Killings of women and girls by their intimate partner or other family members

Global estimates 2020

Some 47,000 women and girls worldwide were killed by their intimate partners or other family members in 2020. This means that, on average, a woman or girl is killed by someone in her own family every 11 minutes. Where trends can be calculated, they show that the magnitude of such gender-related killings remains largely unchanged, however, with only marginal increases and decreases over the past decade.
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KEY FINDINGS

• Some 47,000 women and girls worldwide were killed by their intimate partners or other family members in 2020. This means that, on average, a woman or girl is killed by someone in her own family every 11 minutes.

• Women and girls in all regions across the world are affected by this type of gender-based violence. With an estimated 18,600 victims, Asia is the region with the highest number of victims in absolute terms, while Africa is the region with the highest level relative to the size of its female population.

• Accounting 80 per cent of the total, the vast majority of all homicide victims worldwide in 2020 were men or boys, but the sex composition of homicide victims differs markedly depending on the context. Women and girls account for only one tenth of all homicide victims perpetrated in the public sphere, yet they bear a disproportionate burden of lethal violence perpetrated in the home: in 58 per cent of all killings perpetrated by intimate partners or other family members, the victim was a woman or girl.

• National trends in gender-related killings of women and girls are often volatile. On average, Europe has witnessed a 13 per cent decline in gender-related killings of women and girls in the private sphere over the past decade, while the Americas has seen an increase of 9 per cent, although these averages mask contrasting trends between the countries and subregions within those two regions. Due to the limited availability of data, it is not yet possible to identify time trends in gender-related killings in other regions.

• Lethal violence experienced by women and girls in the private sphere appears to be a more intractable problem than killings of women and girls outside the home. Eastern Europe has witnessed a reduction of 47 per cent in female homicides perpetrated outside the home over the past decade, while female homicides perpetrated by intimate partners or other family members have seen a reduction of 15 per cent over the same period. Although less marked, similar trends have also been recorded in Western Europe and South America.

• Global data on the impact of COVID-19 confinement measures on gender-related killings of women and girls remain patchy and inconclusive. The average annual number of these killings showed an increase of 11 per cent from 2019 to 2020 in Western and of 5 per cent in Southern Europe. No change was detectable in Northern Europe and there was a slight decrease in Eastern Europe. By comparison, in Northern America the number of gender-related killings of women and girls increased by 8 per cent, in Central America by 3 per cent and in South America by 5 per cent. These increases were of a similar magnitude to previous annual changes recorded in the past decade.

• At the national level, monthly data from a limited number of countries covering the period October 2019 to December 2020 show high variability in trends across countries, but suggest that, overall, female intimate partner/family-related homicides remained relatively unaffected by the lockdowns in those countries.
Global estimates

Women and girls in all regions are affected by gender-based killings. While Asia is the region with largest absolute number of killings, Africa is the region with the highest level of violence relative to the size of its female population.

Total female intimate partner/family-related homicides

2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Rate per 100,000 female population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>18,600</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>18,100</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Americas</td>
<td>7,300</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>2,600</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rates of female intimate partner/family-related homicide per 100,000 female population

2020
Gender dimension of homicide

Homicides within the private sphere affect both sexes, but women and girls bear the largest burden of lethal violence perpetrated within the home, accounting for approximately 6 out of every 10 homicide victims killed by intimate partners or other family members.

**Total homicides**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Non-Intimate partner/family-related homicides**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Intimate partner/family-related homicides**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key findings

Trends in female intimate partner/family-related homicide

- In Eastern Europe, female intimate partner/family-related homicides decreased significantly less than homicides perpetrated outside the domestic sphere.

- Number of homicides of women by partner/family members increased between 2019–2020 in almost all sub-regions where trends could be estimated.

- No change in Northern Europe and slight decrease in Eastern Europe.
Total number of women killed by intimate partners or other family members

In 2020, approximately 47,000 women and girls were killed worldwide by their intimate partners or other family members. This means that, on average, a woman or girl is killed by someone in her own family every 11 minutes.

1 woman or girl is killed by someone in her own family
1. WHY FOCUS ON KILLINGS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS PERPETRATED BY INTIMATE PARTNERS OR OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS?

The killing of women and girls at the hands of intimate partners or other family members – people whom they would normally be expected to trust – represents one of the most extreme manifestations of gender-based violence. Such killings are often the culmination of prior experiences of gender-based violence, which can include psychological, sexual and physical abuse.1

Female homicide perpetrated by intimate partners or other family members is not the only form of gender-related killing of women and girls. This type of homicide can also be perpetrated outside the private sphere, for example, in the case of intentional homicides of female sex workers, killings of women related to various forms of trafficking and organized crime, and killings of women accused of witchcraft. Several types of female homicide are committed on the grounds of gender-related motivations2 but there is not yet a standardized approach to define and count all forms of gender-related killings of women and girls. When available, statistical data on this type of homicide are often based on national definitions, practices or specific legislation that are not comparable at the global level. To address this issue, the United Nations system has held a series of consultations aimed at developing a new statistical approach to improving data on gender-related killings of women and girls (see box below).

