutor’s office as **they tell you that your report will not be processed, that it’s better you make a settlement agreement with the client who assaulted you.**

**One time I decided to file a report, it took hours and hours,** not only did I have to repeatedly repeat “santo y seña, pelos y señales” (with great detail), about everything that happened, but there is also a very strong sexist cis bias which considers that: “you are not a real woman,” so they do not treat you like one, even with how screwed up they treat a ciswoman, a victim of sexual abuse, a trans woman is treated in an even more screwed up way, a more prejudiced way. My change of identity, my legal name and my documents were not acknowledged yet, so at all times they spoke to me under my previous name; the medical examiner that checked me was a female doctor, but the treatment was extremely cold, impersonal, inhuman, with little empathy and sensitivity, including in the psychological area, they wanted you to be a “good victim,” to cry, to scream, to show yourself weak, to demonstrate your vulnerability.

On the topic of femicide, sometimes there are support

networks, that is, families —mothers of the victims of cisgender women who seek justice—, **but for trans women, those family networks disappear.** Why? Because they don’t want to be involved in issues of violence, also because of the embarrassment of having an openly trans daughter - they don’t see them as women and they do not respect their gender identity, only when we bring money -, that means that when it comes to access justice, family members do not want to get involved, file a complaint, open an investigation, they do not want to look for the murderers or trans femicides of their daughters and unfortunately the birth family are the ones able to make legal decisions, unless they deliver a power of attorney to an organization. That is exactly what we have done in CAIT. This is what civil society is looking for: that family members get involved in these processes of access to justice.

In the case of transfemicides of sex workers in the country, **one of the causes of death is by gunshot.** In other words, because **they are shot in areas where they work** and well they pass away, there in the street, or as they are waiting for emergency services. That is an indicator how **violence towards trans women also has a hate component,** apart from the misogyny - due to gender issues, - perhaps there are transphobic motivations and homophobia. Homophobia because the perpetrators perceive trans people, especially trans women, as homosexual men, do you get me? That happens in entities like Tamaulipas, Sonora, Chihuahua, Veracruz —which is the one that registers the highest number of murders—, and Guerrero.

And it is no coincidence that these states also record a large amount of violence and crimes related to organized crime or criminal groups, and trans women sex workers are also the most exposed to this violence. The issue of use of weapons and sexual abuse is also a problem. A colleague was abused sexually not too long ago, and there are three more colleagues that have had to deal with sexual abuse while being threatened with a weapon, including when they had already agreed to provide the service. The issue of sexual abuse is intense, I think it happens more with cisgender women, because perhaps with trans women, they are sometimes more daring. I do not, but other colleagues, yes, they physically fight with the clients. Generally, in the case of trans women who are murdered in a public space, the perpetrators are clients that return for revenge, say for what they considered to be a bad service, because they weren't satisfied with the service or because the colleague robbed a cellphone or their wallet - that is something that happens-.

[Over the four violent episodes she has lived]: The first was in like 2014, when I started to practice sex work. A client hired me, took me to the hotel and in the room, alone, he took out a black gun - I am not familiar with guns -, it was a "normal" one, not too big nor too small, and he put it on my head, in my mouth and abused me. When we left the hotel he was threatening me with the gun, I got in the car, we left, and he left me at the spot where he picked me up. When I got off I was very upset, crying, I went home. His intention was not to kill me but to abuse me sexually;

something that happens a lot with rapists, not only the fact of abusing someone or penetrating them, but everything else that it implies, like the power, knowing that they have control of the situation. I think they target the girls who look more innocent, and from there, they pick the girl, they can go ahead several times... now in 2020 for weeks they've been sexually abusing, and well, the *modus operandi* has not changed.

We do not trust institutions whose jobs are to deliver justice, in Public Ministries, in prosecutors offices, and that's why we prefer to leave it aside. It is not that we "normalize" it, rather, we do not have trust in these processes and prefer to turn the page, without working on it emotionally, but later it has repercussions on our mental health. Any sex worker will continue to be subjected to violence whether it's visible or not, be it by a client or by a pimp. What we do is make a problem visible and open up spaces that can help the government get closer to the population, but that does not translate into security for us because, in the end, those who continue to put our bodies out in the streets daily it's us.



# GILBERTA MENDOZA SALAZAR

*Originally from Tempesquistla, municipality of Huacatlaca, Puebla. She is an expert interpreter and teacher or advisor of nahuatl at the Mayor's Office of Tlalpan. She is also the aunt of Aidee, a murdered student at the Autonomous National University of Mexico (UNAM)'s College of Sciences and Humanities (East location - CCH Oriente in Spanish). Mexico City (47)*

I migrate to Xoxtla, Puebla - my sister lives there -, and I started high school but since we speak our mother tongue [the interviewee refers to her native language], from there I began to suffer from discrimination, since I was 16 years old, they did not accept me and released me, so I migrated to Mexico City. Here it is very difficult, us indigenous women came to work domestic jobs, without any contracts, without any rights, long shifts and eating leftovers. I couldn't study and did secondary school at the National Institute for Adult Education for one year. I was looking for a scholarship for my daughter at the delegation, and I found that in Sederec [the interviewee refers to the Secretary of Rural Development and Equity for the Communities] they needed a person who speaks an indigenous language, so I took courses to be an expert interpreter and studied high school at the Autonomous University of Mexico City (UCAM), and I am doing my thesis for my degree on indigenous education at the National Pedagogical Institute. I am part of the Council to Prevent and Eliminate Discrimination in Mexico City (COPRED) and also participate in the school's Chanich community radio.

I am the aunt of **Aide Mendoza**, murdered on April 29, 2019, at the Autonomous National University of Mexico (UNAM)'s College of Sciences and Humanities (CCH). My niece lived with her parents in Santa Martha, in the Ixtlahuaca neighborhood. She was my brother and sister-in-law's second child of four. She was in her third year of high school, about to enter university; she wanted to be a psychologist. She was against violence; in her publications she referred to the motto of the UNAM For my race the spirit will speak: "How can our spirit speak for our race since we are being murdered?!" Months before, another girl had been murdered outside the campus. She supported the idea of no violence and the young people who demanded justice, and that there should not be more violence in schools. She was very emphatic with her peers, and found herself in a group scout. I don't know how she did it, but she had everything under control.

Since she was murdered, I have always said it was femicide, because it can't be a homicide, it was inside the campus, at a distance

of 40 or 50 meters, as confirmed by the National Defense Secretariat (Sedena) and the National Polytechnic Institute (IPN). From the beginning they said it was a stray bullet, but we didn't believe it. The media reported that school authorities said the girl had a heart attack or that she fainted, well no! Everything happened so fast, so confusing my cousin tells me they were bringing the girl in an ambulance, that she was hurt, and my cousin [asks me] to go to the prosecutor's office. When I arrived, [it turns out] that the girl had already passed away before I got to the hospital. We didn't know at the time, but there was medical negligence because when everyone heard a noise, the girl put her hands to her stomach and says "it hurts," and her friend checks her... first she doesn't find anything, then she finds a hole, a little blood on the right side, and that's when she falls to the ground, she passes out. The teacher comes in and they talk to the nurse. It takes time for the nurse or the doctor to arrive, I don't know, and they say the girl had a seizure. So they called an ambulance, they arrived, but only one paramedic and one medical intern who did not know how to handle the situation, and also did not bring all the equipment and had to go back and they spoke to him about the Rescue and Emergency Squad of the Secretary of Citizen Security (ERUM). The ERUM arrives, but school authorities do not allow the ambulance to leave: because someone had to sign and also the director who was not here... The girl, before arriving at the hospital, had already passed away, and it was almost four o'clock, how much time had passed! In the prosecutor's office there were two lawyers from the CCH school, the truth is I got upset and told them, "How do you want me to trust you, if that is where they harmed my niece and what have you all done? Until what time did she arrive at the hospital? And she was already dead!" He said thanks to him they took the girl, but it was much too late.. And well [there were] many violations against our rights, I spoke to the [the Commission of] Human Rights. It would be very important that when

the process begins or they open an investigation, [they consider] those of us who speak an [indigenous] language and that we **have the rights to an interpreter**, after much insistence they asked for an expert interpreter; also that same lawyer **asked my brother to sign a blank piece of paper**. After 15 days the teachers met to speak about the circumstances, they invited my brother and my sister in law - my cousin went with them, I could not go - **They say the school director treated them very poorly, he almost closed the door on them** and told them: "What are you here for? Didn't you ask for me to resign? So what do you want here?" very despotic... **Until today no culprit has been found**, they want to blame the person who had supposedly been stealing around the area, not on campus; first they told me it was a stray bullet and then they want to blame any random person. They never said it was an indigenous young woman. Also, the lack of responsibility of the school, of the UNAM too. It was a nine-millimeter caliber weapon - Glock, it seems -. They have not confirmed if it was lost by the police, but that's how they handle it.

Thank God, for a moment **we had support**, my sister in law had a lawyer who is of her religion, she trusted him a lot, when I asked her how the case was going she said that life cannot come back, that now the important thing is to repair the damage. In fact a center called Prodh did support us [Center for Human Rights "Miguel Agustin ProJuarez"]. Mardonio Carballo, from Channel 22 is now director of the People's Cultures Department and offered support. However my brother did not accept.

I went to Guatemala to UN Women and they offered me their support as well, but my brother trusted that lawyer and cut me off. It turns out that my brother argued with the lawyer, that they had gone to Human Rights because the lawyer had threatened them to collect

that money, in fact, he stole about two parts of what they had gathered in the school - since they did not want further investigation - and for any other type of support he was very insistent on charging. Here in the attorney general's office they gave that man a job. I told the lawyer Sayuri to support me. She wanted a witness because **that person couldn't stay in that job**, that is, how am I going to get an investigation file opened for me when maybe that man could be there? In other words they do not work well. They were going to the UNAM with psychologists for the emotional issue, the pain, the mourning, but for a very short time; my sister-in-law says that her religion is good for her and we respect it, but she no longer took the children and my brother doesn't go either .

I met Lesvy's mother, who was murdered at the UNAM. They are such shocking cases that we wonder **why the authorities don't tell the truth**, why they don't do their job well. In an interview they asked me what I thought of the young women who rioted and broke windows... I told them: "it's not right, but look, you get fed up, you get tired, the authorities don't do their job well and **it's like hiding or covering up to the people who do harm.**"

It bothers men, not everyone of course, that a woman earns a bit more money, that a woman speaks out, that she raises her voice when our country is macho, so we start badly from our education, it's important to know our culture. They do not respect the elderly anymore, kids, anybody, we should all respect each other, **because the violence comes from there, and it is worse with firearms.**

I see that the authorities do not want to do their job well, in our communities, community assemblies exist, where people vote raising their hands, where they take into account and punish people who cause harm with communitary work and the community is watching, that way people start to understand, **the same people educate you, but here they protect the people that do harm, so when will there be justice?** We need more empathy, more respect, value our culture more and our knowledge to demand justice, to get together as many of us women are already doing, finding strategies, **finding a way to demand to the authorities...they must pay attention to us.**



# VÍCTOR YUNUEN MENDOZA VIVAS

An employee of the local government, with a law degree, just finished his studies. He is the son of Marina Vivas, who was murdered with her friend Rosy. *Acapulco, Guerrero*

I have a sister; and in those moments an aunt supported my mom by taking care of us especially with such harsh times. My mom was responsible for us at all times, thanks to her I am the person I am, with many principles and ethics, with a career and goals. She raised me in a way that led to me supporting my sister at all times. It was a sad circumstance, but despite her absence we learned to move forward, after all, that's how she raised us. My sister is currently in school, I still have communication with her. My mom supported us so that we can continue pursuing our studies.

After the death of my mom, many things changed, our finances, family members, my education, many things... It really changed my life, I had to learn to grow up, mature from one day to the next. She passed away on December 19 of 2017, unfortunately, I did not receive my mom's family support, I thought we would get closer, and that they would not push me away. It was different when my mom was

alive, it was a major change. Thank God that because of my mom I find myself working at her job that she left and I am able to support my education and get my degree. I took responsibility for my sister even if she wasn't with me by giving my aunt financial support to help me care for her. I had more support from my mom's friends than her family. It hurts to remember. I also had my father's support and he guided me in my career. He is also a lawyer, he approached me, he was always there for me. They were the only support systems I had and I am grateful.

What I know about the event: the day prior to what happened I spoke to her, we would always chat, she called me, I called her: "Hello son, how are you? What have you been up to?" She told me she was going to stay at her friend Rosy's house to help her out. It was in Acapulco, by Cumbres de Figueroa. On December 19th I received a call, I did not recognize the number, I answered it due to their insistence,

and it was one of Rosy's family members, my mom's friend, they told me she had passed away along with Rosy. At first, I took it as a joke as I had just spoken to my mom the day before, finally when they told me: "Yunuen, they are here, I am seeing them, they took them to the hospital"... It turns out they were shot by the **projectile of a bullet**, my mom was penetrated by it in the skull, causing laceration and bleeding in **her head**, above all that.

When I found out the news, I did not know what to do, **everything came crashing down for me**. I called my family but nobody answered, only my aunt Nancy who was deeply impacted and I turned to my mom's friends. I had to go to the hospital, but it turned out she wasn't there anymore, they had taken her to Semefo (Forensic Medical Service). I had to do the recognition of the body, **it was very painful for me to see my own mother dead**. At one point I said, "no, it's not her," I had to accept it was, my "aunt-friend" came with me, Susana Castro, to give me strength. They gave me her belongings and her blood stained clothes. I was shocked, very scared. I had to go to the **prosecutor's office** to make a statement, but I couldn't speak, they had to let me go.

I had to absorb all the expenses that were made, the coffin, the transfer, because my family did not want her to be buried in Acapulco, but instead where she was from, in La Reforma in Tierra Colorada, and I accepted everything because I did not know what to do; it was very difficult and overall for me and my sister. When she found out it affected her a lot, she was not in Acapulco and was only

12 at the time, **her world completely fell apart**. I don't talk to her a lot about it anymore because it is very painful for her.

