



## Bolivia and GBV

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**Query:** A rapid review of the evidence on gender-based violence (GBV) in Bolivia including a review of evidence and news reports on the links with climate change, extractive industries and migration.

**Purpose:** To inform FCDO thinking on thematic areas of focus

# 1. Overview

**This report summarises the findings of a review of the evidence on gender-based violence (GBV) in Bolivia including a review of evidence and news reports on the links with climate change, extractive industries and migration.** It is a high-level summary based on rapid desk-based research (see Annex 1 for methodology) and is not a comprehensive mapping of the evidence. This report provides a rapid overview of the overall sense of the scale of GBV in Bolivia, including comparative data with other countries in the region where available, and information about risk factors and drivers. It also explores GBV in extractive industries, particularly critical minerals, the interaction between GBV and climate change, particularly deforestation, and the links between GBV and migration.

**Women and girls, especially Indigenous and rural women and girls, experience persistently high and frequent levels of violence in all areas of life,<sup>1</sup>** despite the significant progress that Bolivia has made in recognising women's human rights both nationally and internationally.<sup>2</sup> The main source of national representative data on GBV in Bolivia is from an extensive survey conducted by the government in 2016. Although it was conducted eight years ago, the survey is extremely comprehensive and shows high levels, of frequent, serious, recent violence in multiple areas of women's and girls' lives.<sup>3</sup> A national survey on GBV in Bolivia has not been conducted since.

**Data on the scale of GBV in Bolivia,** compared to other countries in the region include:

- **Intimate partner violence:** Bolivia has one of the highest rates of IPV in South America at 59.5% of women aged 15+ reporting ever having experienced physical and/or sexual IPV, compared to 14-17% in Brazil, Panama and Uruguay.<sup>4</sup> The figure is even higher when it includes emotional violence (74.7%) and among women who are separated, divorced and widows (87.8%).<sup>5</sup>
- **Bolivia has one of the highest rates of femicide in the region,** with 94 cases reported in 2022, equating to 1.5 per 100,000 women aged 15-49. Among 18 countries in the region, Bolivia ranks fourth, following Honduras (6 per 100,000), Dominican Republic (2.9 per 100,000) and El Salvador (1.6 per 100,000).<sup>6</sup>
- **Early and child marriage:** Official data shows that rates of early and child marriage in Bolivia are lower than a number of countries in the region at 20% compared to 22.1% for the Latin America and Caribbean region as a whole.<sup>7</sup> However, census data shows that 84% of girls under 18 in Bolivia report being in unregistered unions (not marriages).<sup>8</sup> The prevalence is higher among minorities of Quechua-speaking communities, the Aymara people and Afro-descendants.
- **Other forms of violence:** Women and girls in Bolivia also experience high rates of non-partner sexual violence, including: trafficking and sexual exploitation; violence in educational settings, the workplace, and the community; obstetrics violence; property

violence; online violence and violence against them if they are activists or generally in the public eye.

**Key risk factors and drivers** include:

- **Individual level factors** such as being Afrodescendent or Afro-Bolivian, Indigenous and/or living in or from a rural area, living with a disability, being a young woman or girl, living with HIV and also having experienced violence in childhood. These individual factors interact with interpersonal, community and societal level factors.
- **Inter-personal level factors** such as the unequal power in personal relationships between women and men and men's excessive alcohol consumption.
- **Community level factors** such as harmful gender norms that justify the use of violence to control and punish women and children.
- **Societal level factors** such as inadequate services for the protection of GBV survivors, the absence or inadequate enforcement of laws and policies and low levels of women and girls' education.

**There are multiple and intersecting links between GBV and extractive industries, climate change and migration in Bolivia.** Extractive industries exacerbate climate change impacts. People migrate because of climate change and environmental damage from extractive industries that make small-scale farming unviable, or shift to work in extractive industries when they lose their livelihoods because of climate change. GBV is usually not a specific focus of studies or reports on extractive industries, climate change or migration, however, it tends to be mentioned as one of many negative impacts.

## 2. Scale and prevalence of GBV in Bolivia

### 2.1 Intimate partner violence (IPV)

**Around 3 in 4 (74.7%) Bolivian women married or in union aged 15+ have experienced IPV in their lifetime and 44.4% in the last 12 months**, according to data from the 2016 Survey on Prevalence and Characterisation of Violence against Women (Spanish: *Encuesta de Prevalencia y Caracterización de la Violencia contra las Mujeres*, Epcvcm) carried out by the National Institute of Statistics of the Plurinational State of Bolivia (published: 2018).<sup>9</sup> The survey included a total of 2,417,626 urban women, and 904,155 rural women.

In 2023, there were 51,770 reports of violence against women and girls under Law 348<sup>10</sup> (The Internal Law to Guarantee Women a Life Without Violence). In 2023, there were 39,096 reports of family or domestic violence. Between 2013 and 2023 there was a 193% increase in cases of family violence recorded.<sup>11</sup> This is more likely to be due to Bolivia's increased efforts to address GBV as a crime and rights violation, rather than an actual doubling of experiences.