This research brief is focused on female victims of intentional homicide perpetrated by intimate partners or other family members. This is because – based on available evidence – intimate partner/family-related homicide accounts for the largest proportion of gender-related killings or “femicides”.3 Furthermore, data on this type of homicide are more readily available and comparable than data on gender-related killings that take place outside the family sphere. Internationally comparable data on female intimate partner/family-related homicide remain patchy, but are available for a large enough number of countries to enable the production of global and regional estimates,4 thanks also to the implementation of the framework provided in the *International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes (ICCS)*.5 Although still affected by limitations caused by poor coverage, in particular in Africa and Asia, these data provide useful information on the magnitude of the problem and, in some cases, information on trends. Data on gender-related killings perpetrated outside the family sphere are more limited and, to date, do not meet the same level of standardization and geographical coverage.

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2 General recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19, para. 19 (CEDAW/C/GC/35).
4 During the period 2010–2020, 95 countries made available at least once data on intentional homicides of female victims perpetrated by their intimate partner or other family members. These data were submitted to UNODC by Member States through the annual United Nations Surveys on Crime Trends and the Operations of Criminal Justice Systems (UN-CTS). Where applicable, UN-CTS data are supplemented with external data sources. Regional groups are based on the UN M49 classification scheme.
Statistical framework for measuring gender-related killings of women and girls (also referred to as “femicides/feminicides”)

Different approaches to and definitions of gender-related killings of women and girls (also referred to as “femicide and/or feminicide”) exist at the national and international levels. For example, the 2015 report of the United Nations Secretary General on Action against gender-related killing of women and girls referred to this concept as “the intentional murder of women and girls because of their gender”. From a conceptual point of view, such killings differ from other types of intentional killings of women and girls because they are based on gender-related motivations, either directly or indirectly.

In order to harmonize the existing statistical approaches for measuring gender-related killings of women and girls, in 2019 the United Nations Statistical Commission asked UNODC to develop a “statistical framework on gender-sensitive crime statistics, with a focus on the gender-related killing of women and girls (femicide/feminicide)”. UNODC, together with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), undertook a thorough expert-level consultation process in order to develop a global statistical framework for measuring gender-related killings of women and girls, aligned with the *International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes (ICCS)*; this box briefly describes the proposed conceptualization of the statistical framework.

In general terms, gender-related killings of women and girls are committed on the grounds of “gender-related motivations such as the ideology of men’s entitlement and privilege over women, social norms regarding masculinity, the need to assert male control or power, enforce gender roles, or prevent, encourage or punish what is considered to be unacceptable female behavior”. Gender-related killings can take place in a wide range of situations within both the private and public spheres, and within different contexts of victim–perpetrator relationship. In principle, what defines a gender-related killing is not a specific relationship or type of perpetrator but the fact that it can be rooted in the gender-related motivations described above.

Such killings have a clear conceptual meaning, but they are challenging to operationalize in statistical terms as this requires an understanding of which behaviours, modi operandi and circumstances associated with a killing are actually gender-related. The following set of non-exhaustive standard characteristics related to the modus operandi or context of an intentional homicide has been identified as indicative of gender-related motivations in killings of women and girls.

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9 UNODC and UN Women, “Statistical framework for measuring the gender-related killings of women and girls (also referred to as “femicides/feminicides”)”, forthcoming.

10 General recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19, para. 19 (CEDAW/C/GC/35).


12 For further information, see UNODC and UN Women, “Statistical framework for measuring the gender-related killing of women and girls (also referred to as “femicide/feminicide”)” (forthcoming).
Killings of women and girls by their intimate partner or other family members

In principle, these variables could be used to identify gender-related killings among intentional homicides of women and girls, but they are not yet mainstreamed in national statistical systems and data on gender-related killings cannot be readily collated at the national and international levels purely on the basis of these characteristics. Until national statistical systems fully adopt these standard parameters, the first building block in the construction of data on gender-related killings can be approximated on the basis of women and girls killed by partners or other family members. While the victim’s relationship with a perpetrator who is a partner or other family member is not necessarily indicative of specific gender motivations by itself, evidence indicates that this type of homicide is overwhelmingly related to gender roles. Data on women and girls killed by partners and family members are also more readily available because information on the relationship between the homicide perpetrator and victim is already recorded in a significant number of national systems. Being aware that an approximation is made on the grounds of data availability and statistical feasibility, data on women killed by intimate partners and on women killed by other family members can be used as the first building block for counting gender-related killings.