My mom was in a union at her job and they were able to provide for some of the funerary expenses, they helped me pay for the procedures, transfer, coffin and the funerary service for the wake, they also paid for some household expenses; but unfortunately it was only temporary support. I looked for support from **orphan insurance for my sister**, but they did not give it to me, I was not going to take charge of her, my aunt was, **they asked me for legal guardianship** to prove my aunt was caring for her. I looked for benefits in my job but they asked for the same thing. I spoke to my aunt, who can support my sister in whatever she needs, she can secure her, and from there came family problems concerning legal guardianship - up until today it is still very difficult and delicate - Overall, **I take care of her** despite the family situation we are in, the only thing I will do is fulfill my duties **because she is my sister and I can't abandon her**.

Unfortunately we don't recognize the information that we received about the aggressors, we don't know who did it, we don't know their motives. The process and case were not continued, there was no way of knowing who did it, it was only femicide, it was two women who were attacked. **We saw the three year old girl**, Rosy's daughter. She was in the back of the van when her mom was attacked and saw her pass, **she was left an orphan**. Thank God **she stayed with her family**, as far as I know. **The treatment of the authorities in the prosecutor's office**

was... they didn't treat me badly, but I can not say it was accessible, I waited many hours for them to be able to testify and bring in the witnesses - family members of Rosy - unfortunately these procedures are carried out this way.

I have friends who at a younger age, have endured the same misfortune, it has been difficult to move on, they were left as orphans, they have continued at their own pace but lost their education, *without support*. From what I know, in all cases of violence, it always has to do with guns and that is alarming, because one asks several questions, why do these situations happen to you? And something else to think about is how easy it is for a person to have a weapon. I have learned this happens in all of Mexico, that there are people who obtain weapons illegally, in fact, it's illegal. It's alarming especially for the populations who have suffered cases like mine, and overall for the LGBT community.

A change would be needed, that the authorities carry out their work continuously, more cameras to see where the person went, what kind of person did it, and that they find the aggressor, that there are more movements and security above all towards the population. *Here in Acapulco* - like in other regions - what I've seen is that if they are attacking someone, or robbing them, or there has been another type of attack, the authorities, the police don't do their job how they should. On one occasion I was working at night in a hotel as a receptionist and they robbed us, so we called 911 to ask for help. The person who answered us

immediately directed a nearby patrol car that was close to the area. Out of fear, I could not see if they were armed, but they forced themselves through the door to enter, it was 3 in the morning and the only thing that a police officer said "It is very late, I have to change, I have to get dressed," and he hung up immediately, the only thing I did was take shelter... To think about how security is in all of Mexico, if something like that happened to me, something worse can happen to other people, where the authorities do not carry out their job as they should. I would like security for the population to be promoted so that they don't have to live in fear when they go out and be attacked, assaulted or that one of their family members or friends lose their life, more than that, that there be security overall.

For now I don't participate in any group because of my job and education that I have to sustain. I want to keep moving forward, grow as a professional, keep studying because methods change and keep updating, prepare myself, form my own patrimony with my family, in this case my sister, grow and help her have a career, keep going overall.



# CLAUDIA GONZÁLEZ

Survivor of sexual violence, works with migrant women in refugee situations and collaborates with Voces de Mujeres en Accion (Voices of Woman in Action) *Monterrey, Nuevo León*



I am from Monterrey, from a small, semi-rural town and I came to Monterrey at 18 years old to study. I work in a project with migrant women in a refugee situation or shelter applicants here in Monterrey, (they come) from Honduras, Guatemala, Peru, El Salvador, and internal migration: Tabasco, Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas and Puebla. Apart from that, I also work in the Ministry of Culture as a state liaison in Nuevo Leon. I started working (on issues of gender violence) **after acknowledging myself as a sexual violence survivor**, and when someone approached me in a moment of crisis. Then, unfortunately, I saw that it was very common. And I began to understand more when I was collaborating with Voices of Women in Action.

(Among women who migrate) the issue of sexual violence is very present, **rapes by military personnel, rape by gangs, that is something that is always in the stories, and harrasment**, out of no where they arrive, **armed, in the middle of the night to homes to loot**. (Also) I was working in a district, in zones that they call La Campana and Altamira,

that were heavily exploited by violence during these war times. Gangs came in, organized crime came in, (“agarro parejo”) they got in everywhere, and grasped it as a social base for all young people from the area. So they arrived, they settled, there were fights over territory and so on. It was a violent zone, now very vulnerable, and it continues being violent. Organized crime continues and it continues to be diminished. Many people completely left, many families, so it has changed a bit. But that also happens there, I was going there for almost a year because I was working on a book of the women there. The book consists of their stories, of how they tried to support themselves and transform their lives during this period, because they are part of what they call neighborhood committees. On paper they are diverse committees, but on a real level when you’re there it’s exclusively women that are doing the real work, the ones who meet together, the ones who make decisions over the water source, the water pump, over the issue on garbage – that is a common issue there since there is no constant garbage collection system –, on the issue of drug sales,

and the security of the children. It is a very complex and violent place. I was going with them to hear their stories, how they organized, why they remain there, why this desire to be organized, of trying to do something else –because years can go by and this place will remain in this violent situation – The same thing happens to them as the migrants, that the names of the cartels, either the Zetas, or the Golfo, are not named, and if someone does say it, they say it quietly, but in reality they are not named. You recognize it because it's part of your territory and because you know war is what started at this point, that cartels entered, but realistically those are topics that are not spoken of. They can say “ It's because those little boys have guns,” “they have drugs,” they can say it like that, but on the subject of “they are from this cartel,” that can never be mentioned. We had to be aware of this when we were making our networks, networks of support, and begin to recognize them and how to strengthen them.

Over here I see these kids completely alone and free, they are children of the community and of course they must be taken care of, because they are cannon fodder for organized crime. Childhood that gets abandoned, with traumas, with psychological issues, with insecurity and abandonment, eventually they belong to organized crime if these causes are not treated. Right now in these cases those who are armed are boys or girls too, in these situations when they can't find another thing to hold onto. In Monterrey there are many gangs, the West area is a high risk place. These growth fragmentations

have become time bombs, and they are exploding. Gangs, which have always existed, are now armed gangs. According to recent data it is estimated that 20% of gangs, around two thousand gangs, are part of organized crime, or some cartel. Something new is that of this 20%, a 1% are gangs exclusively of women, that are armed and are part of organized crime.

The armed issue diminishes the youth, young men, and leaves young mothers alone and well, they have to search for it. It is very notorious for all the mothers who are left without a partner, and even including the issue of disappearances. The other is the issue that now it is armed, here the issue of femicides has increased a lot due to the same issue of gender violence, machismo, and now with armed men, it has had a great impact because those fights that before could be beaten, now they are shot. The news is full of women who appear shot all the time, the wife, the ex-wife, the woman who was the partner and no longer wanted to, also the mom, the mother-in-law, they go to their house and finish them, they murder them, because now they are armed. That is why the topic of childhood is so big, because eventually the mom is also murdered. So the issue of femicides with arms has increased a lot.

(In murders on public roads) the exhibition of the body, the way it is displayed and where the body is left is very noticeable (the gender difference). It is obvious that it is by organized crime and because they are involved, they are later murdered. Men disappear,

but women are always displayed and shown, that is to demonstrate that here she is and here is how it happened. That is a very noticeable issue. Here we had a case of a lesbian colleague that was murdered, she was also put on display and the issue was very violent. Maybe we could say before the issue of war started, maybe it's something new since the year 2000, well here it has increased a lot since 2010. Before the difference there weren't that many women inside, and the bodies of these women weren't on the street displaying a message, tortured, because it is evident that they were tortured, as if the bodies were punished for some situation.

Perhaps the trans community is the most targeted among the LGBT community, (so much) that you can notice it. It exists in all neighborhoods, I could say that's where they are obviously, in these highly marginalized communities and other is where they are, because of the marginalization that we understand they have to live, also differentiated by the subject of gender and trans identity. But the trans femicides are there.

When you see a femicide, of a partner, ex-partner or other, it's with a small gun. These guns that are in gangs, that are in neighborhoods, costing the life of girls and boys that are nearby when these armed conflicts take place, there are small weapons (guns). We can't deny that *there are certain areas in which one goes and it is inevitable to see large weapons of those who guard the house of someone that has something to do with organized crime.*

Of the public policy that focuses on the armed issue, at least this issue that is in these communities, *that is its young men and women who are carrying these weapons or who are suffering the consequences of their existence.* Well it does have to do a lot with the attention to childhood and the focus on the youth, definitely with the gender issue that is differentiated. *Mental health seems to me obviously super important, not only that it is guaranteed, that it exists and there is availability.* Because even on this matter of mental health it can be inferred that what impacts is masculinity. The matter of masculinity is also there and it is what is sustaining this criminal life.



# MARÍA FERNANDA AQUINO

Is a specialist in litigation of cases of sexual and domestic violence. At the time of the interview, she worked in the department of gender-based violence in the Center of the Human Rights of Women (Centro de Derechos Humanos de las Mujeres A.C. (CEDEHM)) *Chihuahua, Chihuahua*

**T**he Center of the Human Rights of Women specializes in three areas. One, in which I am in, is of gender-based violence, where we dedicate ourselves to two major topics: one is the strategic litigation of cases, and the other is the establishment of public policies to guarantee a life free of violence for women. In strategic litigation, we have very specific guidelines on what we litigate in order to create an impact in the judiciary, and above all, not only do we handle gender-based violence against adult women, but also how it affects their children and adolescents, and how sometimes it is not clear that they are also direct victims of this violence. And the other two topics that are touched on are the disappearance of people and the support and defense of human rights Defenders.

Accompaniment is integral for persons who are clients of the center. It is a legal, psychosocial, and—more than anything in the department of missing persons—of humanitarian support. We look

for all of the resources they need for their case. For example, we also have specialized personnel in medicine, in case it is necessary, to make accompaniment the most integral it can be in a direct manner with persons who belong to the institution, there are also lawyers and psychologists.

The most common violence is psychological violence and sexual violence, which is increasingly visible. I wouldn't say that is has increased, rather, I think that our awareness of sexual violence has increased and the courage of many women to come forward to report it.

[With the clients] The initial interview is an instrument that has been used for various years and is one of the things that in the last two years we have noticed in the risk assessment, of the questions we always ask, something that has increased is the use of drugs and weapons by the aggressor. Any type of weapon. For us, it was

normally a parameter in the pipeline on the topic of [the] security. Our offices are visible, realistically we do not have something that could protect us from an attack. Against us and the clients. We don't have mechanisms to tell them that we can keep them in a safe place, more than the shelters, but with the shelters you obviously have limitations. There have been cases where they have been found in the shelters. So, understanding our limitations in terms of security, we ask these questions with the idea of channeling them to an institution that, although it does not have all the resources, well, it has more, because it belongs to the government. Minimally, it has the same resources as the public ministries. If it has public ministries, it has more capacity. We had to rethink these questions because it became something that they always answered "yes."

There is a very large problem here in Chihuahua with crystal meth consumption. So that specific drug, at least something I have perceived, is that it tends [to] make people very violent. It makes the violence very—I can't find the word—brutal? If I had to name it. So normally, apart from consuming crystal meth, they tend to sell it, that is, they tend to be involved in drug dealing. At least in what we have noticed in the interviews. That is one of the drugs that we have put as "very risky" for the clients, that is, if they consume it. Because the violence is a lot. Normally, when I hear accounts of people who have been injured by someone on crystal meth, it turns out to be a very physical and severe violence that puts their lives at risk. It is a violence

that can lead to femicide. And that is something we have noticed on various occasions. And also, that they have access to weapons. A lot of clients tell us: "It's that he doesn't have any weapons"; but his cousin is a part of La Línea. In other words, if the aggressor is not the one who actually has the weapons, or is not the one who consumes drugs, then he is related to people who do have weapons and who can represent a risk and have even threatened them by saying: "If you don't stay with me, I am going to tell [...]," and they tell them the names of These people who they know are dangerous. So many of them, well, decide to stay in light of those threats. If the offender himself is not the risk, the context of the offender may be.

[The reach of armed violence] is all over the state. Including the mountainous areas, which has a distinct problem, and dare I say worse, because it is not that they are their partners, but that there are women who are picked up, taken away for a weekend, terribly violated and returned as if they were bargaining chips. So, in the mountainous areas, which are under control, there really is no order, no law, there is no one who can help them. A lot of them do not return, they are taken away and you never hear about them again. There are a lot of cases of disappearances. In these contexts, I think that in the urban areas, this violence appears as intimate partner violence a little more. And another part is trafficking. A lot of them are taken to be a part of trafficking networks. First, they treat them as if they were their partners and then take them away.

[Limits of the organization] It is very complicated because it is very important for us to handle these cases that we cannot for security reasons. If orders of protection were actually effective, well we would have no reason to be scared. Because we would know that there is something that would protect us. That is something that really limits us. It is very complicated. For example, yesterday one of my colleagues, as she was coming out of the office, was followed by an aggressor who followed her halfway to the historic center. She kept walking until a security guard helped her. But it is those types of things, there is no security, not for us and not even for the victims, that the aggressors will not replicate what they have been doing.

Another big problem that exists is this idea that if she was involved with someone involved in drug trafficking, the crime of femicide, for example, if she was a victim of femicide, it is not ruled a femicide, instead it is a homicide because of the drug trafficking and even if there are 1,000 reasons that it was committed because of gender, but because it was in the context of armed violence and generalized, they do not take into consideration gender.

[In one case], she was a victim of femicide, but the situation she was in was very violent. She was in a situation in which all the people she lived with, including the people who participated in the investigation as “witnesses,” are people who are involved in drug trafficking and who are constantly armed.

