



THE
LUTHERAN
WORLD
FEDERATION

A Communion
of Churches

Briefing Paper: Investing to prevent violence against women and girls

Introduction

This year the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) commemorates the 16 days campaign just two months after its 13th Global Assembly and the publication of its Gender Justice Toolbox which, among other things, provides resources and guidelines on prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence. During the Assembly, LWF crafted additional resolutions on ending gender-based violence as well as revisiting resolutions made at the Twelfth Assembly in 2017.

This year LWF also celebrates ten years of its Gender Justice Policy, a key document that has shaped its engagement on gender justice and women's empowerment, institutionally, in the member churches and in programming.

2023 also marks 75 years of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a global instrument which recognizes the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world. The Lutheran church played a key role in the formation of this global instrument.

16 days campaign theme

This year the LWF joins the 16 Days campaign under the UN Women Global theme **UNITE. Invest to Prevent Violence Against Women & Girls**, with its focus on financing different strategies to end violence against women and girls. This campaign theme is also aligned to the priority theme of the 2024 Commission on the Status of Women, focused on **Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective**.

The 16 days theme, which is a call to action- implores all stakeholders, including donors, governments and civil society, to move towards concrete commitments and investments. With just seven years remaining to meet the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), rapid infusion of funding into gender equality initiatives and institutions is needed.

Violence against women and girls has deep roots in the systemic inequality between men and women that has persisted throughout modern history. Investments which provide direct support to violence prevention, support survivors and strengthen legal systems to hold perpetrators accountable are imperative, and a sustained effort to promote women's full citizenship and participation is critical to proactive prevention. By mainstreaming gender across civil society and human rights sector projects, donors can increase the impact of their direct anti-violence against women and girls work.

Whilst financial investment is critical to ending violence against women and girls, there is also a need to invest in challenging harmful social norms and cultural practices, empowering women and girls as well as engaging men and boys to model positive masculinities.

The cost of Violence against Women and girls

Violence against women and girls is one of the most pervasive women's and girls' human rights violations, and the immediate and long-term physical, sexual, and mental consequences can be devastating, including death.

Data from UN Women shows the alarming extent of the problem. Globally, an estimated 736 million women—almost one in three—have been subjected to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both at least once in their life (30 per cent of women aged 15 and older). This figure excludes sexual harassment. More than 640 million or 26 per cent of women aged 15 and older have been subjected to intimate partner violence. In 2021, around 45,000 women and girls worldwide were killed by their intimate partners or other family members. This means that, on average, more than five women or girls are killed every hour by someone in their own family.

Economic insecurity due to disrupted livelihoods and limited social protection continue to increase women's and girls' vulnerability to violence¹. At the same time, violence increases women's risk of poverty and economic hardship due to both the direct costs of violence such as out-of-pocket health expenditures, and indirect costs like reduced earnings or livelihoods loss. COVID-19, violent conflicts and war and the climate crisis have also exacerbated violence against women and girls due to their gendered impacts.

In addition to the strong moral arguments underpinning advocacy for prevention of and response to violence against women and girls, the World Bank argues that 'to end poverty in a liveable planet, we need gender equality' as it not only benefits women but also societies economically. Gender-based violence (GBV) incurs significant social and economic costs at a national level. In some countries, GBV is estimated to cost states up to 3.7% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which is more than twice what several countries spend on education.²

Price Waterhouse Coopers estimates that in Australia violence against women costs \$21.7 billion a year, with survivors bearing the primary burden of this cost. Governments (national and State and Territory) bear the second biggest cost burden, estimated at \$7.8 billion a year, comprising health, administration and social welfare costs.

A 2017 study by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) revealed that improvements to gender equality would generate up to 10.5 million additional jobs by 2050 and the EU employment rate would reach almost 80 percent.

As donors grapple with fallout from the COVID-19 crisis, it is crucial that funding for recovery not be taken from the already meagre allocations for combatting GBV.

Funding landscape

Despite the huge cost of violence against women and girls, and the importance of supporting the work of women's rights organizations, and defenders of women's human rights, funding towards these organizations does not match the reality on the ground. According to UN Women, **only 1 percent of gender-focused state aid is directed to these organizations**, and funding has not improved despite increased momentum and clear evidence of need. 75% of countries do not have systems to track budget allocations for gender equality in general.

An additional challenge is that there is limited data on national budgets to address violence against women and girls or gender equality in general.

¹ <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Policy-brief-Addressing-violence-against-women-through-social-protection-en.pdf>

² <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/socialsustainability/brief/violence-against-women-and-girls>

Violence against women and girls has gradually become a priority for donors' and multilateral institutions' global development programs in the last few years. However, multilateral donor action on gender-based violence is still relatively new compared to longer-standing thematic issues such as malnutrition.

Official Development Assistance (ODA) for ending violence against women and girls has more than tripled since 2016, when it amounted to US\$126 million. In 2020-2021 bilateral allocable official development assistance **to women's rights organisations and movements was USD 574 million on average per year** down from USD 581 million in 2018-19.

The **UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women (UN Trust Fund)**, established in 1996, awards grants to initiatives demonstrating that violence against women and girls (VAW/G) can be systematically addressed, reduced, and, with persistence, eliminated. In 2022, the UN Trust Fund worked with 186 civil society organizations (CSOs) on preventing and addressing VAW/G in 70 countries and territories across five regions, supporting them with grants totalling USD 87.8 million. The majority of grant recipients, 62.4 per cent, were women's rights organizations (WROs)³.

Foundations also play a critical role in supporting efforts to address gender-based violence. This support is often embedded in gender initiatives like access to finance, women's social, and economic empowerment. However, there is currently little research or analysis on total amounts of funding foundations provide to support SGBV.