#### Experiences of intimate partner violence - % of women 15+ married or in union

PHYSICAL AND/OR SEXUAL		SEXUAL		PHYSICAL	
ever	past year	ever	past year	ever	past year
58.5	27.1	34.6	16.3	52.4	21.4

		Of women who have experienced violence - % who have experienced following forms:			
	% who have experienced at least one form of violence	Psychological	Physical	Sexual	Economic
<b>Lifetime</b>	74.7	92.7	67.3	45.5	41.8
<b>Past 12 months</b>	44.4	88.0	46.6	34.6	33.9

For women aged 15 or older, **separated, divorced and widows**, who have experienced situations of violence during the relationship with their ex-partner, by type of violence, prevalence **is even higher at 87.8%**.<sup>12</sup>

		Of women who have experienced violence - % who have experienced following forms:			
	% who have experienced at least one form of violence	Psychological	Physical	Sexual	Economic
<b>Lifetime</b>	87.8%	92.5	77.7	54.9	69.7

**Note:** A range of useful data breakdowns of data by different characteristics from the 2016 survey on VAWG in Bolivia can be found here on [the National Institute of Statistics of the Plurinational State of Bolivia website](#).

**Dating violence:** 51.8% of unmarried (soltera) women have faced sexual violence within a dating relationship (48.5% of urban women and 66.5% of rural women) in their lifetime (2016).<sup>13</sup> 13.6% of single women surveyed experienced sexual violence in the past year (2016).<sup>14</sup>

**Regional comparisons reveal that Bolivia has one of the highest rates of IPV in South America.** Women reported ever having experienced physical and/or sexual IPV at rates that ranged from 14% – 17% of women in Brazil, Panama, and Uruguay to over one-half (58.5%) in Bolivia.<sup>15</sup> Past-year prevalence of physical and/or sexual IPV ranged from 14.1% in El-Salvador to 27.1% in Bolivia. Note that the psychological and economic violence measured in the Bolivian national survey (see figures above) is not included in this regional review.

**Percentage of women (15+) who reported physical and/ or sexual IPV, ever and past 12 months**

	PHYSICAL AND/OR SEXUAL		SEXUAL		PHYSICAL	
	ever	past year	ever	past year	ever	past year
Bolivia (2016)	58.5	27.1	34.6	16.3	52.4	21.4
Argentina (2015)	26.9	2.7	3.9	0.2	26.5	2.7
Brazil (2017)	16.7	3.1	2.4	0.7	16.1	2.7
Chile (2016/17)	-	-	6.7	2.1	-	2.7
Paraguay (2008)	20.4	8.0	8.9	3.3	17.9	6.7
Peru (2017)	31.2	10.6	6.5	2.4	30.6	10.0

Source: For comparison data on all countries in the Americas see: Bott S, Guedes A, Ruiz-Celis AP, Mendoza JA. (2019) Intimate partner violence in the Americas: a systematic review and reanalysis of national prevalence estimates. Rev Panam Salud Publica. 43:e26. <https://doi.org/10.26633/RPSP.2019.26> and presented more clearly here: [https://www3.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com\\_docman&view=download&slug=intimate-partner-violence-against-women-in-the-americas-2018&Itemid=270&lang=en](https://www3.paho.org/hq/index.php?option=com_docman&view=download&slug=intimate-partner-violence-against-women-in-the-americas-2018&Itemid=270&lang=en)

**The percentage of women experiencing frequent incidents of violence is also high – over a third to close to half of women who have experienced various forms of violence have experienced it many times.** The 2016 survey captured the frequency of different forms of violence. Some examples are given below. A full set can be found at <https://nube.ine.gob.bo/index.php/s/2hHHRdCYsblFbdG/download>

Statistics are also given for the past 12 months.

Form of violence	% of women surveyed	Many times	A few times	One time
They slapped you or hit you with their hands and fists	36.4	38.4	33.0	28.6
They insulted you, or used rude or aggressive words when addressing you	58.4	47.2	43.1	9.7
They have used physical force to force you to have sexual relations	20.5	37.6	36.0	26.4
Although they had money, they did not meet household expenses	17.7	41.7	41.9	16.4

**Most experiences of different forms of IPV are severe.** The 2016 survey captured the severity of different forms of violence. Some examples are given below. A full set can be found at - <https://nube.ine.gob.bo/index.php/s/6QuKDQ1s4ONYrSs/download>

Form of violence	% of women surveyed	Severe	A little severe	Not severe
They slapped you or hit you with their hands and fists	36.4	85.9	11.8	2.2
They insulted you, or used rude or aggressive words when addressing you	58.4	67.4	23.3	9.3
They have used physical force to force you to have sexual relations	20.5	85.9	11.8	2.2
Although they had money, they did not meet household expenses	17.7	78.0	17.0	5.0



## 3.2 Non-partner sexual violence

Bolivia has the highest rate of (partner and non-partner) sexual violence in Latin America, and according to Equity Now, the country also has some of the region's lowest reporting rates for these crimes.<sup>16</sup>

**Sexual violence in social settings, the workplace and in educational settings:** Data from the 2016 national survey highlights the high levels of sexual violence in different settings.