A resource we have utilized a lot is the CEAV [Executive Commission for Attention to Victims in the State of Chihuahua] because, well, it is a part of the prosecution. But even personnel from CEAV have told us that “they do not feel safe taking it on,” and they are a part of the system.

I find it very interesting to make visible that this context of armed violence cannot be the pretext to stop making gender-based violence visible. Even when it occurs in such a context, it is still gender-based violence. That is something very important, that no authority is clear about, and it is very easy for them to ignore it.

So, as long as this continues to happen, the number of women who die, who are victims of femicide, and will never receive justice for that, will continue to increase, the trafficking networks will continue to increase, because gender is not factored in or recognized in these cases. I believe that this is the most valuable thing and if we do not recognize that, there will be no justice for these women.

A portrait of Rita Campo, an activist and researcher, with her face blurred. She is wearing a dark jacket and a light-colored scarf. The background is a street scene with buildings and trees, overlaid with a semi-transparent purple filter.

# RITA CAMPO

Activist and researcher, she worked in the Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana (UAM) (Independent University Metropolitan of) Iztapalapa. She is now a private researcher. *Mexico City*

I work on violence against women, particularly with several processes accompanying cases. The majority of research I've done has gone to investigative case files of disappeared women in Mexico City. I have contributed to the context analysis so that they can achieve the status of missing person. Above all, we have dedicated ourselves to challenging some inauthentic expert reports in which they end up blaming the victims for their own disappearance. That and also I have participated in some femicide cases. Particularly the Lesvy trial, I was part of the group supporting family members. There we have collaborated with the political activities that happened during our work with the groups.

[About the murders of women] first of all, I would like to tell you how we analyzed the context for Mariela Vanessa Díaz, who was from the eastern part of Mexico City, since the city is divided into quadrants, how we feel that security forces organize themselves

and what was the effect of the militarization that we see particularly in Iztapalapa, which is where the civil guard comes in and what we have seen on the ground.

Maria Vanessa Diaz Valverde disappeared on April 27, 2018, and after this disappearance, an independent group of professionals began to work together to help the family in their search. We became aware of a very significant lag in the implementation of the Law on Disappearances, even compared to other states with high levels of violence, like Guerrero or Veracruz, where they have a process of implementation much more advanced than we have in Mexico City.

In January 2018, when the General Law on Disappearances came into force, we had a transition period in Mexico City with the previous administration, which had refused to formalize a specialized prosecutor's office, so we still had the previous prosecution sys-

tem until 2018. We mobilized to demonstrate that there is a common issue in all disappearance cases, especially concerning women, in which they are registered as absent. This implies that there is no crime to prosecute, and no search is formalized that uses the General Law or the approved protocols on disappearances.

In order to apply these protocols, I did a context study of the vulnerability of women, youth and girls. I did it based on my intuition, which was applying the same criteria the previous legislature used to measure security in the city, and the impact of securitization policies in Mexico City. These policies involved dividing the city in four quadrants: North, South, East and West. Following the same logic, we began to realize that the policy that they used during this legislature's time in office had to do with monitoring processes that didn't help us map out the illegal and hostile terrain of these events, rather the opposite: in a way they made possible strategies to make violent crimes invisible that were being committed in specific areas.

As time has passed, now my hypothesis is that certain policies were implemented, technologies used, and human resources applied to generate lawless spaces or "ghettos" where women's bodies are vulnerable, exploited and murdered. In the Eastern zone which includes various municipalities such as Iztapalapa, Xochimilco, Tlahuac and a bit of Tlalpan. We began to consider the evidence regarding the disappearance of women, young people, and girls in Mexico City in a

very rudimentary way, because in reality it was the only thing we had at hand, apart from requests for access to information. There were files that we managed to collect since we were permanently monitoring social networks because the files that are officially shared are only those of Amber Alerts. As for the other files of women, since the Amber Alert is not fully operating in Mexico City, the prosecutor's office is under no obligation to share them. But we began to notice an increase from the second half of 2018 and for 2019 we thought that the curve had to go down at some point.

In 2019, there was a rash of disappearances on the metro in Mexico City. In reality they were inaccurately called kidnappings, (this is) because in all the disappearance cases in the metro there was never any extortion, any ransom asked. We think they should be called what they are, disappearances. With the increase in disappearances, we began to have a lot of calls from relatives and we began to notice some patterns. We specifically began to notice that there are spaces in Mexico City without law, where these women's bodies are violated with impunity, they are treated as merchandise because they generate enormous profitability, they are extracted as such and merged to make them profitable; especially in Gustavo A. Madero, and also in the border areas of Mexico City, particularly those that have to do with the state of Puebla and the State of Mexico. However, in that same eastern zone and in a very strong way in Ajusco. They are in clandestine graves that are already coming to light and mothers that have already identified them.

In the exploitation of women's bodies, they were no longer taken from an area but they began to be exploited in that same zone in the East. There are various cases of many disappeared companeras (fellow women) in which we can imagine they were exploited at the hands of the cartels that operate in the zone, as well as delinquent groups in that eastern area. We began to notice this take off in an extraordinary way and continuously. We belong to a university, so what we have available is documented cases of university students, but we have also documented some cases of female university students who are hooked on social media and later become victims of trafficking and sex work.

In the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, we had hoped that there would be a strong pause due to the health situation, but we realized this wasn't the case, that this curve still exists. Those points emerge in the Eastern zone and begin to concentrate in the bordering part with the state Puebla y Mexico, generating a much larger radius, around the counterpart eastern zone of Mexico City.

I defended the hypothesis that Mexico City was not an area exempt from the so-called "trafficking-corridor," widely studied, but rather it was part of it. And with this increase in disappearances and *modus operandi* that we have found and documented, we are becoming aware of these spaces and black holes that are forming around Mexico City for the exploitation of women. For me, it corroborates this hypothesis because we clearly have a veil of invisibility where we notice that, when the National Guard arrives in Iztapalapa, there is something like a rearrangement of the limits that were established between cartels and criminal groups, where the phenomenon of disappearance begins to become cases of forced disappearance [by the state] and sometimes with a very clear intervention by the Mexico City Secretariat of Public Security [police]. We wonder a lot who controls the city's video surveillance system, due to the *modus operandi* with which the prosecutor's offices work. In short, the lack of investigative possibilities by the prosecutors.



# ROCÍO SUÁREZ

Activist and researcher, she worked in the Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana (UAM) (Independent University Metropolitan of) Iztapalapa. She is now a private researcher.  
*Mexico City*

**T**here is a more poor trans community, I believe that in this community is where the majority of cases (of violence and murders) are concentrated, at least those which are documented. This is the case of women who perform sex work. Another important issue for me is that of interpersonal relationships that also occur in some of these cases. Even at the level of violence between the couple, it is something that is repeated. For example, how violence in between a couple isn't identified in a timely manner.

Women at risk who work in the street, sex workers, are the group most vulnerable to generalized, social violence, institutional violence, and from the authorities. It is one of the groups most vulnerable to this type of violence. For example, I did a comparison about 2 or 3 years ago, where I visualized the extent of murders of the LGBT community in this country, including what the "Letra S" documents. What I noticed is the difference in form, in the instruments they used to murder gay and trans people. A majority of the murders of trans people are with firearms. While murders of gay people, the causes of death are with other instruments, suffocation, other things. I think it also has to do with intention, because whoever carries a firearm is not to simply frighten. Precisely, it comes with a situation of greater violence.

The gay and trans population (sic) live in different contexts. Like I was telling you, in the case of the trans population, they are more exposed to police violence and from other individuals. In the case of those which practice sex work it is at night, they are more vulnerable, there are no witnesses that can act in their defense or testify in these situations.

I consider that this violence has always been present. What happens is that it is not made visible. I'll give you an example. Right now we talk about the most recent murders, but we don't talk about the murders that were committed decades ago in Chiapas, prior to the Zapatista uprising. All of a sudden we don't remember these events, but these are the most important historic events. Like that of one colleague, Iliboria Cruz, an adolescent of 18 years, who was murdered and generated a first investigative commission.

I think that violence is constant, but maybe what is happening is that the media make it look like we are in a wave of murders. I will give you an example, a few months ago it seemed like a wave, which included the *compañera* from Puebla, the one from Chihuahua, the cases of Veracruz, like four cases. The media says this is a new wave of murders, but the truth is that this is not a new wave. What the media waves have done is capture a case, other media outlets are interested and capture more cases. That is why we see the interest of others, that continue to follow, but this doesn't occur like this, these cases occur constantly. I who document the cases have made out that those presented, of the 5 or 6 cases, have been presented somewhat less often in different states of the country, but with those cases there was not a lot of media attention. It seems important to mention that these cases do not have a temporary nature, I think they have always been there, only that now we are documenting these cases in a better way. There are many more organizations that

document these cases, that is why now we have a better approximation. We also know that there are many cases that remain underreported.

We, (documented) since 2007 to 2020, and from 2016 to now, have seen in the last 4 years, a larger number of cases than in the past 13 years, but that does not mean there is a higher murder rate. We have been perfecting the way we document cases, which is why we are getting more cases. There is an information gap there. We are probably reaching our limit because it seems that the last few years have had the highest rate. For example, we have coordinated with other organizations, with the *Letra S* we have meetings where we share mutual information. That way we see if there are cases that one or the other organization doesn't have documented. That helps us achieve a clearer approximation. We have some sources while *Letra S* may have others which we may not have access to.

We supported the case of Paola, a *compañera* that practiced sex work, together with that of Kenya Cuevas, in 2016. She is approached by a client, who works for a place in private protection, and murders her in his own car. Well from this case we can infer that there is an arrest of this person lingering in the air, but abnormal circumstances follow, for example in the first hearing his freedom is declared. The judge determined that there is not enough evidence to determine if he was the murderer, in the investigation documents for example, the rulings on the subjects of studies of gunpowder on

their hands come out negative for him and Paola. With that logic, it would seem that it was a third person who activated the weapon, despite the fact that there were only the two of them in the car and he was the one who had possession of the weapon. In fact, there were several shots, one was the one that took Paola's life and several others that got out of the car, possibly due to the struggle. The judge determines that there is not enough evidence to determine the responsibility of this person and declares his release at the first hearing. We know there was a visit from his boss, that he visited him, because he worked in a gas company, which however doesn't appear in the things that are discussed. The prosecution is dissatisfied with the decision of the judge. The attorney agrees with the prosecution, and decides to call him again, but so far the order has not been completed because in the end that is what has to be presented.

[Actions that have been implemented to protect the population that is most at risk] Female sex workers have their own security mechanisms. In some areas of Mexico City there are WhatsApp groups to comment if there is any case of violence. For example, "arrancones" [informal and risky car races] in Tlalpan are a problem for sex workers, they serve as a pretext for mistreating their colleagues. They yell at them, they throw things at them, they create this climate. There are things that are much closer, that the colleagues who work at a point already know them, if you already left, if you were late in returning. These mechanisms are currently weakened by COVID.



# SUSANA CASTRO MESA

Originally from Oaxaca, at three years old she moved to Acapulco because her father was murdered. She is a lawyer, teacher in municipal public administration and has training in feminism. *Acapulco, Guerrero*

**F**rom the age of 20 I have been involved in this issue, perhaps because ever since I was a child I lived in a violent environment and I saw my mom struggle to get us ahead. Twenty-five years ago I participated in the Frente Liberal Guerrerense (Guerrero Liberal Front). I was in charge of the prisons in the State Secretariat for Women, where I saw the inequalities and the stories of several women that affected me. I was later in charge of the legal area of the Women's Institute in Acapulco and saw more cases. All of this has marked me and now I can no longer stop doing things for women.

We need to legally establish our association, we think it will be called Ni Una Mas Acapulco (Not One More Acapulco). It began when Carmen Liboro (teacher and president of the organization) took in the children of her neighbor, who had been killed, and began buying them with her salary things, diapers, shoes, clothes, groceries. I recruited more women to help her. We got closer to her, Carmen informed us

that as lawyers we can be a huge support, to take on cases of violence against women in the legal field. We provide legal support, make referrals, we give support during meetings, we've had meetings with the president of the DIF (social services agency), with some council members, some agencies. Whatever is legal is what we support, for example custody, who is going to have it?

Acapulco has an Amber Alert program regarding violence against women in which we participate in counseling. **There we put into place the fight for these children who are left unprotected because their mothers were murdered**, the femicides, but we have no echo. They actually see us with skepticism, they have mistrust against the government, even if we tell them we aren't part of the government, they want nothing to do with it.

We offer support to orphaned children because their mothers were murdered or disappeared; the grandmothers who were left in charge of the children, fathers who are also a part of the group because their wives were murdered, we also have a person here who has HIV and has their child. It's about 123 people. We have a little one who was just born about 15 days old, his mom died when he was 3 days old. Not only people [sic] whose mothers have died from femicide, but orphans from other causes, that is why I say that we have to focus formally, because we are going to lose ourselves in this world of so many needs. I don't completely like the work we do because it's not fully satisfying for me to say, "Now!" but seeing someone's face change and say "thank you" is the most gratifying.

We see that women who have been violated are unaware of their rights and [of] economic violence, "I am with him because I don't know how to do anything, I am with him because I need him to support me"... when they sell dinner, wash, they iron. They need empowerment, that part of not recognizing what they are as women, as mothers, that they really are independent, but something that has affected and continues to affect a lot is that it is believed that a single woman is worth less and so I must stay with him so that society says that I have my husband, my partner.