The United Nations Foundation, in partnership with the [Spotlight Initiative](#), and as part of a commitment made during the Generation Equality Forum has established a funding vehicle—the WithHer Fund which provides flexible funding for grassroots groups and women's rights organizations.⁴ Likewise, the Spotlight initiative is also a major fund targeting ending violence against women and girls to the tune of US\$500 million.

The bulk of LWF's funding for the communion office and member churches gender justice and women's empowerment work comes from related agencies (ReLags). These are ecumenical partners who are also part of the world-wide Lutheran Church. An example of this support for the gender justice work in the churches is Act Church of Sweden, Bread for the World and Norwegian Church Aid support for the church in Guatemala's 'Ecumenical program for the betterment of gender justice' from 2022 to 2022. Support provided amounted to 1,596,733 Euros. Activities included training on advocacy, formulation of advocacy strategies, training on gender relations, facilitate advocacy efforts by religious leaders to prevent SGBV, Health and psychosocial support to SGBV victims as well as livelihoods support.

For LWF country programs, Canadian Lutheran World Relief (CLWR) has been one of the major donors. In 2021, CLWR supported the "Gender Responsive Humanitarian Assistance to Conflict Affected Women and Girls in Rakhine State" in Myanmar, providing support up to 610, 154 Euros. Main activities included, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH), provision on non-food items (NFIs) and shelters such as the reconstruction of gender friendly 30 Longhouse and installing streetlights in four different camps.

CLWR also provided support for 'Emergency Protection, SRHR and Livelihoods for South Sudanese refugees and host communities in Uganda, providing a budget for gender and GBV to the tune of 210,523 Euros. Activities include operating and maintaining a toll free SGBV complaints hotline, equipping and increasing the safety of women safe spaces to maximise usability as well as upgrading one of the women's safe spaces into a vocational and life skills training centre for GBV survivors and persons at risk.

³ <https://www.unwomen.org/en/trust-funds/un-trust-fund-to-end-violence-against-women>

⁴ <https://unfoundation.org/the-withher-fund/>

Examples of LWF investments to prevent violence against women and girls

LWF is a Generation Equality Gender Based Violence Action Coalition Commitment maker: In line with its strategic objective to promote and protect the rights and dignity of women and girls, the LWF is accelerating efforts to support member churches and country programs to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in church and society. This includes stepping up advocacy towards concrete prevention and response strategies to GBV and ending impunity for perpetrators at the local, regional and global level as well as increasing resource mobilization efforts towards gender-based violence prevention and response programs.

Investing in gender responsive programming: In addition to the theological and human rights commitment underpinning LWF's position on Gender, LWF is committed to Gender Just Programming because it is a best programming practice which addresses and challenges pre-existing inequalities and vulnerabilities. As we seek to build human dignity, justice, and peace through our work, Gender Just programming helps us deliver on this commitment. The LWF World Service global strategy 2019-2024, commits to eliminating institutional, cultural, interpersonal systems of privilege and oppression that sustain discrimination against women. LWF has addressed GBV in refugee settings for decades, including with Global Affairs Canada funds, in Uganda for example, where both SASA (for South Sudanese) and Zero Tolerance Village Alliance (ZTVA) (for Congolese) methodologies were implemented with success.

Investing in addressing unequal power dynamics: Challenging harmful cultural practices and social norms have been key for the LWF's work to combat sexual and gender-based violence. LWF recognizes that unequal power relations between women and men, shaped by society's understanding of gender relations is at the heart of violence against women and girls. It is therefore important that prevention strategies focus on changing mindsets and attitudes on women's place in society and human rights in general. LWF is accompanying its country programs and member churches on work to challenge the status quo, engaging religious and community leaders as well as increasing women's agency through ongoing capacity building and training.

Investing in Women's economic empowerment: Increasing women's economic empowerment as an entry point for broader social change at the household and community level is key to increasing women's agency and decision-making power within the home. Achieving economic justice and women's empowerment requires a multi-pronged effort combining a human rights-based approach with the development of women's potential to overcome poverty as well as addressing gender structural inequalities. Research has shown that there is a close relationship between women's economic independence and their ability to make decisions and have control over their lives. Most women who remain in abusive relationships cite the lack of financial independence as one of the reasons for staying.

Investing in positive masculinities: Male engagement is crucial in all of LWF GBV response and prevention activities. For attitudes and social norms to change men and boys must accept women's rights and gender equality. Within work to end gender-based violence, the goal is to sensitize men and boys to the often harmful, violent, and limiting ideas of what it means to be a "real man" to free them from negative cultural pressures. These notions of "masculinity" make them believe they can only express themselves or act in certain ways toward women and girls. Broader gender justice efforts focus on reclaiming and promoting positive models for being men and women, for leadership, and for restoring relationships of care and mutuality in every sphere of society. It is important to note that not all men engage in gender-based violence, although, in 90 percent of SGBV cases, the perpetrator is a man. At its Twelfth Assembly in September 2023, the LWF convened a men's pre-assembly for the first time. The gathering explored strategies to promote positive and life-giving masculinities which are crucial for the work to end gender-based violence and discrimination.

CALL TO ACTION

Violence against women advocates should consider the following points in their 16 days advocacy on investing to prevent violence against women and girls.

1. Religious institutions to take a stand against violence on women and girls
2. Community leaders and duty bearers to invest in challenging harmful cultural practices and social norms that perpetuate violence against women and girls
3. States to allocate national budget to sectors that contribute to preventing violence against women and girls including education, health, and social protection sectors.
4. States to promote an enabling and just economic environment by addressing the structural barriers and exclusionary practices that limit women's equal participation in the economy.
5. States to invest in policy formulation, strengthening legal systems including empowering the police force and the judiciary to ensure increase in prosecutions for perpetrators of violence against women and girls.