<b>WOMEN AGED 15 OR OLDER WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED OR ARE EXPERIENCING GENDER BASED VIOLENCE, IN SOCIAL, EDUCATIONAL AND WORKPLACE SETTINGS, DURING THEIR LIFETIME, BY FORM OF VIOLENCE, 2016 (Percentages)</b>			
	<b>Social settings</b>	<b>Educational settings</b>	<b>Workplace settings</b>
They have made sexual comments that bothered or offended you	60.0%	37.8	31.4
They groped you or touched your body without your consent	31.3	12.0	9.3
They forced you to have sexual relations	6.2	1.5	2.2

On August 4, 2019, the bodies of two young women who were minehead workers were found. The women had been sexually assaulted.<sup>17</sup>

### **Reporting sexual violence:**

- In 2023 between January 1 and March 31, there were 11,450 reports of sexual violence against women, boys, girls and adolescents in Bolivia.
- In 2024 According to the report of the Attorney General's Office of the Public Ministry, between January 1 and March 31, 2024, 2,697 complaints of sexual violence were registered, which is equivalent to 21% of the total complaints registered within the framework of Law 348. (12,541 complaints).

- Of these 2,697 complaints, 805 were reports of sexual abuse, 743 were rape of women, 650 were rape of an infant, girl, boy or adolescent, 413 *estupro*<sup>1</sup> or statutory rape, and 86 were sexual harassment.

This data is from the Bolivian Gender Observatory, Women's Coordinating Body, a digital advocacy platform that produces annual data on different aspects of VAWG.<sup>18</sup>

### **Sexual violence and pregnancy:**

Under Bolivian law, abortion is a crime except in cases of rape or when necessary to protect the life or health of a pregnant person. There are approximately 185 clandestine abortions every day in Bolivia.<sup>19</sup>

According to data from the Ministry of Health and Sports, girls and adolescents were forced to carry to term a pregnancy resulting from rape, either due to the influence of agents such as the Catholic Church or the absence of clear procedures related to requests for abortions. Public health services registered 559 legal abortions from 2014 to 2021, of which 62% were pregnancies resulting from rape. Women and girls seeking legal abortions are likely to encounter stigma, mistreatment, and revictimization.

Between 2020 and 2022, the Public Ministry prosecuted 186 women for aborting their pregnancies, although many of these women were likely victims themselves. Thousands of women and adolescents sought clandestine abortions that put their lives at risk. Of the total court cases registered by the judiciary in 2021, 39% corresponded to gender violence. There were violations of due diligence in investigations of such cases, especially by the police and prosecutor's office.<sup>20</sup>

## **2.3 Femicide**

**Bolivia has one of the highest rates of femicide in the region<sup>2</sup>**, with 94 cases reported in 2022, equating to 1.5 per 100,000 women aged 15-49. Among 18 countries in the region, Bolivia tanks fourth, following Honduras (6 per 100,000), Dominican Republic (2.9 per 100,000) and El Salvador (1.6 per 100,000), as shown in the figure below.<sup>21</sup>

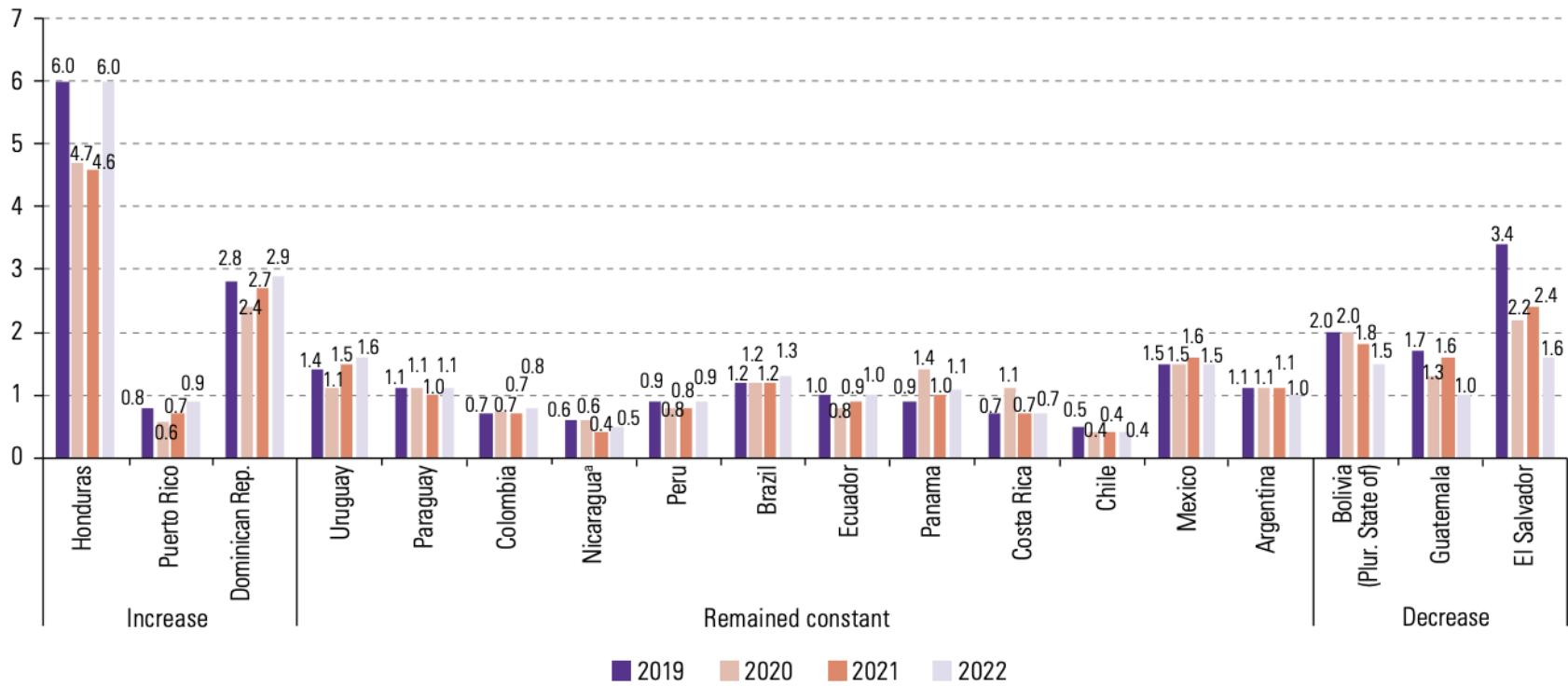
In the region, only three countries (**Bolivia**, Guatemala, El Salvador) registered a decline in femicide rates. In Bolivia, there were 108 cases reported in 2021 - 1.8 per 100,000 women aged 15-49<sup>22</sup> and 107 cases reported in 2020 - 2 per 100,000 women aged 15-49.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The crime of *estupro* usually describes cases in which an adult has sexual relations with a minor above the legal age of consent by means of seduction or deceit. This discriminatory law mislabels rape and contributes to impunity for rapists as it ignores the exploitation of unequal power dynamics and the vulnerability of teenage girls. In addition, the penalties prescribed under *estupro* provisions are generally very low, far lower than applicable penalties for rape (see table below), and are not commensurate with the severity of the crime. ([Equality Now, 2021](#))