The other building block to count gender-related killings lies outside the family sphere, where the eight “modi operandi” or contexts remain the only parameters that can operationalize the gender-relevant subset of homicide.
Killings of women and girls by their intimate partner or other family members

Statistical framework for measuring gender-related killing of women and girls

The data blocks to collect and aggregate statistics on gender-related killings

Women and girls killed by Intimate partners + Women and girls killed by Family members

Women and girls killed by other known/unknown perpetrator where the homicide modi operandi meets at least one of these criteria

- Previous record of harassment/violence
- Illegal deprivation of her liberty
- Use of force and/or intimidation
- Body disposed in a public space
- Hate crime
- Sexual violence was committed before
- Victim was working in the sex industry
- Victim of forms of illegal exploitation

Operational criteria to capture the gender-related factors

The aim of the new statistical framework is also to provide operational guidance to national statistical systems; several institutions can produce data on gender-related killings and the harmonization of practices across national institutions fosters comparative analyses of data. For example, the analysis of relevant data across stages of the criminal justice process – from cases and prosecutions to convictions – can provide important information about state response in relation to gender-related killings of women and girls. Furthermore, the framework is aimed at providing guidance on the collection of additional information (disaggregating variables) for to conducting policy-relevant analyses to identify drivers and enablers of gender-related killings and factors that could help prevent them.
2. EXTENT OF FEMALE INTIMATE PARTNER/FAMILY-RELATED HOMICIDE IN ABSOLUTE NUMBERS

In 2020, it is estimated that – out of a total of 81,00 female victims of homicide – 47,000 women (41,500–52,600)\textsuperscript{13} and girls worldwide were killed by their intimate partners or other family members (including fathers, mothers, uncles and brothers).\textsuperscript{14} With an estimated 18,600 victims (15,100–21,000), Asia accounted for the largest number of female intimate partner/family-related killings in 2020. This was followed by Africa, with 18,100 (16,500–20,800), and the Americas, with 7,300 (7,000–7,600), Europe accounted for 2,600 (2,500–2,700) female intimate partner/family-related killings in 2020 and Oceania recorded the lowest number, with 300 (250–350) (see ).\textsuperscript{15} It is important to note, however, that these absolute numbers are also influenced by the differences in the size of the populations of the world regions.

With an estimated population of 4.6 billion in 2020, Asia is by far the most populous region, so it is not surprising that the continent accounts for the largest share of female intimate partner/family-related homicides globally.

**Figure 1:** Estimated number of female victims of intimate partner/family-related homicide, by region (2020)

Source: UNODC estimates based on UNODC Homicide Dataset.
Note: Error bars represent estimation error due to imputation of missing values at the country level. The bands do not represent confidence intervals and should not be interpreted as such. The estimates are based on the latest available data, which remain limited, in particular in Africa and Asia. The size of the error bars provides an indication of the level of uncertainty that the estimates carry both at the regional level.

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13 The global and regional estimates are produced on the basis of available national data and through a statistical model imputing missing values at the country level. They are complemented by an interval of uncertainty that accounts for estimation error due to the imputation of missing values at the country level. The bands do not represent confidence intervals and should not be interpreted as such. For more information, see the methodological annex to this document.

14 The 2020 estimate of 47,000 victims is not directly comparable to the 2017 figure (50,000 victims) published in the *Global Study on Homicide 2019* due to an improvement in the coverage of national data and refinements in the statistical model. The different global estimates for 2017 and 2020 should not be interpreted as evidence of a decrease in the global number of gender-related killings in the private sphere over this time span.

15 The difference of 100 killings between the estimated global total and the sum of the regional estimates is due to rounding.
3. EXTENT OF FEMALE INTIMATE PARTNER/FAMILY-RELATED HOMICIDE IN RATES

From a comparative perspective, it is more informative to look at the number of female victims of intimate partner/family-related homicide in different regions per 100,000 female population than in absolute numbers, as the former takes into account differences in population size and growth. Victimization rates are also better than absolute numbers at capturing women’s actual risk of being killed by someone in their family.

In 2020, it is estimated that out of every 100,000 women and girls worldwide, 1.2 were killed by their intimate partners or other family members. While Asia accounts for the largest absolute number of female victims of intimate partner/family-related homicide, it is in Africa that women and girls appear to be most at risk of being killed by their intimate partners or other family members. In 2020, the female intimate partner/family-related homicide rate in Africa was estimated at 2.7 per 100,000 female population, compared with 1.6 in Oceania, 1.4 in the Americas, 0.8 in Asia and 0.7 in Europe.

The variability in the rate of female intimate partner/family-related homicide across the five world regions was significantly lower in 2020 than the variability in the total homicide rate, which ranged from roughly 2.5 in Europe to almost 15.0 in the Americas. Thus, while the overall level of lethal violence varies significantly across the regions, the variability is less pronounced in the case of female killings within domestic contexts.

