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FEATURED Q&A

What Will Reverse the Rise in Gender-Based Violence?



Gender-based violence has increased in Latin America amid the Covid-19 pandemic, according to the United Nations. A demonstration on femicides in Mexico is pictured. // File Photo: Mexican Government.

Q Even before the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, Latin America and the Caribbean had 10 of the 12 countries with the highest rates of femicide in the world, according to the World Bank. During the global health crisis, lockdowns have only worsened gender violence in the region, according to the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. What types of initiatives can and should be taken in the region in order to deter such violence? To what extent have government efforts to fight gender-based violence in the region succeeded, or failed, and why? Can the economic costs of violence against women be quantified, and what other factors might make the strongest case for policymakers to invest in addressing the problem?

A Merike Blofield, director of the GIGA Institute for Latin American Studies and professor of political science at the University of Hamburg: "The risk of violence in the home increased with lockdowns and the economic fallout. Most Latin Americans live in households with children, depend heavily on informal labor income and live below or close to the poverty line. For these households, acute financial stress was added to the mental stress. Feminist activists have achieved significant legal progress. However, there is a yawning gap between gender-based violence laws and implementation. The existing infrastructure to address immediate gender- and domestic violence-related needs, such as dedicated hotlines, centers where survivors can seek legal and sociomedical help, and shelters, is insufficient and fragmented. Broader programs such as cash transfers to

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U.S.-based financial technology company Tipalti said that, through its partnership with Intercash, it is extending its prepaid debit-card service in several countries, including in Latin America.

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Move to Impeach Piñera Advances in Chile's Congress

The lower chamber of Chile's Congress advanced a measure to impeach President Sebastián Piñera over allegations that came to light in the leak of documents in the so-called Pandora Papers cache.

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Piñera // File Photo: Chilean Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

Piñera Impeachment Measure Advances in Chile's Congress

The lower chamber of Chile's Congress early this morning approved a measure to proceed with an impeachment effort against President Sebastián Piñera, La Tercera reported. The attempt to remove Piñera from office began after alleged irregularities over the sale of a mining firm came to light after the recent leak of a cache of documents known as the Pandora Papers, which involve politicians and businesspeople from several countries. The vote in Chile's lower house came in the early morning hours and followed nearly 22 hours of debate, Reuters reported. The lower house passed the measure with the minimum 78 votes needed for passage, along with 67 votes against the measure and three abstentions. It now moves to the Senate, where it would need two-thirds support of the chamber's 43 members in order to advance, Reuters reported. The Senate is to consider the measure just days before the Nov. 21 presidential election in which Chileans are to select Piñera's successor, EFE reported. The allegations against Piñera involve a deal surrounding the sale in 2010 of the Dominga copper and iron mine. At the time, Piñera was in his first term as president. The mine was sold to a childhood friend of the president's via a Piñera family firm that was listed in the British Virgin Islands, EFE reported. The leak of the information led to controversy amid suggestions that the deal was contingent on a favorable regulatory situation, Reuters reported. Courts had previously examined the deal and dismissed the case in 2017. Piñera has rejected suggestions of wrongdoing or irregularities related to the sale. During a six-hour speech Monday to lawmakers, the president's attorney, Jorge Gálvez, defended Piñera's actions. "With what we have experienced today and the way in which the accusation was prepared, improvised for the purpose of planting its discussion a few days before an election, how can we not understand that politics is an activity that has a

bad reputation," said Gálvez, EFE reported. The impeachment effort is the second such action against him. In 2019, lawmakers launched a failed attempt to remove him from office over allegations of human rights violations, which he denied, during a clampdown on massive protests. [Editor's note: See [Q&A](#) on the Pandora Papers in the Oct. 19 issue of the Advisor.]