<sup>2</sup> Note that 'femicide' and 'feminicide' are used interchangeably in the sources referenced here. This evidence review will use the term 'femicide' (the murder of a woman or girl because of her gender), rather than 'feminicide which is sometimes understood to have a broader, more political meaning. (Source: [GHRC, 2009](#))



**Figure 2**  
Latin America (18 countries and territories): feminicides or femicides, 2019–2022  
(Rates per 100,000 women)



**Source:** Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, on the basis of records from the national mechanisms for the advancement of women.

<sup>a</sup> Nicaragua only reports cases for the indicator women’s deaths at the hands of their intimate partner or former partner.



Geographically, most femicides were in the Department of La Paz (23), followed by Santa Cruz (20), Cochabamba (12) and Potosí (9), Beni (6), Tarija (4), Oruro (3), Chuquisaca (3) and Pando (1).

The main cause of death was "asphyxiation" (24) and "blows or trauma" (23), while the rest of the femicides were due to other factors.

The Prosecutor's Office indicated that the aggressors, in the majority of cases, had had or were in a sentimental relationship with their victims, who were mainly between 21 and 50 years old.<sup>24</sup> 36% of the femicide victims were aged 18-28.<sup>25</sup>

### 3.4 Child marriage

According to the Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean (2020), in Bolivia one in five (20%) women between the ages of 20 and 24 were married or in union before reaching the age of 18, compared to 22.1% for the Latin America and Caribbean region as a whole. This statistic was over 30% in Suriname (36%), Nicaragua (35%), Honduras (34%), Belize (34%), Dominican Republic (32%) and Guyana (32%). There are only four countries with percentages below 20%: Costa Rica (17%), Argentina (16%), Peru (14%) and Jamaica (8%).<sup>26</sup>

However, there are other reports that present a different picture of child and early marriage in Bolivia.

According to UNICEF (2023), Bolivia ranks second in Latin America for girls ages 15-17 who report being currently married or living with a man. Indigenous girls and those with only a primary school education are most affected, with rates reaching up to 58% in some areas.<sup>27</sup> The prevalence is higher among minorities of Quechua-speaking communities, the Aymara people and Afro-descendants. A study conducted by Plan International showed that some men from Indigenous communities believe that the ideal age for union for girls starts at age 13, and 18 years for boys.<sup>28</sup>

Ipas Bolivia also presented evidence that the issue of child unions is far worse than official records suggest:

- Census data shows that 84% of girls under 18 in Bolivia report being in unregistered unions (not marriages).
- Cross-checked census data reveals 23,770 adolescents aged 15-17 claimed they were currently or had been married or in an unregistered union.

This strongly indicates that early unions are common, despite the law.<sup>29</sup>

A regional study of eight countries including Bolivia, by Plan International and UNFPA, found that the patterns of gender disadvantage, poverty and relationship violence that girls often face in their natal home are often replicated with their partners in their unions. Men themselves

stated that they use violence and control with their adolescent wives, which they dominate in decision-making.<sup>30</sup>

**Teenage pregnancies:** In Bolivia, every day approximately 61 girls and adolescents become pregnant. According to the United Nations Population Fund, Bolivia has one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in the Americas: 88 per 1000 girls and women between the ages of 15 and 19, while the regional average is 70. Meanwhile, according to figures from the Ministry of Health, 22,221 teenage pregnancies were recorded between January and July 2021, a figure that was projected to increase in the second half of the year.<sup>31</sup>

### 3.5 Other forms of violence

The types of violence featured in this section do not represent a comprehensive list of GBV faced by women and girls in Bolivia.