Of all the cases we are aware of, there is only one advanced case, it is that of a *compañera* from Mexico whose daughter was killed. I believe there is already a

sentence, he is already in custody, but from there out nothing else. We have questioned the prosecutor from here: what happened with those cases... they are very deficient.. There's been a problem since the beginning to get the doctors to ratify, they do not want to get involved in the femicide roll. There is a girl whose boyfriend cut open her forehead and forearms with a box cutter, then threw her from the third floor. The neighbors see how she is thrown, although she continues to live for three days and declares to the MP (prosecutor's office) that he was the one who cut her with the box cutter like a fish and then threw her. On her death certificate it says the aggressor is unknown and that she dies from the fall! Seeing her dad cry, who says, "She was the one who told me he treated her like a fish, and that he was the one who pushed her..," and also when gathering information on how to classify a femicide, not much is known, this has to be done by the prosecutors office, they must investigate and all but for this they must be trained. There are many failures, especially with the oral trial, in the distribution of justice, they always get released, they are free! We had a meeting with the council, there were about a hundred or so cases and only three are being processed as femicide, and no one has been arrested, so the number of how many women have died but THERE IS NO ONE IN JAIL, THERE ARE NO GUILTY... that's where IMPUNITY occurs, from saying "I can do this to a woman and then nothing happens...."

Now we see that femicide occurs a lot in young women. It is not possible to generalize, but they are girls

who come from a broken family, although there are varying cases, they are usually between 16 and 33-35 years old. We have not had an LGBT population, but we are aware of it because it is also a very vulnerable population. Femicides have increased because it is already **easy for someone who can have access to a weapon to buy it**. Most of those that we have known have been murdered have been with a firearm, although there have also been blows with sharp weapons. What is most striking is **why are they being shot in the face?** As in the case of Marina, Víctor Yunuen's mother, and Rosy, his friend.

Today you find women who say: **"I'm not leaving him because he has a gun under the bed, I'm not leaving him because he's working for the maña (gang) and he has guns in the house, big guns"...** so, **access to weapons has affected the rate [of violence]**, it's easy to acquire one... and because they say "she cheated on me or left me," it's easy for them to shoot... or you pay and someone is going to murder her on a motorcycle and leave her there... **And of course they have to see the weapons**, of course, when they kill with one blow, they scream, maybe someone notices, they call... but when they have access to the weapon, nothing can be the same anymore. I fully agree that you cannot have access to weapons... they say it is legal to have a weapon, but **having a weapon you have to shoot it**, that is why have

it. If you have kept it all your life, it isn't true - one day you use it, and perhaps in anger, in an act of violence, because you have access to the weapon in your house. Of course that has to be regulated. It has not changed in a positive way, but has **increased negatively and viciously**, because apart from being shot to death, they also hurt her, insult her, rape her, burn her... and yes, it has increased.

I have heard many speeches, but there is no political will. There is a lot of ignorance on the subject, there is a lack of specific comprehensive programs, work groups, but involving those who have the problem, real programs, not desktop ones.

We want to establish ourselves legally to spread throughout the state of Guerrero, it is a large job, but we will look for allies, take walks with the children, continue celebrating their birthdays... Sometimes I feel like [that] we are alone on this path, but I know that there are many women working on the same thing. I feel grateful, the truth is that the work that you do is important.



# VERÓNICA

Together with other activists, she founded Las Libres, a feminist organization that promotes and defends all the rights of women in the state of Guanajuato and the country. In 2006 she received the Human Rights Watch Award. *Guanajuato, Guanajuato*

Since 1995, I have been working on gender-based violence, and now through Las Libres, have been documenting the phenomenon of violence against women and femicides since 2000 to now. We provide accompaniment services to victims of gender-based violence, with everything they need, not just advice, but also legal defense and litigation services within the judicial system, and even emotional and psychological, medical, legal, social support, in strengthening their family, personal, and community networks. All of the cases that we take on have to abide by judicial and social justice, get out of the violent situation, and strengthen their networks. We document the phenomenon of femicide and the accompaniment of direct and indirect victims for access to justice and reparations for the damage sustained. At the beginning, we thought we wanted to dedicate our work to the girls and women that most needed it, such as those from rural areas, indigenous, and populations at the margins of urban areas, but the problem of violence against women affects all

types of women and we have supported all types of women and from all age groups.

If we talk about the phenomenon of femicide and assassinations and murders of women, in the last five years they have mostly concentrated on young women, we did not see that between 2000 and 2005, they were mostly married women, it was the husbands, and in Guanajuato, the origin of femicide was very clear: it was domestic violence, intimate partner violence. Normally, it was the husbands and married women, and it wasn't those that got married last year, instead those couples had history together, so they were clearly women between the ages of 30 and 40 years old, including those older than 40 years, but that is where it is mostly concentrated. That has completely changed: it is now young women who are being murdered with a firearm in public spaces and their ages are very clear, it's as if the age groups targeted have been reversed.

We have received various cases for women regarding attempted femicide with a firearm where the aggressor was a police officer. That is an interesting piece of information because the issue of firearms becomes very clear. In less cases it is the husband with a firearm who participates—as said by the women—in some criminal networks, normally house robberies. Another piece of data on the use of firearms, in very few cases, but we do have some, especially in rural areas, where the husbands have weapons, and powerful ones too, and politicians and economically-powerful people also have firearms and those are the ones that threaten and even hurt others.

The case that has impacted me the most is that of a woman whose partner was a police officer. A police officer from a municipality here in Guanajuato shot her in the thigh and the entire department protected him, including the municipal president, everyone. The woman, who over and over and over again had experienced this extreme violence, finally encouraged herself to ask for help. She had already reported the crime and when we went in to accompany her case, the entire process was super complicated because it was not only reporting the crime, it was also doing all of this work with the municipality and city hall, to make all of the administrative sanctions for the police, above all the dismissal and the exemplary message. After that process, [he] gets out of prison and follows the entire process. Finally, we agreed to an expedited trial because she decided it so. She gets out of that violent

situation, is economically independent, reconstructs her life with her kids, starts all over, changes city—it's a lot of work—with her family and friends to leave the violence. The guy, via his mother, gets closer through the children, makes the children want to see him again, and returns to exerting violence: he kidnaps the kids and is violent against her. So, even with the pressure of the lawyer of the aggressor who wanted the case to end, who wanted everyone to find alternative solutions to all of the incidents, we, the prosecutor's office, and judge had to defend her from herself. We wanted to give her maximum protection, even if she would be mad at everyone. A few years later, she understood that it was for her own good, if she didn't, he would've killed her. We had a lot of other cases that were much more scandalous, much more brutal, one thinks that they have seen the worst, but this called my attention because she got angry at the protection given to her, but she then understood that it was the best thing for her.

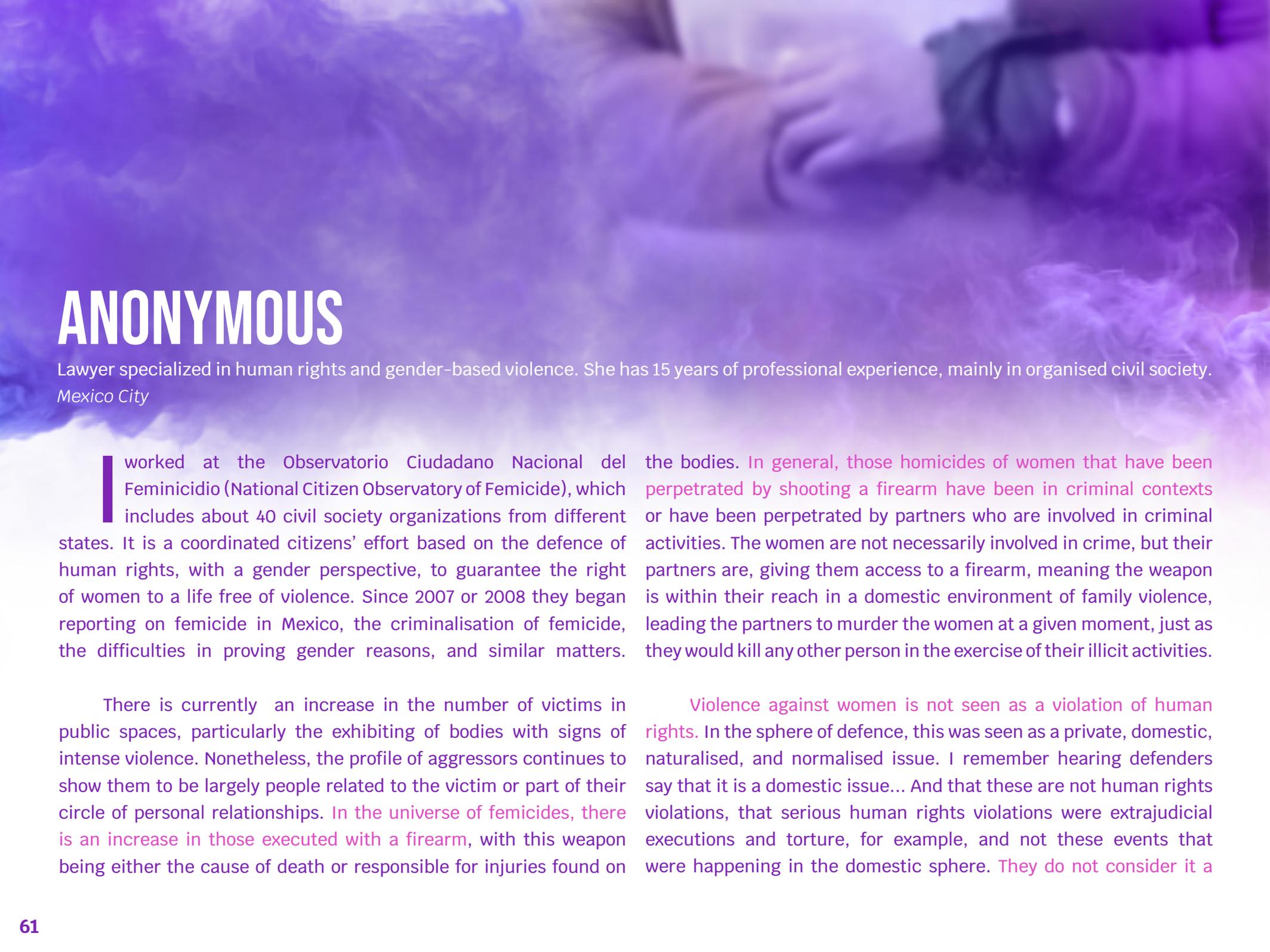
It is also not black and white, it is not that the State does everything wrong, and women do everything right, no; let's strengthen them to confront these processes. There are processes where women [do not report] because of social pressures, fear—it is brutal. In the last 20 years, we can see how this phenomenon has evolved. Our explanation has to do with three realities: [one] the circulation of firearms in a country where it is supposedly illegal, however a majority of people have firearms. Two, in various assassinations of women that we have accompanied, we have seen firearms

exclusively used by the military, so there you ask, what are the military's weapons doing among criminal groups? And third, the same firearm is being used in various crimes, due to the circulation of [criminal] weapons within organized crime. Mostly, what we have in Guanajuato in one case, and in another as well, is the issue of drug sales, drug dealing. That is what we have found. There is a massive circulation of firearms among and between criminals.

In Guanajuato, in recent years, most executions with firearms are the same for men and women. Five years ago, it was clear who was targeted with the amount of bullet wounds, and the woman, who was there for whatever reason, only had one direct shot. Since 2017 and more recently, we are seeing very similar executions: if there is only one shot, then it is one shot towards the man and the woman. And what is different from what we have seen before is that instead of groups of men being targeted with usually only one woman, we are now seeing groups of women with only one man there. But in the executions, we have not found distinct differences like we do see in specific murders. A serious difference, for example, is the evidence of sexual violence or naked bodies. We have found very little cases where the body is semi-naked or completely naked and it almost always has to do with bodies that have already been burned. Now that has to do with more crime, more firearms, and more so in public spaces. It can be in any place and the bodies of murdered men and women are treated more or less equally.

[Concerning the LGBTQ+ community] in Guanajuato there have been some cases, and clearly there is more protests or more symbolic protests with these cases, because they are always [stem from] reasons of hate, of discrimination. But we have not found distinct murder cases that tell us that it was for that reason. Clearly, those with longer weapons let us know that the assassins are sent from those in middle or high in command of the cartels; in the cases with shorter weapons, more quotidian cases, well they are normally those that are involved in drug sales, those that make up the weakest link. Every time, more and more men are linked to crime, because before it was clearly femicide and it was done with their hands, they were beatings and strangling, and in the last five years, even if they are femicides and even if it was their husbands or ex-partners, it was mostly done with a firearm.

There is no public policy that is serious, effective, preventative, with sanctions and attention to violence against women. The most that we have are capacities that have not worked, a lot of money thrown away. So, where is the matter from our perspective? All of the efforts are enforced once they are already dead. The solution is prevention and prevention linked to public security, and that happens through the municipalities, the strength of the municipal police, public security policies, and the prevention of violence against women.



# ANONYMOUS

Lawyer specialized in human rights and gender-based violence. She has 15 years of professional experience, mainly in organised civil society.  
*Mexico City*

I worked at the Observatorio Ciudadano Nacional del Femicidio (National Citizen Observatory of Femicide), which includes about 40 civil society organizations from different states. It is a coordinated citizens' effort based on the defence of human rights, with a gender perspective, to guarantee the right of women to a life free of violence. Since 2007 or 2008 they began reporting on femicide in Mexico, the criminalisation of femicide, the difficulties in proving gender reasons, and similar matters.

There is currently an increase in the number of victims in public spaces, particularly the exhibiting of bodies with signs of intense violence. Nonetheless, the profile of aggressors continues to show them to be largely people related to the victim or part of their circle of personal relationships. **In the universe of femicides, there is an increase in those executed with a firearm**, with this weapon being either the cause of death or responsible for injuries found on

the bodies. **In general, those homicides of women that have been perpetrated by shooting a firearm have been in criminal contexts or have been perpetrated by partners who are involved in criminal activities.** The women are not necessarily involved in crime, but their partners are, giving them access to a firearm, meaning the weapon is within their reach in a domestic environment of family violence, leading the partners to murder the women at a given moment, just as they would kill any other person in the exercise of their illicit activities.