4. TRENDS IN FEMALE INTIMATE PARTNER/FAMILY-RELATED HOMICIDE

In those regions where data availability allows for an investigation of trends over time (the Americas and Europe), substantial differences can be observed in trends in the annual number of female intimate partner/family-related homicides. Both in Europe and the Americas, data availability and national trends vary, with some countries displaying increases over certain time periods, some displaying decreases and some a level of year-on-year variability or irregular data availability that make it impossible to discern clear trends. However, what does seem to be common to many national trends is that they show relative stability when longer periods of time are considered, rather than year-on-year changes.

Regional estimates level out different national trends but, overall, Europe has seen a modest reduction (13 per cent) in the total number of female victims of intimate partner/family-related homicide over the past decade, while there has been a similar level of increase in the Americas (9 per cent) over the same period, albeit at a very different absolute level.

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16. Due to improvements in data coverage and statistical modelling, the estimated 2020 global rate of 1.2 female intimate partner/family-related homicides per 100,000 women is not directly comparable to the 2017 rate of 1.3 rate published in the Global Study on Homicide 2019 and should not be interpreted as a decrease in the risk of such killings at the global level in recent years.


18. For the variability in Europe, see in the annex to this document; for the variability in the Americas, see Figure 18.
Figure 2: Trends in the total number of female victims of intimate partner/family-related homicide in the Americas and Europe (2010–2020)

Source: UNODC estimates based on UNODC Homicide dataset.

Note: The dotted lines represent ranges around the estimate and show the extent to which the regional estimate for a specific year relies on reported versus imputed country-level series of intimate partner/family-related homicide. The ranges do not represent confidence intervals and should not be interpreted as such. For more information, see the accompanying methodological annex.

The modest reduction in the total number of female victims of intimate partner/family-related homicide in Europe is the result of national trends that fluctuate around a small overall decline in several countries in Eastern Europe, including Belarus and Romania, and few countries in Western Europe. In several populous European countries such as Germany, France, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom there has been variability around stable levels of gender-related killings in the private sphere in the last few years.

The overall trend in female intimate partner/family-related homicides witnessed in the Americas over the last decade is the result of divergent trends experienced at the country level. For example, among the most populous countries in the region, the United States and Brazil have recorded a slight decrease in recent years, while there has been an upward trend in Mexico.19 By contrast, less populous countries, but with higher rates of female intimate partner/family-related homicide, such as El Salvador and Honduras, have recorded some reductions since 2015. Overall, the Americas is characterized by substantial heterogeneity at the country level when it comes to levels of and trends in intimate partner/family-related homicides and other gender-based killings.

The average trends in Europe and the Americas mask differences and commonalities between subregions. While in Western, Southern and Northern Europe, the number of female homicides within the private sphere is consistently higher than in the public sphere, trends in Eastern Europe (see ) and the other subregions of Europe (see ) suggest that female intimate partner/family-related killings are harder to eradicate than other types of killings of women and girls. Both subregions have seen a noticeable decrease in the number of female victims of killings outside the family over the past decade (by 47 per cent in Eastern Europe and 21 per cent in Western Europe), whereas the number of female homicides perpetrated by intimate partners or other family members has remained relatively unchanged. As a result of these different trends, the share of total female homicide victims that were killed by intimate partners or other family members has increased substantially, from 34 per cent in 2010 to 45 per cent in 2020 in Eastern Europe and from 60 per cent to 63 per cent over the same period in the other subregions of Europe.

19 For more information on the situation in Mexico, see Calderón, L. et al. (eds.), Organized Crime and Violence in Mexico: 2021 Special Report (Justice in Mexico, University of San Diego, October 2021).
A similar pattern can be observed in South America where, from 2017 to 2020, female homicides perpetrated outside the private sphere decreased by 20 per cent while they remained relatively stable within the family (see ). These data suggest that factors that triggered the decrease in female non-intimate partner/family-related homicides in Europe and South America only partially impacted on intimate partner/family-related homicides. They also suggest that positive contextual developments and policy interventions that are successful in reducing lethal violence in the public sphere, may not be sufficient to achieve the same reductions in gender-based killings within the family.

Source: UNODC estimates based on UNODC Homicide dataset.

Note: Eastern Europe is defined according to the M49 regional grouping.
Killings of women and girls by their intimate partner or other family members

**Figure 5: Trends in female homicides in the private and public sphere in South America (2017–2020)**

Source: UNODC estimates based on UNODC Homicide dataset.

Note: South America is defined according to the M49 regional grouping.

Trends in the number of women and girls killed in the private and public sphere are flatter in Central America (1) and Northern America (1), although the slight increase in non-intimate partner/family-related killings in Central America does not seem to have affected the stable trend in intimate partner/family-related killings. This suggests that female intimate partner/family-related killings tend to remain stable even in contexts where there are dynamics that trigger increases in non-family violence.

**Figure 6: Trends in female homicides in the private and public sphere in Central America (2017–2020)**

Source: UNODC estimates based on UNODC Homicide dataset.