**Trafficking and sexual exploitation:** In Bolivia, 1,359 cases related to crimes contemplated in Law No. 263, known as the Comprehensive Law Against Human Trafficking and Smuggling, have been registered during 2023, primarily affecting women and girls. Of these cases, 73% have been classified as human trafficking, equivalent to 989 cases.<sup>32</sup> The report "Panamazonia: Human Rights Situation of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples 2019", mentions that the sexual exploitation of Indigenous girls and women has increased by 66%. The report notes a disturbing increase in human trafficking and smuggling networks for the purposes of sexual slavery, child sexual exploitation and sex tourism. It is estimated that these networks operate in almost all the countries of the Amazon basin (Ecuador, Colombia, Brazil, Peru, **Bolivia** and Guyana). The main victims are Indigenous girls.<sup>33</sup> FIIAPP (the International and IberoAmerican Foundation for Administration and Public Policies) identifies human trafficking, money laundering and mistreatment of women, girls and boys, as some of the key crimes related to drug trafficking.<sup>34</sup>

**Violence against women in the public eye:** Civil society organisations and others have raised concerns that women community, union, human rights and climate activists, journalists and politicians face discriminatory sexist attitudes and abuse, as well as overt physical violence when performing their roles.<sup>35</sup>

Regional: The level of violence against human rights defenders in Latin America is alarming. More defenders are murdered in the region than anywhere else in the world, a clear indication of the risks they face in carrying out their work. Of particular concern are defenders belonging to vulnerable groups, such as women, indigenous peoples, people of African descent, and the LGBTBI+ community. The normalization of violence against these populations through misogynistic and homophobic discourse has contributed to this problem. The lack of a differentiated approach to investigating crimes against these groups exacerbates this discrimination.<sup>36</sup> Further, more than a third (38%) of women press workers recently surveyed in Latin America and the Caribbean said they were attacked online or on social networks and that the aggression was linked to their gender and journalistic work.<sup>37</sup>

In Bolivia: There were 47 cases of political violence and harassment against women reported in 2023 and 23 women left their position as a result.<sup>38</sup>

The United States Department of State 2023 Human Rights Report on Bolivia states that women participating in politics face violence and harassment. The president of the Association of Councillors of Bolivia reported that between January and May, there were 110 cases of harassment and political violence against elected women councillors and mayors.<sup>39</sup> The same report expresses concerns about the threats and harassment faced by journalists and states that women journalists face attacks and threats due to their gender. According to the domestic NGO Unitas (National Union of Institutions for Social Action Work), the number of reports of threats and attacks against women journalists increased, with 14 cases reported through May.<sup>40</sup>

**Violence against political activists:** Bolivia's political and social crisis has been accompanied by witness accounts, images and reports of violence against Indigenous women, public representatives and activists from the Movement for Socialism. Shops have been looted, houses belonging to female leaders of social organisations and their headquarters have been set on fire, and Indigenous women have been abducted, tortured and subjected to sexual violence. There have also been a number of speeches against women's rights.<sup>41</sup>

On 6 November 2017, Indigenous women and women from rural areas came together to protest against the violence. During the march, Patricia Arce, one of the country's mayors, was attacked and dragged through the streets, had her hair forcibly cut and was covered in red paint. The United Nations has stated that it 'deplores the violence and inhumane treatment' against Patricia Arce and other women, men, youth, girls and boys in the country.<sup>42</sup>

**Violence in social settings, workplaces and educational settings:** Data from the 2016 national survey on violence against women highlights the high levels of physical, psychological and sexual violence women face in all three settings in their lifetime. Note: data for sexual violence is given above.

<b>WOMEN AGED 15 OR ABOVE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED OR ARE EXPERIENCING GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN SOCIAL, EDUCATIONAL AND WORKPLACE SETTINGS, DURING THEIR LIFETIME, BY FORM OF VIOLENCE, 2016 (number and percentage)</b>						
<b>FORM OF VIOLENCE</b>	<b>SOCIAL</b>		<b>EDUCATIONAL</b>		<b>WORKPLACE</b>	
	<b>Women</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Women who study or studied</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Women who work or worked</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
WOMEN OVER 15	3,697,268		3,349,160		2,861,284	
<b>Psychological violence</b>						
They humiliated or belittled you	1,946,482	52.6	1,709,767	51.1	1,550,065	54.2
They threatened to harm you	1,104,505	29.9	749,430	22.4	581,867	20.3
<b>Physical violence</b>						
They physically attacked you	847,093	22.9	951,336	28.4	366,530	12.8
Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística - Encuesta de Prevalencia y Características de Violencia contra las Mujeres 2016 - <u>Bolivia: women age 15 or older, who have experienced or are living situations of gender violence, in the areas: social, education and work throughout their lives, according to form of violence.</u>						