ECONOMIC NEWS

Oil Theft Surges in Colombia Amid Shortages: Report

There has been a rise in criminal gangs' tapping of oil pipelines in Colombia amid a scarcity of smuggled Venezuelan fuel used in the drug trade, Reuters reported Monday, citing data from Colombian oil-pipeline operator Cenit and tax authorities. Gasoline is a main component in the making of cocaine, but shortages of fuel in Venezuela amid the country's economic crisis have prompted criminal groups to turn

Thefts of crude from Colombian pipelines hit a six-year high earlier this year.

to stealing the oil from Colombian pipelines, which they must then refine. Colombian gangs are also reportedly sending the fuel to Venezuela, a reversal of historic smuggling patterns. "Now it's switched," Yessica Prieto, project and investigations director of Colombian energy advocacy group Crudo Transparente, told the wire service. "It's ... Colombia mafias, or criminal groups, who are stealing Colombian crude, refining it illegally—obviously artisanally—and which crosses the border to Venezuela," Prieto added. In the first half of 2021, thefts of crude from Colombian pipelines, mainly the Caño Limón-Covenas pipeline near the border with

NEWS BRIEFS

Head of Mexico's Financial Intelligence Unit Resigns

The head of the Mexican Treasury's Financial Intelligence Unit, Santiago Nieto, resigned on Monday following a scandal over his wedding party, which was held in Guatemala, the Associated Press reported. A private plane carrying prominent guests to the wedding in the city of Antigua was found to be carrying \$35,000 in cash. Local newspaper El Universal reported that the money was adequately documented and declared, but the news sparked public outcry. Mexico's top anti-money laundering official, Nieto was seen as a close ally of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Longtime politician Pablo Gómez will replace Nieto.

Venezuela Starts Vaccinating Children With Cuban Covid-19 Vaccine

Venezuela has begun inoculating children aged 2 to 11 against Covid-19 with the homegrown Cuban vaccine Soberana 2, Vice President Delcy Rodríguez said Monday, Reuters reported. Cuba has said its three vaccines—Abdala, Soberana 2 and Soberana Plus—have an efficacy of more than 90 percent, though critics have pointed out that the results have not been peer-reviewed.

Mexican Prosecutors Arrest Businessman in Pegasus Spyware Case

Mexican prosecutors said Monday they had arrested a businessman on charges that he used the so-called Pegasus software to spy on a journalist, the Associated Press reported. Israeli spyware firm NSO Group has been implicated in government surveillance, with Mexico recording the largest list of alleged victims. Federal prosecutors did not name the suspect, but a source told the AP his name is Juan Carlos García Rivera. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in the Aug. 10 issue of the Advisor.]

Venezuela, have hit a six-year high, according to Cenit data. An average of 3,299 barrels of oil were being stolen per day in Colombia through June 30, higher than the 1,796 barrels per day registered in 2016. Criminal gang activity runs rampant at the Colombia-Venezuela border. Last month, Colombian President Iván Duque deployed a new unit of 14,000 military personnel to Norte de Santander province, where several armed groups have been fighting for control of cocaine production. [Editor's note: See related [Q&A](#) in the Oct. 26 issue of the Advisor.]

BUSINESS NEWS

Tipalti Extends Prepaid Debit Card Service in Region

U.S.-based financial technology company Tipalti announced Monday that, through its partnership with Intercash, it is extending its prepaid debit-card service to countries around the world, including several in Latin America. Tipalti offers a prepaid Mastercard that can be used online, in person and at automated-teller machines, said Tipalti, which is based in San Mateo, Calif. "Through this expansion, Tipalti customers around the globe can now offer integrated and seamless payee signup, with payees instantly receiving a virtual card with an option to request a physical card," the company said in a statement. The cards allow employers to pay people who lack bank accounts by depositing money into the users' prepaid account. The cards include built-in protections against overspending and also against fraud, the fintech said. Users in Brazil, Chile, Peru, Mexico and Uruguay who receive payments through the service can also transfer money directly to their bank accounts, the company added. "Prepaid cards are a convenient, elegant way to transfer money for most of us, but they can be a critical lifeline for the unbanked and underbanked around the world to get paid reliably and without fees," Roby Baruch, Tipalti's chief product officer, said in a statement.

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mothers, which have been shown to reduce the risk of violence, are often unconnected to gender-based violence services. During the lockdowns, governments bolstered gender-based violence hotlines and awareness campaigns. Calls spiked across the region, but many countries also saw reductions in official reports of violence, including child maltreatment, which indicates a decline in access to essential services rather than less need. In Brazil and Mexico, presidents who were outright dismissive of domestic violence and femicide as problems further undermined policy responses. The region has also seen innovative policies—ones that could be replicated. Argentina, in recognition of the economic constraints that those in violent situations often face, established a six-month cash transfer for survivors of gender-based violence. Uruguay has ankle bracelets for offenders that are much more effective than protective orders alone. Chile has centers to educate and rehabilitate men who are offenders. The United Nations has put the economic costs of gender-based violence at about 2 percent of global gross domestic product. This, if human rights arguments don't work, should move governments to action. Policies that focus on prevention and protection, and that address broader risk factors such as poverty and gender inequality, offer most promise. The key for governments is to provide nondiscretionary budget commitments to ensure such policies, and to coordinate them across ministries, levels of government, and the state and civil society."