Note: Central America refers to Central America and the Caribbean, as defined according to the M49 regional grouping.
In Africa, Asia and Oceania, it is not possible to identify trends in female intimate partner/family-related homicide over the past decade, because of the limited availability of sufficiently disaggregated homicide data covering the period 2010–2020. While the link between trends in female homicide and those perpetrated by intimate partner or other family members is not always direct (see section 4), the significant reduction in female homicides in certain populous countries, such as India, Japan, the Philippines and Turkey, since 2010 may indicate that the situation is slowly improving in Asia. This is substantiated to some extent by country-level data on gender-related violent deaths from populous countries such as India, where violent deaths related to dowry payments, accusations of witchcraft and other gender-related factors have been slowly declining.

In several populous countries in Africa, including Morocco, Kenya, South Africa and Uganda, numbers of total female victims of intentional homicides in the last decade are not indicative of clear trends, but show that the level of lethal violence perpetrated against women and girls in the region remains high in relative terms. In Oceania, the two largest countries (Australia and New Zealand) have both recorded little progress in terms of reducing the annual number of female intimate partner/family-related killings over the past decade.

5. HOMICIDE PERPETRATED IN THE PRIVATE SPHERE HAS A DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACT ON WOMEN

Accounting 80 per cent of the total, the vast majority of all homicide victims worldwide in 2020 were men or boys, but the sex composition of homicide victims differs markedly depending on the context. Women and girls account for only one tenth of all homicide victims perpetrated in the public sphere, yet they bear a disproportionate burden of lethal violence perpetrated within the home: in 58 per cent of all killings perpetrated by intimate partners or other family members, the victim was a woman or girl.

Out of all intentional homicides of women and girls in 2020, 58 per cent were perpetrated by intimate partners or other family members, which suggests that the most dangerous place for women is the home. By contrast, the share of all male homicides that can be attributed to intimate partners or other family members amounted to just 10 per cent in 2020, suggesting that men and boys are primarily at risk of being intentionally killed outside the family sphere.
These gender-specific patterns of victimization differ substantially across regions (see ). For example, in regions with lower overall levels of intentional homicide such as Europe and Oceania, the share of male homicides related to violence in the family sphere is larger, at 17 per cent and 22 per cent respectively, than in regions with very high levels of homicidal violence such as Africa and the Americas.

**Figure 8:** Share of intimate partner/family-related homicides among all female and male homicides, by region (2020)

![Graph showing share of intimate partner/family-related homicides among all female and male homicides by region (2020)](image)

Source: UNODC estimates based on UNODC Homicide dataset.

### 6. BURDEN OF INTIMATE PARTNER HOMICIDE BORNE BY WOMEN AND GIRLS

Intimate partner homicide represents the ultimate breach of trust within the home. Moreover, this type of homicide has consequences that go far beyond the direct victims. For example, the surviving offspring not only lose one parent to homicide but may also lose the other to prison, and they are often obliged to leave their parental home as a result.

Based on available data, homicides of female intimate partners account for an average of roughly 67 per cent of all female intimate partner/family-related killings, which suggests that killings by current and former intimate partners account for the largest proportion of all female intimate partner/family-related killings. This means that women and girls bear an even greater burden in the case of intimate partner homicide than of intimate partner/family-related killings in general: on average, women and girls account for approximately 68 per cent of all victims of intimate partner homicide.

Moreover, it appears that the burden of intimate partner homicide borne by women and girls has remained relatively stable in recent years: in 17 countries in various regions, the disparity between the annual

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20 Children can also become direct victims of intimate partner violence, for example, in cases of “familicide” or when children are killed in a deliberate attempt to make the intimate partner suffer. See UNODC, *Global Study on Homicide 2019*, booklet 6, *Killing of Children and Young Adults* (United Nations publication, 2019).


22 Data on female homicides perpetrated exclusively by intimate partners are available from 67 countries across all regions for at least one year in the period 2015–2020.

23 Average weighted by the number of female intimate partner/family-related killings in each of the 67 countries.

24 Note that the average is weighted by the number of intimate partner/family-related killings (male and female victims) in each of the 67 countries, giving more weight to more populous countries.
numbers of male and female intimate partner killings did not change significantly over the period 2015–2020 (see ).

**Figure 9: Trends in male and female intimate partner killings in 17 selected countries (2015–2020)**

Source: UNODC Homicide dataset.

Note: Based on data from 17 countries where data was available (Croatia, Germany, Guyana, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Montenegro, Morocco, Netherlands, Paraguay, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Switzerland).

### 7. WHAT IMPACT HAS THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAD ON GENDER-RELATED KILLINGS?

Global data on the impact of COVID-19 confinement measures on gender-related killings of women and girls remain patchy and inconclusive. The average annual number of these killings showed an increase of 11 per cent from 2019 to 2020 in Western and of 5 per cent in Southern Europe. No change was detectable in Northern Europe and there was a slight decrease in Eastern Europe. By comparison, in Northern America the number of gender-related killings of women and girls increased by 8 per cent, in Central America by 3 per cent and in South America by 5 per cent. These increases were of a similar magnitude to previous annual changes recorded in the past decade.