**Violence against women is not seen as a violation of human rights.** In the sphere of defence, this was seen as a private, domestic, naturalised, and normalised issue. I remember hearing defenders say that it is a domestic issue... And that these are not human rights violations, that serious human rights violations were extrajudicial executions and torture, for example, and not these events that were happening in the domestic sphere. **They do not consider it a**

responsibility of the State to prevent domestic violence and to protect access to justice.

Discussions just begun to arise about the responsibility of the State for the actions of third parties in their private capacity, since the State has the obligation to promote rights, to have an equality agenda, to implement this agenda, to prevent violence, and to protect access to justice. These obligations, which involve designing and providing the necessary institutions, are at both the national and international level. **And when the State does not fulfil its obligations, the risk to women increases, precisely because they do not work with a gender perspective that guarantees equality.**

The State has a responsibility that cannot simply be ignored by saying that this is exclusive to the home and that the families have to change the way in which they interact, or that these are cultural issues for which public officials have no jurisdiction or responsibility whatsoever. I have heard from public officials who said: “I don’t know why they ask me to resolve issues that have more to do with culture, with what our society is like... why should I be responsible for this?” They happen to be good public servants, who have an important decision-making position and who make these statements and genuinely believe them when they refer to the fact that violence against women is not their responsibility. It is not enough guarantee that the judges hearing the cases can really shed gender prejudices and stereotypes and apply the methodology for judging with a gender perspective proposed by the Supreme Court of Justice.

For example, the work of the “Centros de Justicia para las Mujeres” (Justice Centres for Women) or Cejum, was being argued in Court, when the victims came forward in the Atenco case, which debated the effectiveness of the existence of the centres for women.

This has led the State to classify the various types of violence with various crimes, expanding them from those involving digital violence, sexual crimes, and family violence, which continue to be treated as complaints and which would have to be prosecuted *ex officio*. For example, it should be possible to increase sanctions, typifying the classification of femicide, generate specific methodologies for investigation, train professionals with knowledge of the type of crime and the methodology of the gender perspective overall, and create specific and specialised institutions for the awareness, investigation, and punishment of these crimes.

[The change] has been largely due to organisation and social demands, especially from the mothers of the victims, due to the antecedents of the 2009 Campo Algodonero Case Judgment of the Inter-American Court, **where it begins to consider this type violence as structural, and to focus on the responsibility of the State;** and later, in the sentences in the Mariana Lima Buendía case of 2015 and the 2019 case of Karla Pontigo. The 2015 case of Mariana Lima orders that all violent deaths of women be investigated with a gender perspective and under the hypothesis of femicide, and that this is mandatory for all authorities in all areas, including Public Ministries, experts, and all investigative police. There is also the Atenco Case ruling, which brought to light police procedure, which may be the responsibility of senior officers and may depend on their instructions, but also they act to the detriment of women. The sentences were relevant.

I believe that there are federal entities that have a better structure and a better institutional design, and that are more consolidated than in Mexico City, since for many years it has no autonomy with respect to federal powers and they work with the

Criminal Code of the Federal Penal Codes. We see this because the local Victim Care Commission has just been created, based on the fact that there is a local Political Constitution and recently, just in January [2020], the attorney general's office began its transition to an autonomous prosecutor's office. That institutional design is thus recent. In my opinion, there are other states that already have this design, with a Victim Care Commission, and with better or broader tools for working with victims. They have prosecutors specialising in the investigation of the crime of femicide, as is the case in San Luis Potosí or Chihuahua, and Monterrey as well. Of course, there are other states that do not have them: Jalisco still does not have a specialised prosecutor's office. Over there, you still have to argue with the authorities about whether a prosecutor's office is necessary or not. Even with the level of violence they have, they still think it is not necessary.

In Mexico City we are in that process of institutional consolidation of capacities, especially in terms of federal legal advice and local legal advice. I think they still have only about four or five advisors for all of Mexico City. There is the local CEAVI [Executive Commission for Attention to Victims] and the Femicide Prosecutor's Office, which was created in 2019. Consolidation is still in progress, and the location of a headquarters that will be specifically able to attend to femicides 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, for example, is still under review. This started some two months ago; it was different before.

It is a daily effort, which also implies a change in habits and perspective, to put victims at the centre of our work. Although they work with due diligence, it is not usual for the Public Prosecutor's Offices to seek out the victims to inform them of the status of the

investigations. Normally, it is the victims who angrily call, and call, because no one has informed them how their cases are going. This shows a lack of proactivity and an inability to look at victims as the centre of your work, rather than as just people with whom you do not regularly interact or who do not have a close and cordial relationship with the Public Ministries. That is what has to change. We have to keep insisting on this.

There are a large number of children and adolescents orphaned due to femicide. A census is being carried out to guarantee the restoration of their rights. There are quite a few who have been affected, but there is no disaggregated information on which boys and girls were orphaned because their mothers were victims of a firearm, whether it was a femicide or a violent death, in other words, not a femicide, but an intentional homicide. They are working on a database where all the variables are disaggregated, in order to better analyse what is happening and, above all, the patterns that are being used to commit these types of crimes. The goal is to generate public prevention policy, if not directly, then indirectly through the appropriate institutions that can work with this information.



# **3** WHAT IS BEING DONE AND WHAT CAN STILL BE DONE?

# 3.1 THE CURRENT POLITICS

## 3.1.1 ARMED GENDER VIOLENCE IN THE GOVERNMENTS OF LOPEZ OBRADOR AND PEÑA NIETO

On February 1, 2007, the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence was published in the Official Gazette of the Federation, which sought to respond to Mexico's international obligations on the matter. Said law establishes the coordination between the federation, the states and the municipalities, to prevent, punish and eradicate violence against women, as well as the modalities to guarantee their access to a life free of violence and the principles that would govern these actions, legal equality between women and men, respect for the human dignity of women and non-discrimination, among many others.

Article 6 of the law defines the different types of violence towards women, however there is no detailed reference to armed violence against women. The definition is as follows, "any act that inflicts non-accidental harm, using physical force or some type of weapon or object that may or may not cause injury, whether internal, external, or both." This establishes general parameters for armed violence, that don't specifically relate to firearms but rather any device that can be used to cause harm.

Firearms are considered in the law when it comes to preventative protection orders. Protection orders, in accordance with article 27 of the law, are acts of protection and urgent application based on the

best interest of the victim. They are fundamentally precautionary, and must be granted by the competent authority, as soon as there is knowledge of the facts that may constitute infractions or crimes that might imply violence against women.

Based on this information, a preventive protection measure is the retention or safekeeping of firearms owned by the aggressor or by a private security institution, regardless of whether they are registered in accordance with regulations. Once again the law does not allude to other preventive measures that can be put into place to counteract and sanction violence with firearms against women, especially given the fact that this problem isn't made visible in current legislation.

On the other hand, in accordance with article 26 of the Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos (Political Constitution of the United Mexican States) articles 9 and from 27 to 42 of the Organic Law of the Federal Public Administration and the Planning Law, the federal government has the obligation to prepare a National Development Plan (NDP) that establishes the national objectives, strategies and priorities of the integral and sustainable development of the country, a document that will also contain forecasts on the resources that will be assigned for such purposes, will determine the instruments and those responsible for their execution and will establish the policy guidelines of a global, sectoral and regional nature, among others.

On this matter, the NDP 2013–2018, of former President Enrique Peña Nieto, refers to disarmament as the national goal “ Mexico with Global Responsibility” only by mentioning the historical leadership of Mexico on the subject from the Treaty of Tlatelolco; however, there is never any mention of small arms and light weapons or the disarmament of the Mexican population, nor is there any mention of the problem.

Regarding the gender perspective, it is established as one of the priorities in the transversal strategies of the NDP that should be present in all programs of the federal public administration. Within the framework of this transversal strategy, it is considered essential to guarantee substantive equality between women and men. It is noted that this is the first plan in which the gender perspective is established as an essential principle.

In regards to gender violence, the suggestions for its eradication are established in the national goal “A Peaceful Mexico.” This indicates that violence against women is one of the most alarming kinds of violence in the country; it affects 6 out of every 10 women, according to the ENDIREH (National Survey of Relationships in Homes) 2012. However, the plan does not address the particularities of violence against women and how much they are affected by armed violence. In addition, during the six-year term from 2012 to 2018, it did not mean a guarantee in the reduction or visibility of violence with firearms against women, much less a reduction in gender violence in general.

For its part, in the National Development Plan of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, published in the Official Gazette of the Federation on July 12, 2019, in the section entitled “Cambio de la política de seguridad” (Change in security policy) regarding Politics and Government, the “Prevención Especial de la Violencia y el Delito” (Special Prevention of Violence and Crime) is established as one of the specific strategies. It also mentions how to “combat” gender violence in all its expressions, but without further detailing the scope of said measures. This reflects a lack of strategic commitment from the federal government to eradicate

gender violence by firearms, and in general all gender-based violence. Throughout the document, the word “gender” is only mentioned twice.

Regarding gun trafficking, the section of the National Plan on “Recovering the state of law,” under “Politics and Government” states that they will fight “money laundering, arms trafficking, and other illicit acts that can’t be perpetrated without the complicity of public officials with offenders.” This is simply a list of pending issues, without detailing their causes and dynamics, although to a certain extent authorities assume the responsibility when these acts are committed. However, again, there is no relationship stated between armed violence, trafficking in small arms and light weapons, and gender-based violence.

In the current administration, the National Information Center of the SESNSP has sought to present data on violence against women, which disaggregates the crime rate and calls to 911 regarding crimes that affect women in Mexico, including femicide.

In this statistical report, the crimes of greatest impact on women’s lives are intentional injuries, that vary between 56 and 65% of all crimes committed against women, while femicides vary from 1 to 3%, and intentional and unintentional homicide between 3 and 5% each.

However, without a doubt these statistics do not break down the information in enough detail to make it possible to know if the crimes were committed with small arms and light weapons or the characteristics of the aggressors, much less the impact of these crimes on communities.

## 3.1.2 MILITARIZATION OF PUBLIC SECURITY AND THE IMPACT ON ARMED VIOLENCE

In addition to the limitations of federal policies on armed violence, we must mention the impact that the militarization of public security has had on the levels of violence against women in Mexico. This section addresses some of the implications of these measures.

Militarization is a process that has been understood as the direct participation of the armed forces in tasks unrelated to military doctrine. It is also a process that, in terms of public security, implies that police departments are organized and operate under military dynamics, weapons and equipment.

In this framework, it is important to mention that the militarization of public security in Mexico is not a process that began in the six-year term of Felipe Calderón Hinojosa with the so-called “war against drug trafficking,” but dates back a long time, from the moment when the Army, Navy and Air Force became involved in various matters related to public security. However, it is with Calderón Hinojosa that violence in the country increased significantly, which was related to the increased participation given to the Army and the Navy in police tasks to combat organized crime.

It is also important to note that militarization goes hand and hand with the fact that in both public policies and official narratives, military and war language is used, with words such as “combat,” “confront,” “neutralize” or other words that allude to an armed force

relationship between the State and people who break the law. This has generated a kind of cultural militarization in society, in which everyone wants to “combat” to “provide a solution.”

In this sense, as previously stated, the implementation of this security strategy brought not only an increase, but also a change in the way that women are being murdered in the country. Based on this data, it is essential to study closely the relationship between three factors: 1) the consequences for women of the growing tendency of the State to militarize security; 2) the transformations of the characteristics of violence against women in terms of spaces and modalities, and 3) the absence of policies to prevent and address violence against women, whose diagnosis takes into account other scenarios of violence in addition to those that are normally examined. An example of these additional scenarios include the implications of the militarization of security in terms of the availability and use of weapons.

Regarding the first two factors, the report “Las dos guerras” (The Two Wars), published by Intersecta, suggests that militarization in the streets has had a significant influence on the way in which murders occur, and also has had a direct impact on the increase in homicides. Specifically—and based on a model econometric model of “differences in differences”—, the study concluded that violent incidents between the Army and alleged criminal groups have been

triggering the increase in homicides that have occurred with a firearm in the street, for murders of both men and women.<sup>66</sup>

Regarding the last factor, currently Mexico does not have policies that address violence against women caused by the militarized context and the high availability of weapons in the country, even though this militarization is one of the main contexts that generate violence against women. On the contrary, despite the demands of civil society and the recommendations of international human rights organizations, Mexico has ignored the serious consequences of militarizing security and involving the armed forces, with an increasing number of authorities, in public security tasks.

Since 2018, in fact, the Federal Executive, headed by Lopez Obrador, has shown special interest in militarizing public security, which has included constitutional reforms to create a new security force, the National Guard. The government also assigned additional authorities to the armed forces<sup>67</sup> and protected economic resources appropriated for both purposes.<sup>68</sup> In contrast, many resources destined for the prevention of and responses to violence against women in the country have been reduced.<sup>69</sup> Programs to address violence against women have been dismantled;<sup>70</sup> resources have been cut from research centers, many of which carry out important research projects on violence against women.

The president has stated directly that violence against women, denounced by women themselves, was false.<sup>71</sup> Together, all these decisions and the absence of policies contribute to the increased violence against women.

Let's look at testimonies about the military's presence in this violence:

*We have no cases in which public officials are perpetrators, with the exception of a trans-femicide where the perpetrators are soldiers and used firearms only used by the military. This transfemicide was against a trans woman that did sex work, and it is in that context of being hired, when she gets in a vehicle, they go out and kill her (anonymous human rights defender).*

*With forced migration, the theme of violence and sexual assault is evident with violations from military personal, by gangs.. It is something that is always present in the testimonies, there are images that they would randomly show up heavily armed, in the middle of the night to escort them out, armed, or they would constantly threaten them with their arrival. There isn't a specific reason, they just pick and enter, they take and steal our valuable items, and that was constant, they were defenseless... it is random, they would just pass by and pick their target, there was no objective, it is simply about maintaining that territory submerged in fear. **Claudia***

66 Intersecta, "Las dos guerreras"

67 See: Mexican Government, "Decreto por el que se reforman, adicionan y derogan diversas disposiciones" and "Acuerdo por el que se dispone de la Fuerza Armada."