**Technology facilitated GBV (TFGBV):** Research on regional trends found that the MENA region had the highest rate of TFGBV at 98% followed by Latin America and the Caribbean at 91%. The global prevalence rate is 85%.<sup>43</sup> Given high rates of GBV in Latin America, and social norms and political impunity it is not unreasonable for survivors of TFGBV to experience legitimate concern that online threats could lead to action.<sup>44</sup>

Technology facilitated GBV is a reality in Bolivia, where every day many girls, adolescents, women and gender-diverse people are victims of harassment, abuse and violation of their right to dignity on social networks and the internet. National legislation has yet to catch up with the rise in technology facilitated GBV.<sup>45</sup> In Bolivia the prevalence of cyberbullying is 88% of the general population.<sup>46</sup> Seven out of ten girls in Bolivia have felt harassed online, according to a 2021 study of 1050 girls across Bolivia, Conectadas y Seguras, by Plan International.<sup>47</sup>

The S.O.S Digital Centre<sup>48</sup> is a team to support and respond to digital gender violence that since 2020 has been providing information to women, adolescents, journalists, female politicians, activists, and the LGBTIQ+ population on how to respond to this violence. In the first semester of 2023, it responded to 63 people, 40% of whom faced sexual abuse related to information and communication technologies. The most frequent forms of aggression were:

- Threat of publication of intimate, erotic or sexual content.
- Publication of intimate, erotic or sexual content without consent,
- Sending intimate content to family and friends.
- Obtaining intimate content without consent (through stealing access to social media accounts)

**Online gaming used for grooming:** Free Fire is one of the most popular online games in Bolivia. On this platform, an 11-year-old girl was approached by one of the profiles, who gave her 'diamonds' to help her within the game. The relationship continued with the sending of intimate images and finally, a face-to-face meeting at a border point in the country - a case of recruitment of a minor for trafficking and smuggling that ended in the neighboring country of Peru.<sup>49</sup>

**Obstetrics violence:** 63.5% of women had experienced obstetrics violence perpetrated by health care workers in their most recent experience of facility childbirth (2016). 90.8% of women aged 50-59 had experienced this type of violence.<sup>50</sup>

**Property violence:** In response to questions about property violence (i.e. They tried to take or took away your property; They tried to or took away documents that prove your right to ownership of some property; They forced you to put property that you bought or inherited in another person's name), 11% of women over 15 from urban areas and 19.4% of women from rural areas had experienced property violence (2016). This rose to approximately a quarter among women with no education and women over 60. 12.8% of these incidents were perpetrated by a spouse, 25.3% by a sibling and nearly 30% by someone unrelated.<sup>51</sup>



### 3. Risk factors and drivers of GBV

#### 3.1 Individual

**Childhood violence:** The global evidence shows that adverse childhood experiences, including mistreatment, are often associated with a higher risk of IPV perpetration and victimisation in adulthood.<sup>52,53</sup> 81.2% of women who were interviewed for the 2016 survey on GBV had experienced childhood violence (sexual violence not included).<sup>54</sup> In Bolivia and Colombia, two countries with the highest prevalence of physical and/or sexual IPV, 48% and 61% of women respectively report that children in their home are punished through hitting, beating, slapping or spanking.<sup>55</sup>

**Race and ethnicity:** In Bolivia, where about 50% of people identify themselves as Indigenous or Afro-descendants according to the 2012 Population and Housing Census, gender-based disparities are largely intertwined with ethnicity.

**Indigenous women** have been shown to face discrimination both as Indigenous people and as women, resulting in a lack of access to education, health care, and ancestral land rights. In addition, they face disproportionately high rates of poverty and exposure to domestic and sexual violence, exacerbated in contexts of trafficking and conflict.<sup>56</sup>

Incidence of violence levels are even higher among poor, young, and urban women who identify themselves as **Indigenous** or from rural origins.<sup>57,58</sup> In two surveys that measured self-identified ethnicity, women who identified themselves as Indigenous reported slightly higher levels of physical or sexual violence ever and in the past 12 months compared with women who self-identified as not Indigenous in Bolivia in 2003 and 2008<sup>59</sup>. Note: the researchers for this evidence review were unable to find similar data for the 2016 survey.

Noting that the results of the March 2024 census will be released in 2025, according to the previous census in 2012, more than 23,000 people identified as **Afro-Bolivians**, with some commentators suggesting the number is likely to be much higher taking into account people of mixed heritage.<sup>60,61</sup> GBV has been identified as a key issue by **Afro-Bolivian** and **Afro-descendant** women in Bolivia, including machismo, violence against women, and sexual abuse against girls. Afro-Bolivian and Afro-descendant women and their organisations also highlight the lack of disaggregated data and statistics on how many Afro-descendant women have been treated in cases of violence.<sup>62,63</sup>

**Rural / urban:** Data from the 2016 survey on violence against women in Bolivia found that women from rural areas were more likely to experience IPV in the past year (urban: 42.9% compared to rural: 47.6% in the past year).<sup>64</sup> Single women from rural areas were far more likely to experience sexual violence than single women from urban areas. Women from rural areas are less likely than urban women to seek support from an institution, and less likely to make a formal complaint of IPV.