At the national level, monthly data from 14 countries in various regions show high variability in trends across countries but suggest that, overall, female intimate partner/family-related homicides remained relatively unaffected by the lockdowns in those countries.

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25 The slight difference in the female share of intimate partner homicide victims between this group of 17 countries (at 63 per cent in 2020) and the female share of intimate partner homicide victims in the larger group of 67 countries referred to earlier (67 per cent in 2020) is because of the inclusion of different countries as well as the weighting approach applied the larger group of countries.
Killings of women and girls by their intimate partner or other family members

Figure 10: Indexed monthly number of female victims of intimate partner/family-related homicide in 14 countries (October 2019–December 2020)


Note: Based on monthly data from 14 countries (Armenia, Bahamas, Croatia, Ecuador, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Mexico, Morocco, Myanmar, Oman, Slovenia and Spain).

The broader impact of COVID-19 mobility restrictions on other types of gender-based violence also remains unclear because of the limited availability of data. Evidence from 11 countries in various regions suggests that the number of cases of sexual violence and physical assault perpetrated by intimate partners or other family members reported to authorities declined briefly during the first wave of confinement measures in early 2020 but reverted to the previous level as countries emerged from the initial lockdown. This suggests that during the first wave of confinement measures there was likely both a decrease in the accessibility of women to institutions for reporting incidents of domestic violence and in the capacity of authorities to record those incidents.26

26 UNODC Research brief, “What crime and helpline data say about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on reported violence against women and girls” (2020).
Figure 11: Indexed monthly number of female victims of sexual violence perpetrated by intimate partners or other family members, as reported to authorities in 11 countries (October 2019–March 2021)


Note: Based on monthly data on sexual violence cases from 11 countries (Armenia, Croatia, Latvia, Mongolia, Morocco, Myanmar, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland)

Figure 12: Indexed monthly number of female victims of physical assault perpetrated by intimate partners or other family members, as reported to authorities in 10 countries (October 2019–March 2021)


Note: Based on monthly data on sexual violence cases from 10 countries (Croatia, Latvia, Lithuania, Macao, China, Morocco, Namibia, Poland, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland)
Domestic violence helpline data from several countries in Europe and Latin America also paint a mixed picture of the impact of COVID-19 confinement measures on the level of violence experienced by women and girls in the home. Some national helpline data suggest a sharp increase in reported violence against women in the home. For example, data from the national domestic violence helpline in Italy show a drastic, four-fold increase in the weekly number of calls reporting a case of violence at the start of the first lockdown, which started on 9 March 2020. A similar, albeit less pronounced, trend can be observed in helpline data relating to the first lockdown in Argentina, with a noticeable increase in call volumes as restrictions were implemented. The patterns observed in Italy and Argentina are corroborated by recent studies that assessed the impact of COVID-19 confinement measures on violence against women using call service data.\(^{28}\)

Helpline data from other countries only show minor fluctuations after lockdown measures were introduced, but they disappeared shortly afterwards. For example, helpline data from Denmark and Mexico suggest slight decreases in call volumes after confinement measures were introduced, followed by a return to the pre-lockdown level shortly afterwards. Some helpline data also show changes within the range of the variability observed in the pre-pandemic period.\(^{29}\)

Overall, the broader impact of COVID-19 restrictions on other types of gender-based violence (beyond homicidal violence) remains uncertain due to the limited availability of data. Criminal justice data suggest that there was a predominantly declining trend in the number of incidents of sexual assault and rape reported to and recorded by authorities shortly after lockdown measures were implemented. This suggests that during the first wave of confinement measures there was a decrease in the accessibility of women to institutions for reporting incidents, which often translated into an increase in requests for assistance directed to helplines for victims of domestic violence.

**Figure 13:** Weekly number of requests for help from victims of violence received by national helpline, Italy (February–April 2019 and 2020)

![Weekly number of requests for help from victims of violence received by national helpline, Italy (February–April 2019 and 2020)](image)

Source: UNODC, elaborated from weekly data from Italy’s national helpline for victims of gender-based violence and stalking (https://www.1522.eu/).

Note: The first national lockdown was imposed on 9 March 2020 (week 11).

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\(^{27}\) In relation to the pre-lockdown period in 2020 and the reference year 2019.


\(^{29}\) For more information, see UNODC Research brief, “What crime and helpline data say about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on reported violence against women and girls” (2020), p.4.
Figure 14: **Average daily number of calls received by gender-based violence helpline, Argentina (March–September 2019 and 2020)**

Source: UNODC, elaborated with data from the Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity, Argentina.

Figure 15: **Number of weekly calls received by national helpline, Denmark (10 February–31 May 2020)**

Source: UNODC, elaborated from Lev Uden Vold (Live Without Violence), national helpline providing support to victims, perpetrators, family/friends and professionals, Denmark.

