



Recommendations to Prevent and Address Sexual and Gender-based Violence in Central America's Northern Triangle

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), including domestic and sexual violence and violence against LGBTI people, is widespread in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, and forces many Central Americans to flee their homes and countries in search of safety. Therefore any strategy to address root causes of migration must prioritize efforts to prevent and address SGBV. The United States Government should provide funding to support the governments of Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras in combating SGBV through the following efforts:

Justice Sector Reforms

1. Increase by 50 percent the federal budget for investigation and prosecution of SGBV-related crimes; increase financial resources and personnel dedicated to SGBV-related crimes within police, public prosecutor's offices, and courts
2. Increase resources and personnel dedicated to specialized units for assistance to victims focused on gender-based violence within police, prosecutors, and courts, and ensure the accessibility of those institutions in urban and rural areas throughout the three countries.
3. Expand and institutionalize training on SGBV for all police, prosecutors, judges, and child protection officials to ensure awareness of all binding laws related to SGBV and the application of proper procedures in cases of SGBV. Training should be ongoing and mandatory, and should build capacity for assisting SGBV survivors, including children and LGBTI persons as well as survivors of SGBV perpetrated by gangs or organized crime.
4. Create and implement protocols within government institutions including police, public prosecutor's offices, and courts for specialized attention to victims of SGBV, including children, adolescents, and LGBTI persons, and implement and/or strengthen institutional mechanisms to oversee the application of protocols for SGBV cases.
5. Devote resources to strengthening protections for victims of SGBV, including the monitoring and enforcement of legal protection mechanisms (such as restraining orders) for victims of domestic violence and other gender-based crimes. Strengthen victim and witness protection programs by expanding them to protect family members, and offering victims protection beyond the sentencing phase if there is a continued threat.

Child Protection System Reforms

6. Dedicate greater resources to strengthen specialized children's courts so that specialized courts, rather than general courts, hear cases involving violence against children and other child protection issues. Resources should go to decentralizing the courts, increasing the number of specialized judges, ongoing training of judges, and monitoring of judges.



7. Increase the budget dedicated to child welfare agencies and systems to strengthen their ability to respond to child protection needs. Resources should go to decentralizing child protection systems and ensuring that agencies have adequate staffing levels and appropriately trained personnel. Resources should support the use and expansion of home based placements such as family or foster care, rather than institutionalization. State run shelters should comply with national child welfare standards, and when private shelters provide care the child welfare agencies of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala should monitor these shelters. All shelters should maintain and enforce a zero tolerance policy for abuse or mistreatment of children in care.

Services for Victims

8. Dedicate greater resources to serve survivors of SGBV. Invest in the creation and expansion of government programs and services for comprehensive support and attention for women, children, and LGBTI persons who are victims of violence, including legal, psychological, and health care, sexual and reproductive health services, and basic needs such as shelter. Ensure that these services are available at the local level and accessible to victims who live outside of urban centers, and that the availability of these services is adequate to meet the needs of the local population.

SGBV Prevention

9. Implement public education efforts to de-normalize violence against women, girls, and LGBTI persons, including on-going education in primary and secondary schools as well as public and community-based campaigns and campaigns that are directed toward families. Ensure that these programs and initiatives are adequately funded.

10. Create and expand local-level gender violence prevention programming for youth in cooperation with municipal governments, ministries of education, health, labor, and other government agencies, and civil society. Programming should include education, empowerment, and job training opportunities for girls, as well as access to comprehensive health and mental health services.

11. Create and expand local-level gang violence prevention and intervention programming for youth in cooperation with municipal governments, ministries of labor, ministries of education, and civil society. Support evidence-based models that include school-based prevention, strengthening of families, community policing, and meaningful education and employment opportunities for youth, including former gang members seeking reintegration into families, communities, and the workforce. Programming should include a focus on preventing and addressing gang-based SGBV.

12. Create and implement a system for the collection of statistics on SGBV-related crimes to be used consistently across government agencies, in order to provide a more accurate picture of the current extent and forms of violence, to guide policy decisions, and to monitor progress. Make statistics available to the public on an annual basis.