68 See: Mexican Government "Decreto por el que se establecen las medidas de austeridad."

69 Consult the press release published by Amnesty International Mexico, Equis: Justicia para las Mujeres, Red Nacional de Refugios and Red Nacional de Casas de la Mujer indigena

70 Consult Mexican Government, "Decreto por el que

71 MLO dice que el 90% de las llamadas sobre violencia contra las mujeres son falsas," 15 de mayo de 2020,

### 3.1.3 THE EFFORTS FROM CIVIL SOCIETY

Although it might seem that the government isn't doing much to put an end to armed violence that has taken the lives of thousands of women, civil society has made important efforts to reduce violence against them. It is not an exaggeration to say that since 2020, the movement fighting violence against women gained considerable momentum in Mexico and became one of the government's biggest counterweights.

Among the feminist activists interviewed for this study are women who belong to the National Citizen Observatory on Femicide, the Center for Support of Trans Identities, *Casa de Muñecas Tiresia*, and *Las Libres*.

From civil society in Mexico, some efforts have been made to make the problem of armed violence and gender visible, among them:

- The “Observatorio Nacional de Violencia Armada y Género,” developed between Desarma México, A.C., and the Collective Analysis of Security with Democracy (Casede)<sup>72</sup> sought to answer questions such as in which entities there are more women affected by armed violence, in which places women are attacked more frequently with firearms and how it has evolved the phenomenon in Mexico. The study is limited to the period of 2011 and 2013 and does not establish aspects related to the dimension of care.

- The report “Keys to understand and prevent the murders of Women in Mexico,” generated by Data Cívica and the Area of Sexual and Reproductive Rights of the Center for Economic Research and Teaching (CIDE): emphasizes the two types of violence that women are most commonly killed for in Mexico, armed violence on public roads and violence at home.
- The report “The two wars,” by the Intersecta organization: analyzes the impact of the confrontations in which the Armed Forces were involved in Mexico between 2007 and 2018, within the framework of the so-called “war against drug trafficking” had on the incidence of homicides of women.
- The “Second academic meeting on good practices to address armed violence in Mexico: a look at armed violence against women,” organized by 24-0 Mexico, the National Women's Institute and the UNAM Legal Research Institute: The objective was for the participating specialists to contribute experiences and good practices on the treatment of armed violence in Mexico, integrating the gender perspective, not only considering women as a population at risk of vulnerability, but also as agents in the construction of peace.

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<sup>72</sup> For more information, see Arriaga, Roldan y Ruiz, “Mujeres víctimas de violencia armada”

## 3.2 WHAT SHOULD THE POLICY AGAINST ARMED VIOLENCE BE LIKE WITH A GENDER PERSPECTIVE?

**G**ender and sexual orientation always cross paths with the experience of armed violence. That is why it is necessary to focus on public policies with an intersectional focus.<sup>73</sup> This approach must analyze the gender dynamics underlying armed gender violence, focusing on how gender expectations shape the narratives, roles and impacts of differences.

Women, sex workers and family members who survive armed gender violence, or who have lost family members and people from their community as a result of it, must be taken into account as a priority by public prevention policies and give the subject extra attention. It is vital that free and accessible public services, such as medical care and psycho-emotional assistance for survivors, employment opportunities and job reintegration for survivors and their families, be considered as part of a system of care for survivors and victims, and weapons collection strategies, among others.

Likewise, despite the disproportionate and different impacts that are experienced from women, girls and LGBTIQ+ people, they should not be stereotyped as vulnerable or victims. Policies for the prevention, control and regulation of violence.

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73 LeBrun, "Gender-responsive. Small arms control"

74 WILPF, Preventing gender-based violence through arms control, 2016.

75 ONU Mujeres, "El trabajo de cuidados"

The armed forces must be able to recognize the differentiated use of weapons, as well as their transfer and proliferation among these groups, in accordance with their distinctive gender motivations and expectations.<sup>74</sup>

### 3.2.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISARMAMENT WITH A CARE PERSPECTIVE

**I**n the world of global activism against armed gender violence, they raise awareness on how women continue to confront this violence, in some legal cases, due to stereotypes and inequalities of gender. If this data is correct, it offers a comprehensive understanding of gender, well the practice of organizing instances of armed gender violence against the LGBTQ+ community does not require visibility, resources that reach the political sphere in Mexico and in many other countries. Similarly, there are other blind spots in the WPS Agenda (Women, Peace and Security, Dashboard, Women's Peace and Security Panel of the UN Security Council) that highlight the need to study other dimensions and different effects of gender such as consequences of the use of SALW. Such is the case of the actions.

In general the precautions taken are the measures and activities we engage in to secure our own well being and the well being of others. The precautions have a physical and mental scope, since it includes efforts to meet the needs of individuals such as mental health services or everyday concerns.<sup>75</sup> These precautions are conceived as a right that should be guaranteed, for that to happen it requires

correspondence between the sectors – public and private, as well as between genders.

For decades, research, cooperation and activism has highlighted armed conflict and also generated evidence over how the measures taken during and after armed conflict are focused on the women and girls affected. National and international agents have gathered evidence on how women and girls have planned to disproportionately redeem care roles as a result of using SALW, whether that means caring for those who have gone through armed gender violence or those to perpetrate it. It is a phenomenon which can be conceptualized as the appropriation of the work of women and girls in armed contexts such as those involving conflict.<sup>76</sup>

However there are other instances and dynamics of armed gender violence that remain unexplored, especially in countries like Mexico, where arguably there has been the existence of non-international armed conflict since 2006, due to violence related to drugs and strategies by the state to deal with it.<sup>77</sup> Felipe Calderon’s administration launched a campaign against this kind of organized crime, a “war against drug trafficking.” This increased the homicide rate and human rights violation, while accelerating militarization of the country. Apart from legal classification, the consequences of armed violence in Mexico are best characterized by Peter Maurer, president of the International Red Cross Committee as “ similar to those experienced by countries in armed conflict.”<sup>78</sup>

Likewise, the use of armed gender violence leads to work, creating the need for caretaking as a result of the social expectations within the community, and also the structural conditions characterize by gender violence in the country. For example, in 2020, with the COVID-19 health crisis, the number of women murdered, calls for help due to violence, and the opening of criminal investigations for family violence, increased in numbers.<sup>79</sup> In addition, prominent cases of gender violence motivated protests in August of 2019 against the police for their sexual violence against women in custody a claim that spread to the justice system.

In this context, “the police don’t take care of me, my friends take care of me” and “they don’t take care of me, they rape me” have become claims of the feminist movement and activists in Mexico, who stand up for the faults of the security and justice system at the federal, state and local level. The claim does not only demonstrate the lack of institutional accessibility and effectiveness but also the attitudes in regards to gender that spread throughout the operation of these institutions and promote neglect of the dignity and wellbeing of women, girls and persons of the LGBTIQ+ community.

In Mexico, 71% of the actions being carried out are by women, due to the fact that social organization continues to operate under traditional gender roles that women and girls have an ability, if not an obligation, to care as an expression of solidarity and affection toward other people.<sup>80</sup> This attitude was expressed by President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador during the COVID-19 health emergency to justify the

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76 Meger, “War as feminized labour”

77 Iteso and Mexican Commission for Defense and Promotion of Human Rights, *The Situation of Violence*

78 Garduno, “Equiparan a guerra”

79 Equis: Justicia para Mujeres, Intersecta, and Red Nacional de Refugios, “ Las dos pandemias.”

80 Villa Sanchez, 2019

removal of essential public services that correspond with nursing in the public sector. It was argued that “abuelitas” (grandmas), along with other women can do these tasks instead of direct transfers.<sup>81</sup> The infrastructure in relation to care that the State guarantees is limited, it transfers a major burden to women and girls to cover the basic, medical, nutritional, emotional, organizational and other needs that are required for social reproduction. If it were counted, the care provided would represent 23.5% of national gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>82</sup> However, as much as this hidden labor functions as a subsidy from the government, it is obligated to guarantee the well being and dignity of the population.

The dynamics and social expectations based on gender strengthen the experience of armed violence, since they are at the center of the construction of narratives for the use of SALW and these are evident in the different impacts generated. The possession of SALW can be linked to narratives of masculinity reinforced by individual and community gender expectations.<sup>83</sup>

In a similar matter, the proliferation of SALW is marked by how people give “cultural, traditional and political justifications” to the use of arms, which are built from power and gender dynamics.<sup>84</sup> Although there is diversity and complexity in the gender roles that utilize firearms, it is true that SALW, regulated or not, plays an important role in maintaining the dynamics masculine dominance through gender violence.

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81 Morales, Miranda and Villa, “Pide AMLO a mujeres y familias”

82 Inegi, “Trabajo no Remunerado de los Hogares.”

83 LeBrun, “Gender-responsive. Small arms control.”

84 Farr and Gebre-Wold, Gender Perspectives on Small Arms.

85 LeBrun, “Gender-responsive. Small arms control.”

86 Widmer, 2014.

The socioeconomic impacts of armed gender violence are strongly present from the perspective of care work that is unpaid and unrecognized.<sup>85</sup> Facing the threat and practice of armed gender violence, women, and girls assume heavy emotional burdens to accompany each other before, during and after armed violence. They also are affected by an increase in these labors and care for the persons who are injured by SALW,<sup>86</sup> which reduces their chances of joining paid economic, educational, community and leisure activities.

*They (mom and dad of Aidee, who was shot and killed by an unknown person in the UNAM) were going to UNAM with psychologists, but only for a short time, for the emotional aspect, the pain, the grief. We do not take the kids anymore to my sister-in law's who says religion does her good, my brother doesn't go as well, although we still respect her. **Gilberta***

*I think that we do not have trust in the institutions and in the institutions that administer justice, we do not have trust in the Public Ministries, in the prosecutors, and that is why we prefer to set it aside. It isn't that we “normalize” it, rather I think we do not have trust in these processes and prefer to turn the page. We do this without working on it emotionally but that later has repercussions on our mental health. **Natalia***

*There is a major issue with childhoods because the mom is also killed. The amount of orphans is notorious, because their dad disappeared and later on their mom eventually disappeared,*

because their mom had to go out and look for work...they usually end up staying with their grandmother or aunt, but there are many that remain completely alone. They become part of the community,

their neighbor gives them food, dinner, they do not attend school. Now let's talk about children who are armed, these are children who see no way out, they are young from nine, 7 years of age and already armed. These orphaned children, and these widowed women whose husbands were murdered, or domestic violence survivors, carry with them the traumas that they develop over time and there is no form of mental health support systems. However these children who saw their mothers get killed, how their father killed their mother and had to go live with their grandmother the next day, continue with their lives, what happens to their trauma especially after carrying it for so long. It will for sure impact them and their development, who will that child become

Looking at the topic of arms today, more specifically armed adolescents or those who have suffered the consequences of the existence and presence of arms, has to do a lot with the topic of childhood and the focus of adolescence, also distinguishable with the topic of gender. Attention for the victim and mental health support is very important, but not only its existence also its availability. In the topic of mental health it can be said that masculinity impacts it a great deal. The theme of masculinity is present and is what sustains criminal life.

Even those who were in the public space, those who unfortunately were there when a confrontation took the life of a child, they need attention too.. The mother's of their daughters who were killed by femicide, those mothers who are in charge of their grandchildren, nobody attends to them, they stay alone. **Claudia**

On numerous occasions women and girls increased their contributions to the family income, including becoming head of the household<sup>87</sup> to offset costs of care and attention or due to the loss of income of injured family members. With the COVID-19 pandemic it is anticipated that this burden of care will increase.

The neighbors talk no? That their moms are never there are that they don't have a mom anymore, that they don't have a dad, that the neighbor feeds them, the other neighbor gives them dinner, and that they don't go to school. In this case we are talking about armed violence which leaves many adolescents hopeless.. It leaves many women alone.. Well I'm referring to being alone with their children, the household expenses and the upbringing of their children, they are sometimes in the care of parents and others. It is very interesting seeing these families that are perhaps still not recognized, where it is possible to return to this issue of collective upbringing.

The moms who lost their daughters to femicide, they are also there holding their grandkids, hugging and grabbing them, but nobody cares for them, they remain alone. **Claudia**

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87 Farr, 2003.

After the murder of our mom many things changed, the finances, family members, my education, many things.. My whole life transformed and unfortunately I did not have the support I thought I would have from my mom's side of the family. Although my sister was not with me I took care of her, I helped my aunt financially so she can help me care for her. My mom was in a union at her job and they were able to provide for some of the funerary expenses, they helped me pay for the procedures, transfer, coffin and the funerary service for the wake, they also paid for so they did not give it to me, I was not going to take charge of her, my aunt was, they asked me for legal guardianship to prove my aunt was caring for her. I looked for benefits in my job but they asked for the same thing. I spoke to my aunt, who can support my sister in whatever she needs, she can secure her, and from there came family problems concerning legal guardianship - up until today it is still very difficult and delicate - Overall, I take care of her despite the family situation we are in, the only thing I will do is fulfill my duties because she is my sister and I can't abandon her (Victor)

I imagine that when the census in Mexico City is done we are going to have about a thousand, or twelve hundred orphans due to femicide, and what are we going to do about it? (anonymous human rights defender)

It is important to mention, that besides sex workers, people of sexual diversity, like trans women, have networks and support groups to take care of one another before the lack of access and discrimination from public institutions that should guarantee them access to justice, health and free of violence.