Figure 16: **Total number of calls related to incidents of violence against women received by national helpline, Mexico (January–September 2019 and 2020)**

Source: UNODC, elaborated with data from Secretariado ejecutivo del Sistema nacional de seguridad publica, Mexico.
8. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Countries can implement different types of policy interventions to prevent gender-related killings and, more broadly, gender-based violence against women and girls. The evidence presented in this research brief indicates that this type of violence tends to remain constant over time, even in situations where other types of lethal violence show signs of decreasing. In line with the call to action by the United Nations Secretary-General, long-term strategies to prevent gender-related killings by addressing harmful social norms that normalize violence against women should be combined with measures that can be implemented in the short term to protect women and girls in situations of risk, especially in situations of domestic abuse. This can be done by strengthening accessibility to services for female victims of violence and by intervening in specific situations that can trigger lethal violence among intimate partners and families.

Four areas of intervention are of key importance in addressing the problem of gender-related killings of women and girls.

1. Closing data gaps in gender-related killings of women and girls

The collection and dissemination of comprehensive and disaggregated data on gender-related killings of women and girls is a priority for increasing public awareness and developing evidence-based policies and programmes. Data on gender-related killings of women and girls are still not available in many countries and, where they exist, often rely on incomparable national definitions and practices. The forthcoming statistical framework for measuring gender-related killings, developed jointly by UNODC and UN Women, can provide a standardized approach and support Member States in going beyond existing limitations concerning the collection and disaggregation of data on gender-related killings of women and girls. In addition to female intimate partner/family-related homicide, which is the initial building block for the measurement of gender-related killings, the statistical framework provides guidance on identifying and counting other types of homicides related to gender factors. The statistical framework is aligned to the International Classification of Crime for Statistical Purposes (ICCS), and can be used by Member States to collect, analyse and disseminate data on different forms of gender-related killings and on the criminal justice response (arrests, prosecutions, convictions) to such killings. The statistical framework can also be a tool for strengthening and harmonizing existing efforts to collect data on gender-related killings by civil society organizations, academia and initiatives such as Femicide Watch.

2. Preventing and addressing gender-based violence by intimate partners or other family members

Considering that most gender-based killings of women and girls are perpetrated by intimate partners or other family members, specific interventions tackling lethal gender-based violence in the private sphere are warranted. At least 155 countries have already passed laws on domestic violence, and most national action plans on gender-based violence or violence against women include specific actions against domestic and intimate partner violence. A range of interventions can prevent the escalation of violence against women in domestic contexts, such as:

Protection orders

Protection orders and restraining orders have been found to decrease the likelihood of intimate partner violence and repeat-victimization after separation. However, after police intervention,
perpetrators may become more antagonistic and violence can quickly escalate. Further mechanisms and interventions that ensure protection from violent partners may be necessary for preventing intimate partner homicide. Simple, quick and accessible protection and restraining or barring orders, as well as a registration system for such orders, are effective when they form part of a broader package of measures aimed at preventing lethal risks to women, including confidential 24/7 hotlines and domestic violence shelters.

**Domestic violence services**

Evidence assessing the impact of domestic violence services (such as helplines and shelters) suggests that these can reduce victims’ exposure to domestic violence, which is associated with a decline in intimate partner homicides. It is important to ensure that such support can be sustained over the long term and, if necessary, combined with other legal measures, such as protection orders, to ensure that women affected by intimate partner violence have access to places of safety, as well as the option to remain in their home, based on the principle that the perpetrator and not the survivor should have to leave the home.

**Firearm control**

The presence of a firearm in the household has been identified as a risk factor for intimate partner killings. Limiting perpetrators’ access to firearms, especially in situations when there is previous domestic abuse and the victim and perpetrator are living in the same house, can prevent intimate partner violence from culminating in a killing. Awareness-raising campaigns on the risks of exposure to firearms in domestic disputes should also be considered.

**Divorce**

Divorce legislation should be considered carefully in relation to its possible impact on violence against women and girls. As divorce can be a period of vulnerability for women, a holistic approach should be adopted in divorce legislation and coordination among government agencies and courts is needed for preventing and addressing violence that could lead to gender-related killings of women and girls in a coherent manner.

3. **Ensuring effective prosecution and sanctions for perpetrators of gender-related killings**

The criminal justice response to gender-related killings should ensure that justice is accessible and responds to the needs of victims and survivors, and should be commensurate with the gravity of the offence, holding perpetrators accountable and sending a clear message to society about the gravity of such killings. In some countries, in particular in Latin America, specific legislation has been passed on the criminalization of gender-related killing as a measure to strengthen the criminal justice response,

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37 See report of the Secretary-General on action against gender-related killing of women and girls (A/70/93), para. 41(x); and Updated Model Strategies and Practical Measures on the Elimination of Violence against Women in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice (A/RES/65/228). Available at: https://undocs.org/a/res/65/228.


41 See report of the Secretary-General on action against gender-related killing of women and girls (A/70/93), para. 41(v).