A **Lisa Haugaard, co-director of the Latin America Working Group:** "Gender-based violence has devastating consequences in Latin America and the Caribbean, including by limiting women's and LGBTQ+ persons' access to education and work force participation. Women's rights organizations reported during the pandemic that domestic violence increased as women were locked in with their abusers. The region's govern-

ments are pursuing many solutions, but not with the funding and momentum required. Governments in tandem with civil society organizations need to invest in safe shelters for women, children and LGBTQ+ persons. Legislative frameworks should be strengthened to provide internally displaced persons with durable solutions, including access to education, jobs, health care and housing. Police and justice systems are in urgent need of training, with the involvement of women- and LGBTQ+-led organizations in carrying out and designing such programs, on how to handle domestic and gender-based violence cases. This is essential, as police and judges can side with abusers or ignore complaints of threats that lead to danger, and police themselves are among the major perpetrators of anti-LGBTQ+ violence in particular. Governments must press for greater accountability for gender-based violence carried out by security forces and other state agents. Training is especially urgent in issuing protective orders, collecting evidence and nondiscrimination practices. Governments should fund expanded prevention programs and public education campaigns in schools and communities to make it clear that gender-based and domestic violence and discrimination against women and LGBTQ+ persons are not acceptable. Finally, international donors should support such programs, and the United States and governments throughout the region should ensure that victims of gender-based violence have access to apply for asylum in the country where they feel safe."

A **Felicia Marie Knaul, director of the University of Miami Institute for Advanced Study of the Americas and president of Tómatelo a Pecho AC Mexico, and Renzo Calderón-Anyosa, Ph.D. student at McGill University:** "The pandemic of violence based on gender and against women and children preceded, was intensified by and will outlive Covid-19. Despite affecting an estimated

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one in five children and a third of women, it is denied, downplayed and neglected. The economic and social costs of inaction are tremendous. The immediate costs of more than 3 percent of GDP are but a fraction of the real price largely paid by victims and their loved ones. Femicide means the end of a life and leaves entire families bereft and orphaned. For survivors, educational attainment, labor market participation and productivity and the health of future generations are severely compromised. As a pervasive risk factor, gender-based violence may explain much of the gender wage gap and mental health burden. The staggering cost of inaction should sway policymakers to counter the age- and gender-based violence pandemic. But, gender equality and representation, including of marginalized groups and those who are most affected by gender-based violence, in decision-making at the highest levels are necessary. The scale-up required to meet a challenge of this magnitude requires seamless integration across health and the social sectors, breaking barriers that splinter medical, police, judicial, employment and social support services. Seamless also means that programs for women and children must intersect and interact. Opportunities to

reach survivors are missed by relying on the victim to come forward. The innovations that came from Covid-19 through helplines, cash transfer programs and contact points in places such as pharmacies or grocery stores must be harnessed. The heinous truth of

“The economic and social costs of inaction are tremendous.”

— Felicia Marie Knaul & Renzo Calderón-Anyosa

femicide unveiled the pandemic of violence against women and children and sparked a movement across Latin America. Our region palpated not only the pain, but also the power that this unveiling has imbued in women and supporters of gender equity to demand a society free of violence. Those voices are key for rethinking health and social systems to evoke evidence-based change that will quell the pandemic of violence in Latin America.”

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at fkuleta@thedialogue.org.

LATIN AMERICA ADVISOR

is published every business day by the Inter-American Dialogue ISSN 2163-7962

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Latin America Advisor is published every business day, except for major U.S. holidays, by the Inter-American Dialogue at 1155 15th Street NW, Suite 800 Washington, DC 20005

www.thedialogue.org

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Advisor Video

Technology's Role in Latin America's Economic Recovery

A Latin America Advisor interview with Karim Lesina, Chief External Affairs Officer at Millicom



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