### **On accompagnement and collective care:**

In jail I volunteered to work with those who lived in dormitory 10, those sick with HIV, I helped them with their passing. I did not know thanatology, but without wanting to I ended up with a job in it. (Kenya)

### **On cases of aggression with SALW:**

Well, only three months prior, I let one of my users from Chalco, where I have a house, not a hostel. I rent it and donate my furniture to them, and I let them use it. (Kenya)

The Center de Apoyo a las Identidades Trans (Support Center for Trans Identities) is an organization that works under three axis of defense and promotion of the human rights of trans women, especially sex workers; and CAIT main streams this work in the area of health, security and access to justice. We do this based on a series of accompaniments with victims of human rights violations, trans women in precarious situations who live with HIV, who are sex workers or who are undergoing some type of intersectionality. And, above all, that CAIT is an organization that works a lot from the community perspective, through workshops...

I think with the topic of femicide there are certain networks of support, that is to say family - mothers of the victims, mothers of cisgender women seek justice -, but in the case of trans women these families disappear, why because they don't want to be involved in these topics of violence and the embarrassment of having a trans daughter. In many cases in the cases that involve access to justice, many families do not want to get involved, they do

*not want to file a report, open up a case, or look for the murderers of their daughters trans femicide. I think that in itself shows the lack of support for trans women, from family, at least blood relatives, that unfortunately are in charge of legal decisions, unless they give their power to an organization. That is precisely what we have done at CAIT.*

*Exactly what civil society is looking for is that relatives and families get involved in these processes of access to justice, either by filing a complaint, and if not, at least by delegating power, the faculty to do so, to the organization or support center. **Natalia***

In the interviews conducted with survivors, family members, and activists, an important element to highlight about the experience of gender-based armed violence was the care provided by women, linked to the use of SALW. This occurs not only in terms of caring for people affected or wounded with weapons, but also in the accompaniment they share with each other in life and also in death, with survivors, family members and activists due to armed violence of gender.

It is symbolic that the practice of accompaniment and care between female feminists, sex workers and women has attempted to be consolidated in cases like Kenya Cuevas and Natalia Lane, by means of their organizations or groups that through their activism, like their provisions in care and service, care for survivors and victims of armed gender violence. These violent experiences and their frequency in the communities reinforces the urgency and importance of guaranteeing the rights of care.

*Our group surged when Carmen Liboro (teacher and president of the organization) took in her neighbors children, who had been killed, and began buying them with her salary things, diapers, shoes, clothes, groceries.. I recruited more women to help her. We supported children, adolescents and orphans because their moms were murdered or disappeared, grandmothers who were left in charge with the kids, fathers who are also part of the group because their wives were murdered, we have someone with HIV and their kid. Acapulco has an Amber Alert program against violence and we participate with support and put our resources there, and towards the kids who are left unprotected because their moms are murdered through femicides, we do not have an eco though and we are seen badly for it. (Susana)*

*After the murder of Paola I started to fight so that they could turn in the bodies to me. In that search for the bodies, I have access to many investigation cases, many of which I am following up on. In fact I even demand that the government pays for the funeral services, that they accompany the victims. I have learned from being a victim, from being a witness, but I have also learned as a person how to sensitize ourselves. I have one body in which they told me, "You know what? I am glad that they died and it doesn't interest me." So from the families there you learn the structural violence that they lived under.*

It is also important to note that there are no policies that apply to people who are living with some kind of disability due to armed violence. This, coupled with the implementation gaps in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities, causes a situation where families of the victims are charged with guaranteeing care and facing psychological consequences of armed violence with their own resources.

## 3.2.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISARMAMENT WITH AN INTERSECTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The availability of small and light weapons<sup>88</sup> is related to the type of violence that is perpetuated in both public and private environments, that is whether it is a situation of open armed conflict, criminality or domestic violence. The presence of firearms added to the structure of discrimination, gives priority to the use of these devices to make the positions of any of the parties prevail.

Based on the former, we find it useful to return to the systematization presented by the Small Arms Survey to incorporate the gender perspective when proposing attention to the different stages where there is a presence of weapons<sup>89</sup>

- It must be integral, that is to say, gender concept should not be reduced to only femicides but including all gender identities even those who are non binary.
- It must be intersectional, which implies other characteristics will be taken into account, like those that highlight the precarious conditions that certain groups face and their vulnerability, such as age, economic situation, original identity, religion, place of residence, or disability -physical, psychological, cognitive or sensory among others.

- The relational nature of the interactions of gender identities must be recognized, since these are built from social dynamics - for example, what is expected from a “man” or from a “woman,” as well as conceptions on power.
- It must be located under a specific context, which means that living conditions and the logic of coexistence will be different in irregular settlements on the outskirts of large cities than in middle-class suburbs, or even within the same spaces.

This understanding of how gender affects people’s lives becomes relevant when, for example, we talk about the violence that is exercised against the LGBTIQ+ population —integral perspective—, an issue to which some societies are more prone for reasons of accentuated homophobia —specific context—, by living under implicitly heteropatriarchal norms, for which there are reasons the different manifestations of violence against them could be a kind of “punishment” —relational sphere—.

The activist and survivor Natalia Lane shares part of her experience with us, beginning with the discrimination against trans women to access study or work spaces, which generates economic insecurity,

88 See: United Nations, General Assembly, “Report of the Panel of Governmental Experts”

89 Lebrun, “Gender-responsive. Small Arms control,” 62.

which highlights the relevance of the intersectional perspective — for example In Mexico City, 45% of the trans population has faced discrimination in the classroom and only 3% of trans women have university studies,<sup>90</sup> while 25% of trans women in the capital are engaged in to sex work<sup>91</sup> —; continuing with verbal attacks in public spaces, reaching beatings and sexual violence in the family and private spheres, up to its most extreme form, such as transfemicide.

*For this reason, I tell my fellow trans activists not to state and not to talk about trans life expectancy of 35 years, not to talk about “they are killing us,” because the ones they are killing are the poor, the migrants, sex workers, racialized women, trans women who have that cocktail, that mixture.*

*They are killing companeras that work in the streets, the ones who come from Honduras, from Guatemala, the ones who live with HIV, the ones who got kicked out of their homes, who were told to never return, those are the ones that are getting killed. Those who have the life expectancy of 35, those who are not fellow researchers, I respect them because they are doing something important, that is visualizing our experiences and other ambitions, but that is not life’s trajectory.*

*They are the companeras who inject biopolymers or oil into their butts or breasts, who eventually die at age 20. Why? Because they followed a hegemonic beauty standard which told them if they didn’t have large breasts, they were not a woman.*

*I think it is fair to connect this intersectional viewpoint with these experiences, they are important because there you see ethnicity, social class and gender crossed, permanently. (Natalia)*

As demonstrated in this example, there are circumstances that increase the conditions of vulnerability that surround certain populations, so the presence of small arms in any of these stages can increase the probability of coercion over people and the ability to assault.

At the same time, arms have something called a cycle of use, which in every stage, from production to its destruction, it becomes convenient to identify the gender dynamics present. This is in order to be able to propose weapons control mechanisms that prevent their use from reinforcing armed violence that is living in a certain place.

Generally the cycle of use of small arms<sup>92</sup> is divided into four parts: manufacturing, acquisition, possession and use: transfers, including illicit trade, storage and disposal. In this regard, it should be noted that within each stage it is possible to find that certain tasks are associated with the role that each gender is expected to play.

For example, in terms of production, but also in storage, from the moment they are with military corporations that are in charge of these activities or have legal control over them<sup>93</sup>, we can concur that traditionally, it is men who deal with these labors, while women fulfill an administrative role<sup>94</sup>.

90 Alfonsín et al, “Mujeres trans privadas de libertad,” 11.

91 Ibid., 12

92 LeBrun, “Gender-responsive. Small arms control,” 66, figure 1.

93 Ibid,67.

94 Ibid, 71.

On the other hand there is a tendency to identify women and adolescents victim roles since they usually receive the aggression in the domestic sphere<sup>95</sup>, while transfers take place illicitly, these groups are used as “mules” to transport complete parts, components and any other illicit material jointly.<sup>96</sup>

However, these areas have also presented an opportunity, since the awareness campaigns on the risk of having weapons in the house have been directed at women, with the aim of their partners not to acquire or keep them in the same family home<sup>97</sup>. In the same sense, efforts have been made towards campaigns for the voluntary exchange of arms, in order that families hand in weapons they own and gradually disarm the community in situations of conflict.<sup>98</sup>

The former statement is evidence that it is important to see women not only as a population that suffers the effects differently but as people who are capable of being agents of change in their communities.

With regard to the acquisition of small arms it is still a pending matter that not only should search be carried out on whoever intends to acquire the equipment legally<sup>99</sup> but that data related to any form of violence against women and minors<sup>100</sup>, whether they are alimony debtors, people who have complaints of sexual harassment,

and even if an emergency call has been made by the couple, when they have withdrawn the charges or an agreement has been reached, if the person had a legal permit to have a firearm at home, whether it was for sports use or for self-defense, this is revoked along with the equipment.

Of course, several fields are left out to prevent the diversion of the use of small arms, such as those related to the loss or theft of legal equipment<sup>101</sup> as well as the issue of the history of attacks on civilians by certain corporations of the public force, whether that be in the form of coerced sexual violence with a firearm, the causing of injuries, or even extrajudicial executions, in addition to the high availability of equipment on the black market to be acquired illegally.<sup>102</sup>

Additionally in Mexico, the topic of parts, munitions and explosives is lost when attending to the armed violence that has been emphasized over the last few years. Especially since the contextual circumstances that result in the urgency of illicit trade of equipment assembled in the United States.<sup>103</sup>

It is important to have data to limit the spectrum of violence that is generated by small arms and light weapons which is why the transparency and accountability exercises of the US become essential.<sup>104</sup> This is parallel to the information coordination systems and implementation of actions at the international level. This couples

95 Ibid, 69.

96 Ibid, 70.

97 Ibid, 68.

98 Ibid, 72.

99 Sedena, “Permiso extraordinario para la adquisición de armas.”

100 Around the world many countries have produced databases on violence against women, integrating hate crimes is still pending towards LGBTIQ population. See: Colombia Law 1257 of 2008 (December 4 2008) available at <https://cutt.ly/gvJBxBL>; Joel Silva, Ley Maria da Penha:CERS (October 9 2019), disponible en <https://cutt.ly/xvJBYey>

101 LeBrun, “Gender Responsive. Small Arms control,” 69-70

102 Ibid.

103 See: Medina, “A snapshot of illicit arms trafficking.”

104 See: Medina, “La pertinencia del enfoque de genero”

with the possibility of sharing failed and successful experiences as well as being able to work on the logics under which armed violence occurs or is promoted in the world.

Finally, establishing dialogue and cooperation mechanisms with civil society organizations seems necessary, on the one hand, to be able to take advantage of the networks built with the population at the local level, and on the other, to continue reviewing impartially with the arms control exercises with a view to reducing gender violence against women, girls and the non-binary population. This lies in being able to include the perspective of the people who are being directly affected by armed violence in a distinct way.



# 4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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This study, which has been a collective effort, has left us with greater knowledge and many reflections. Below we recapitulate the main conclusions and recommendations which have also been presented throughout the document.

# CONCLUSIONS

The concept of gender and its comprehensiveness: The concept of gender is not reduced to the female identity, but rather encompasses all gender identities, including non-binary ones which is why we include the LGBTQI+ population when investigating gender-based violence with firearms. Gender-based violence with and without firearms permeates through all social classes, settings and has fatal consequences for the victims and their families or friends at many different physical, psycho-emotional, social, economic, and relational levels. For this reason, it is necessary to analyze armed violence from an inclusive and intersectional perspective.

The intersectionality between the characteristics and conditions of victims of gender-based violence with firearms. Throughout the interviews, it was observed that victims faced a multiplicity of challenges due to the discrimination and oppression systems that persist in our society. On top of the fact that Mexico has a wide availability of firearms and armed violence.

Similarly, these social and economic characteristics —age, housing, gender, education, economic activity to which they are engaged, marital status, residence in marginalized urban areas or rural areas— determine a victim's access to justice as well as the search for comprehensive care for the physical, psychological, social and economic consequences of violence which are oftentimes permanent.

The aforementioned information highlights the absence of an intersectional perspective for the elaboration of public policies to prevent and deal with armed violence from a gender perspective. An intersectional perspective would also help with the administration of justice, from the moment a complaint is filed until the investigation is carried out to access comprehensive care.

An example of this is sex workers who identify themselves as trans women and face physical aggressions due to their gender identity. Due to their type of work, public security elements usually exhort them not to report the attacks or the crimes they have experienced. At the same time, if they go to the justice system, they point out that if they do not have legal recognition of their gender identity, the gender with which they identify is not respected and they are victims of mistreatment by the authorities who are reviewing cases. This is because forensic doctors usually make victims feel uncomfortable. If migrant women sex workers are victims of sexual assault involving a firearm, they do not have incentives to report it because of the criminalization of the authorities regarding their migratory status and because of their work activity.

As previously mentioned, the lack of access to formal education and the lack of knowledge regarding one's rights and how to access them affect the victims and their families in the same way. Therefore, requesting help for their cases and demanding full diligence in criminal investigation processes is difficult for victims.

Relational: The profile of the aggressors has expanded with the increase in violence with firearms in public spaces. Aggressors range from partners, ex-partners, husbands who are linked to crime and drug trafficking, police or security forces, soldiers, politicians, and people with economic or political power.

In most instances, the role that each person plays in society also affects the disposition of the bodies once their lives have been taken. Female bodies and those with non-hegemonic aesthetics show evidence of the injuries inflicted by an individual. In addition, their bodies are exhibited in public spaces.

The specific context of aggression and violence: Violence against women has increased in the last 15 years in Mexico. Of particular concern is the increase in the number of femicides, in calls for help, and the need for attention at shelters for women victims of domestic violence.

The context and profile of the aggressors influence the type of firearm they use. Those who are linked to crime and are middle or high-ranking officers have access to long firearms. Those who engage in drug dealing or are a weak link in the chain of crime own small arms.

In most cases of femicide, aggressors use firearms. However, it is difficult to detect other types of aggressions generated by the use of firearms such as injuries or sexual violence because they are reported in public records.