42 See UNODC, Strengthening Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Responses to Violence against Women (Vienna, April 2014).

43 See report of the Secretary-General on action against gender-related killing of women and girls (A/70/93), para. 41(x); and UNODC, Strengthening Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Responses to Violence against Women (Vienna, April 2014).

while in other countries, gender-related killings are treated in the same vein as other intentional homicides.\textsuperscript{45} In general, criminal law reform should be accompanied by a review of criminal policies – including investigatory and prosecutorial policies and practices – to ensure that action is taken with due diligence and without delay.\textsuperscript{46} At the level of criminal justice institutions, this requires the establishment of specialized units and mechanisms to monitor and sanction criminal justice officials who do not exercise due diligence in cases of gender-related killing.\textsuperscript{47}

4. **Investing in evidence-based prevention of gender-based violence against women and girls**

In the long term, it is necessary to put in place interventions at multiple levels that can reduce the prevalence of gender-based violence and reduce the number of gender-related killings of women and girls. Based on a systematic review of different prevention interventions, the United Nations system has identified seven key strategies to prevent violence against women, summarized in the RESPECT framework,\textsuperscript{48} which can address the root causes of gender-based violence at the country level:

1. **Relationship skills strengthened** – this strategy refers to interventions aimed at individuals or groups of women, men or couples for improving skills in interpersonal communication, conflict management and shared decision-making.
2. **Empowerment of women** – this strategy refers to both economic and social empowerment interventions, including inheritance and asset ownership, and microfinance.
3. **Services ensured** – this strategy refers to a range of services, including police, legal, health, and social services, provided to survivors.
4. **Poverty reduced** – this strategy refers to interventions, ranging from cash transfers to labour force interventions, targeting women and households with the primary aim of alleviating poverty.
5. **Environments made safe** – this strategy refers to interventions aimed at creating safe schools, public spaces and work environments, among others.
6. **Child and adolescent abuse prevented** – this strategy refers to interventions aimed at establishing nurturing family relationships, prohibiting corporal punishment and implementing parenting programmes.
7. **Transformed attitudes, beliefs and norms** – this strategy refers to interventions that challenge harmful gender attitudes, beliefs, norms and stereotypes that uphold male privilege and female subordination, that justify violence against women and that stigmatize survivors. These may range from public campaigns and group education to community mobilization efforts.

The seven strategies should not be treated as silos, as successful programmes often have implemented interventions that fall across more than one of the seven strategies. Only a wide-ranging approach and long-term commitment can lead to a substantial reduction of gender-related killings.

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\textsuperscript{46} See report of the United Nations Secretary-General on action against gender-related killing of women and girls (A/70/93), paras. 10 and 41 (bb-ee).

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., para 41 (ff-ff).

9. STATISTICAL ANNEX

Figure 17: Country-level trends in female intimate partner/family-related homicides in Europe (2014-2020)

Figure 18: Country-level trends in female intimate partner/family-related homicides in the Americas (2014-2020)
Killings of women and girls by their intimate partner or other family members

**Figure 19:** Rate of female intimate partner/family-related homicide per 100,000 female population in selected European countries (2014-2020)

![Graph showing rates of female intimate partner/family-related homicide in Europe]

*Source: UNODC Homicide dataset.*

**Figure 20:** Rate of different types of gender-related killings of women per 100,000 female population in the United States (2017-2019), Brazil and Mexico (2018-2020)

![Graph showing rates of different types of gender-related killings in the US, Brazil, and Mexico]

*Note: Available data for the United States refer to female intimate partner/family-related homicides and are based on the FBI’s Supplementary Homicide Reports (available at https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/tables/expanded-homicide-data-table-10.xls). Available data for Brazil and Mexico refer to “femicide” cases as defined in respective national legislations. Besides killings of women and girls by intimate partners or other family members, other types of gender-related killings can be considered as femicides. For Mexico, see Secretariado Ejecutivo del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública, Gobierno de Mexico (available at https://www.gob.mx/sesnsp/documentos/lineamientos-para-el-registro-y-clasificacion-de-los-presuntos-delitos-de-feminicidio?state=published) and for Brazil, see Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública (available at https://forumseguranca.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/anuario-2021-completo-v6-bx.pdf). The selection of the specific criminal offence to conduct investigation and/or prosecution in cases when a woman is intentionally killed is subject to determination by competent authorities and this can affect comparability and even completeness of relevant data (see UNODC, Global Study on Homicide 2019).*
**Figure 21:** Number of gender-related violent deaths in India (2016-2020)

Source: National Crime Record Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs, India.

**Figure 22:** Trend in the rate of female intimate partner/family-related homicide per 100,000 female population in Australia and New Zealand (2014-2020)

Source: UNODC Homicide dataset.

**Figure 23:** Female homicide rates in Kenya, Morocco, South Africa, and Uganda (2010-2020)

Source: UNODC Homicide dataset.