**Living with a disability:** GBV, particularly sexual violence, disproportionately affects women with disabilities, especially those with moderate or severe disabilities.<sup>65</sup> According to Humanity and Inclusion, seven out of ten women with disabilities have been subjected to violence within their families, and half are survivors of sexual violence.<sup>66</sup> It is estimated that only a small percentage of cases are formally reported, given that many women and girls with disabilities are in situations of dependency.<sup>67</sup> Note, however, that the source of data provided by Humanity and Inclusion is not referenced.

**Age:** Young women and adolescent girls (15-28) are more likely than older women to experience GBV (particularly physical and sexual violence) in the past 12 months.

**BOLIVIA: WOMEN AGED 15 OR OLDER, MARRIED OR IN A FREE UNION, WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED OR ARE EXPERIENCING VIOLENCE IN THEIR INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP (2016)**

	WOMEN IN SITUATIONS OF IPV	Of the women who had experienced violence - % by type of violence			
		Psychological	Physical	Sexual	Economic
	% (last 12 months)				
15 - 28	48.2	87.6	50.1	38.7	32.3
29 - 39	46.4	87.8	48.4	37.9	34.9
40 - 49	45.1	90.0	47.7	36.9	32.4
50 - 59	41.2	86.8	39.3	27.7	33.9
Over 60	35.3	87.1	39.8	18.9	37.8

Source: <https://nube.ine.gob.bo/index.php/s/kiOdQc32Pp4jso8/download>

One in three girls in Bolivia have experienced some form of sexual violence before the age of 18.<sup>68</sup> In 2024, according to the report of the Attorney General's Office of the Public Ministry, between January 1 and March 31, 2024, there were 650 cases of rape of an infant, girl, boy or adolescent, and cases of 413 estupro or statutory rape of people under 18.<sup>69</sup> Over half (58.7%) of women who participated in the study featured below (looking at violence faced by women living with HIV) reported sexual violence in childhood.<sup>70</sup>

**Living with HIV:** Comparison data from a study of violence against women living with HIV in seven countries in Latin America involving 937 women found that Bolivia had the highest rates of different forms of violence:<sup>71</sup>

- 82.5% of women interviewed in **Bolivia** reported ever having experienced any type of physical violence from anyone other than an intimate partner.
- Lifetime emotional violence ranged from 83.6% in **Bolivia** to 30.2% in Honduras, and in the last year from 51.5% to 24.5% respectively.

- The prevalence of lifetime physical and sexual violence ranged from 73% in **Bolivia** to 13.7% in Honduras, and in the last year from 35.8% in **Bolivia** to 6.1% in Guatemala.
- The prevalence of sexual violence by anyone other than an intimate partner ever in the seven countries analysed is 43.5%. Two countries are above the value of the total sample: **Bolivia** (76.3%) and Peru (58%).
- Physical violence during pregnancy by a partner ranges from 9.6% in Honduras to 49.6% in **Bolivia**.
- The percentage reporting sexual violence in childhood anonymously ranged from 58.7% in **Bolivia** to 26.1% in Honduras. In the face-to-face interview, the figures ranged from 52.2% in **Bolivia** to 9% in Guatemala and Honduras.

### 3.2 Interpersonal

**Unequal power in relationships:** Another study with a sample of 2,759 Bolivian heterosexual couples, found that IPV is less likely to occur in families in which the decision making is egalitarian (female and male partners make decisions together) but more likely to occur when either the male partner or the female partner makes decisions alone. These findings support the hypotheses that an unequal gender distribution of power may cause conflict within heterosexual couples.<sup>72</sup>

**Alcohol consumption:** Men's excessive alcohol consumption is associated with intra-family violence and can constitute a risk factor for violence against women and girls. In focus group discussions for a study on the impact of neighbourhood improvement programmes in La Paz, when women began speaking about more access to alcohol in the neighbourhood, they invariably ended up speaking about intra-family violence within the household.<sup>73</sup>

### 3.3 Community

**Gender norms:** Gender norms are a significant driver of GBV in Bolivia, perpetuating power imbalances and justifying the use of violence to control or punish women.

- **GBV is normal and accepted:** UN Women state that one of the main challenges facing women in Bolivia is '*Normalization of violence as a socio-political means to repress women and lack of enforcement of existing regulations*' (p8).<sup>74</sup> Former President Evo Morales is reported to have made a significant number of sexist and homophobic remarks that normalise GBV. While visiting an oilfield in April 2012, he asked two women professionals at the 'Sísmica 3D' camp in Chimoré: 'Oil workers? Are you drillers? Or do you get drilled? Do tell me.' When there was local opposition to the construction of the TIPNIS road in Chapare, Morales said, 'Young men, you have instructions from the President to go and seduce the Yuracaré Trinitaria women so that they don't oppose the building of the road'.<sup>75</sup> More recently, in 2022 women called for Luis Arce to fire the Vice Minister of Government Coordination, Gustavo Torrico, for insulting remarks about Mayor Eva Copa. He apologised and kept his post.<sup>76</sup>

According to focus groups for a study on neighbourhood improvement programmes in La Paz, violence against women is generally accepted, very rarely denounced, and almost never condemned unless it ends with femicide. Very few men expressed concern about violence within the home.<sup>77</sup>