Regarding the LGBTQI+ population, there is no systematized record of the attacks and violence suffered by these groups according to official public information. Yet, several reports developed by the *Letra S* organization have been recovered to identify people with diverse gender identities who have been killed with a firearm between 2017 and 2019.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

In each interview, we collected the person's proposals and suggestions. To accurately reflect the voices of the survivors and those affected by violence, we chose to place them in this section, alongside the recommendations from the organizations that carried out the study:

## 1. DESIGN AND PROMOTION OF PREVENTION POLICIES

**W**ith the complete and informed participation of survivors, relatives of victims, activists, academics, and civil society organizations, we need effective public policies to prevent violence with firearms against women and the LGBTQI+ community. These policies must be in accordance with international legislation and with good international practices. They must also have specific routes for their implementation and an adequate institutional structure that identifies the responsible institutions.

*First, there is no serious, effective public policy for prevention, punishment, and attention to violence against women. The most we have is training that has not been of any use. A lot of money has been thrown away. When there is a response, it is often too late because people have already been killed. The issue is prevention because it is linked to public security. This is because municipalities need strong police, security policies, and the prevention of violence against women in their territories. **Veronica***

*The victims are numerous and a more comprehensive plan is required by the local and federal authorities: for investigation, to*

*reduce impunity, and to repair the damage for the victims. There isn't that. We are not in a framework of transitional justice, which would be necessary. **Anonymous Human Rights Defender***

## 2. IN DEALING WITH CASES OF VIOLENCE

**T**o address and reduce gender-based violence with firearms we need a change of vision or conception throughout society.

*To understand gender-based violence against women as a serious violation of human rights, it is necessary to make the state responsible for preventing it, protecting one's access to justice, and favoring a model of transitional justice. **Anonymous human rights defender***

This is a model focused on providing access to truth, justice, reparation, and care for victims and their families. Not only by punishing those responsible for the aggression, but also by understanding the structural processes of violence against women and people with non-binary gender identities. This is because these processes escalate until they reach their most extreme forms, which are femicide and transfemicide, among others.

It is also important to claim that reparation and attention is a right of the victims and not a concession of the state since it is its institutions that do not guarantee or allow the right of women and people with diverse gender identities to a life free of violence.

According to a case advocate, the minimum conditions for dealing with cases of armed violence against women and the LGBTQI+ population would be the following:

*First of all, there has to be a very close collaboration between the authorities that investigate gender crimes. For example, in one city there was coordination on the investigation of gender-related crimes. The idea of creating this coordination is to have more cases on the radar of women who are in risky situations. This way, women can be helped more easily and we can guarantee protection measures and the monitoring of these measures can be guaranteed.*

*Specialized prosecutors in the states with consolidated structures need to send [the] message that certain acts will not go unpunished. Households must know that there will be consequences for each of these actions. The investigation gives the benefit of the doubt to women. It is not like before when aggressors would get away with saying that she “committed suicide” or that she “deserved it.”*

*We need to protect children and adolescents who are victims of armed violence. Added to this, we need a plan to address the issue comprehensively because a case-by-case plan will take too long. There should be a list of all children who are victims of armed violence. By doing this, it will help address the issue in a more structured way.*

### 3. PUT THE VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE AT THE CENTER

*Testimony of a human rights defender: Putting victims at the center of our work would require a daily effort where there is a change of habits and a change in perspective from how we normally work.*

*Generally, public ministries do not look for the victims and inform them about the state of the investigations on their case. Regularly, it is the victims who call because no one has updated them on their case.*

*This lack of proactivity (by public ministries) has to change. They must also consider gender in investigations .*

### 4. CARE FOR SURVIVORS AND FAMILIES OF VICTIMS OF GUN VIOLENCE

*Claudia’s testimony: I think that there needs to be medical attention for victims and innocent bystanders. The mothers of women who were murdered also need medical attention.*

In January 2013, after months of intense demands and citizen mobilizations in the face of a disproportionate increase in violence in Mexico, the General Victims Law was issued to recognize and guarantee the rights of victims of crimes and human rights violations. Specifically, the law gives people the right to assistance, protection, care, truth, justice, comprehensive reparations, due diligence, and other rights enshrined in it as well as those in the Constitution and in

the international human rights treaties that Mexico is a part of. The law requires all authorities and public servants of the different levels of government to comply with it. The law also gave rise to the National Victim Assistance System and the Executive Commission for Victim Assistance. However, the performance of the Executive Commission for Victim Assistance has been very poor to such an extent that it has received complaints of mistreatment, sexual harassment, negligence, and recommendations from the National Human Rights Commission.

Additionally, the commission does not attend to survivors and families of victims of violence with firearms from a gender perspective. Meanwhile, excessive violence continues to leave victims without attention or comprehensive redress. On top of these adverse elements, a November 2020 reform to the General Victims Law eliminated the Comprehensive Aid, Assistance, and Reparation Fund (FAARI). This reform practically annulled the law since instead of providing more resources for its implementation and guaranteeing the restitution of rights and comprehensive redress of the victims of violence, the resources are in the process of disappearing. It is now up to civil society and allied legislators to carry out legal actions against this reform. Also, victims and their families need to protect themselves against said reforms.

Regarding care for survivors, it is important to highlight that, based on the testimonies collected for this and other investigations, care after an attack continues to be extremely poor. For example, survivors face geographic, economic, attitudinal, and other barriers to access services. These are considered the minimum standard of care for survivors of gender-based violence, including health, social, police, and judicial services, according to the United Nations

Population Fund's framework of essential services for gender-based violence.

Structural discrimination continues to affect the provision of services for women who are trans, migrant, indigenous, and Afro-descendant. This lack of attention contributes to the fact that some survivors remain in situations of risk due to the lack of social and economic opportunities.

On the other hand, it is important to highlight that those who live with a disability resulting from the use of a firearm face even more barriers. The implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities continues to be deficient in terms of access to health services and social, police, and judicial services needed to guarantee independent living. In this sense, the responsibility for the well-being of these people is not assumed by the state, but rests with the individual and their immediate community, if they have one.

## 5. EASY ACCESS AND AVAILABILITY OF FIREARMS IN THE STATES AND THE COUNTRY

*Veronica's testimony: We must understand why so many firearms circulate, especially, the circulation of firearms for the exclusive use of the Army. We know what's going on with the Army on the streets, but there's not a lot of evidence on that. It seems to me that they have been very successful in saying that it is human trafficking, sexual exploitation, but it is not only that. It has to do with more macro-political levels and criminality.*

According to the testimonies we collected, civilians perceive that firearms have wide circulation and are easily accessed, especially from the black market. Because of this, it will be very important to consider the prevention control measures to reduce their use and access. Small Arms Survey has developed a practical guide on gender perspective in the control of small arms. We recommend its dissemination, knowledge, and application by public officials and those involved in relevant public policies.

It is essential to comply with the obligations concerning arms control in the international treaties and instruments that have been signed and ratified by Mexico, which in some cases has promoted them. If we want to reduce the violence that disproportionately affects women and LGBTQI+ communities in Mexico, it is urgent to talk about armed violence and gun control.

## TO EXPLORE OR TO CONTINUE DELVING INTO:

The systematization of data helps produce information on the dynamics of violence that prevail in our societies. The information must be truthful, relevant, and efficient, in such a way that it allows legislative and public policy decisions to have a direct impact on violence generated by firearms in the country and it incorporates the perspective of gender in its design, implementation, and evaluation. It is important to strengthen the mechanisms for transparency of public information and to maintain an open dialogue with civil society to provide feedback on the dynamics that are observed and occur at the local level that may spread widely towards other populations and territories. Thus, the participation of a multiplicity of agents becomes relevant for understanding the repercussions that violence generates with firearms on society as a whole.

Strengthen and support the work of civil society as it allows channels of dialogue with the affected populations. This helps establish bonds of trust when carrying out diagnoses, comprehensive support, and pilot projects for the construction of alternatives for a dignified life and peace for these populations.

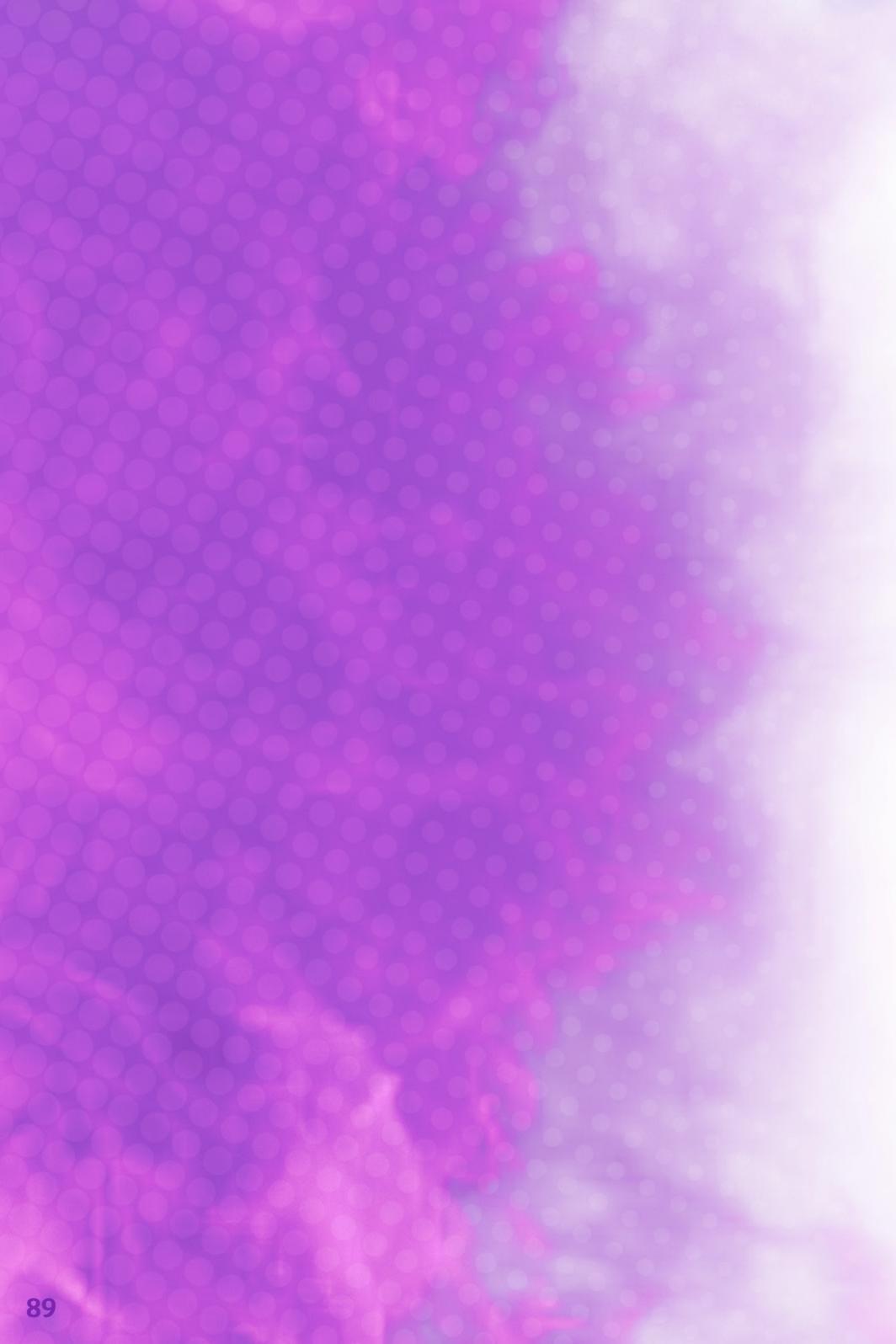
It is necessary to deepen the analysis and study of armed violence against women and people with non-binary identities, taking intersectionality into account. For example, a young indigenous woman, trans woman sex worker.

There should be direct efforts towards the construction of transitional justice while taking gender into account. In addition, there should be a vision and logic in imparting justice for indigenous peoples. An indigenous witness spoke about the difference in the applications of justice. She compared conventional justice involving laws and

institutions to the way indigenous people do justice. She mentioned that community justice is closer to what she would feel like a “fair” justice because it involves her community. That process determines the sanction and reparation as well as the community service that has to be carried out as a re-education process. Therefore, it usually implies that people have to work in spaces for collective benefit. In this process, there is less room for impunity and corruption.

Before concluding, we want to express our deep concern and sadness. While preparing this study, attacks with firearms against women have continued to occur in different parts of the country. Just as an example, on Monday, November 9, 2020, in Cancun, Quintana Roo, during a demonstration at the local Government Palace that protested the femicide of 20-year-old Bianca Alejandrina Lorenzana Alvarado, “Alexis.” During the demonstration, municipal police officers fired into the air and on the ground to disperse the protest, violently injuring eight people, most of them journalists. Two were shot, one of them, a female journalist, left with a bullet in her leg.

Likewise, we see how the state of Coahuila installed a video surveillance system with facial recognition in public spaces - a technology that has already entered into moratoriums in some places due to the human rights violations that have been incurred through its use. Resorting to this technology under the pretext of “not lowering our security guard,” in addition to violating human rights in general, could mainly be used as a tool of repression and dissuasion against social demonstrations. This is confirmed in the case of Coahuila, according to a press release:



*On the afternoon of September 27, in Saltillo's Plaza de Armas, three cameras captured the return of feminist groups to the streets after months of confinement. On that day, they protested the death of Alondra Gallegos García, a 20-year-old victim of femicide. It was the first time that the faces of dozens of protesters and activists were recorded on the servers of the state's new intelligent video surveillance system.*

It is important to remain vigilant about these types of events since, the local public security forces have been used to contain feminist protests, most of them related to the demand for justice and action by the authorities to prevent femicides from continuing to occur in the country. These actions criminalize citizen protest and send the message that it is permissible to continue attacking and violating women up to its most extreme form, otherwise known as femicide.