- **Views that girls and women provoke violence:** In Bolivia, Colombia, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic, six out of every ten men aged 15 to 19 surveyed by Oxfam believe that jealousy is a demonstration of love and 65% of them believe that when a woman says “no” to a sexual relationship, she really means “yes”. Similarly, seven of every ten think that a woman is responsible if she is groped or cornered because she is wearing the wrong clothes, while 40% of them think that if a woman has been drinking alcohol, she is to blame if a man rapes her, even if she is unconscious.<sup>78</sup>

The 2016 survey on GBV found that 33.8% of women justify violence against them with women in rural areas being more than twice as likely to justify violence as women in urban areas.<sup>79</sup>

### 3.4 Societal

**Gaps in protection services:** Quality services can help protect women from violence and are a key part of the prevention continuum.<sup>80</sup> According to the UN (2022), despite legal and policy advancements, gaps persist in access to and quality of protection services for GBV survivors, especially for Indigenous and rural women and girls, due to limited budget and national/local prioritisation.<sup>81</sup> Even though there are support services such as the Integrated Municipal Legal Services (SLIM) and the Child Protection Offices (DNA), which work to prevent violence and offer support and protection to survivors (usually women, children and adolescents), women do not tend to report violence due to the fear of reprisals from their partner, because they do not find the support they need in these legal advice institutions, and due to the cost of travelling to the town.<sup>82</sup>

A 2014 law called for the construction of women’s shelters in each of the country’s nine departments. But according to a Human Rights report (2023) not all departments have shelters. Human rights activists interviewed for the report say that the shelters for domestic violence survivors were not well staffed, did not promise anonymity, and could not provide protection from abusers. Activists said shelters mixed vulnerable women, girls, juvenile delinquents, human trafficking victims, sexual abuse survivors, and children with mental-health problems.<sup>83</sup>

A report from the US Department of State on Trafficking (2024) found that law enforcement officials were often unable to secure safe accommodations for trafficking victims, particularly in departments without multi-use facilities. Law enforcement officers could only provide support for temporary stays in hotels. A shelter for victims of trafficking in La Paz for underage female trafficking victims was not operational.<sup>84</sup>

**Inadequate enforcement of laws and policies:** According to the latest EU report on Bolivia (2023) violence against women and girls remains extremely high despite the Government's stated commitment to tackle this phenomenon. Bolivia is a signatory to most of the international legal instruments on human rights, including CEDAW, its Optional Protocol, and the InterAmerican convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women. Law N° 348, the Comprehensive Law to Guarantee Women a Life Free from Violence, entered into force in Bolivia in 2013.<sup>85</sup> The law broadens protection of women against various forms of violence and establishes the eradication of violence against women as a priority of the state.

However, lack of institutional capacity and relevant funding, together with fluctuating political commitment, continue to be primary challenges for the effective implementation of laws and policies to promote gender equality and prevent GBV. A 2022 report on domestic violence in Bolivia by law firm Baker McKenzie in association with Global Rights for Women states that '*An undesirable situation of impunity persists in criminal proceedings on violence against women and domestic violence, which has been felt in the country's jurisprudence.*' (p.3)

- Sexual violence: Although the law establishes penalties of imprisonment for 15 to 20 years for the rape of an adult (man or woman), including spousal and domestic or intimate partner rape and so-called corrective rape of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex (LGBTQI+) persons, it is rarely enforced.<sup>86</sup> These barriers discourage the vast majority of the survivors who seek justice to abandon their case before it has even left the initial investigatory stages.<sup>87</sup> In March 2023 the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child urged Bolivia modify the legal definition of rape, which requires violence or intimidation and does not include lack of consent to sexual intercourse.<sup>88</sup> In addition, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) said the country must eliminate the discriminatory crime of *estupro*, a legal provision that can be applied when an adult rapes an adolescent girl who is above 14 (the legal age of consent) but below the age of 18. Bolivia must also establish a distinct category for incestuous sexual violence in the Penal Code, defined as any sexual act between an adult relative and a minor.<sup>89</sup>

On 19 January 2023, the IACHR found that the state had not sufficiently investigated or conducted criminal proceedings into a case of sexual abuse against adolescent Brisa de Angulo Losada over 20 years ago. The IACHR's decision also came with a lengthy list of reparations that require Bolivia to improve its treatment of sexual violence survivors.<sup>90</sup>

More than a year since the IACHR issued this historic ruling, some progress has been made in implementing the measures ordered by the IACHR, significant challenges remain, particularly with legal reforms needed to ensure that girls survivors of sexual violence obtain justice.<sup>91</sup>

- Protection of women in politics: The government passed Law 243 Against Political Harassment and Political Violence Towards Women in 2012 which was meant to protect 'all women candidates, elected and designated officials or those exercising a political or public role'. Many public servants are not aware of the law or what it entails. Most importantly, in many cases, complaints are processed and decided by officials who could themselves be the harasser. It also does not cover any other type of activist. In addition, women who want to denounce harassment or violence need to resign first to be able to make the denunciation. Thus, despite the government's willingness to implement this law, the lack of clarity on the roles and functions of subnational authorities, and its lack of budgetary support have meant that, in practice, the law has been ignored in local governments, and women from rural areas had to go to La Paz if they wanted to denounce cases of political violence.<sup>92</sup>
- IPV: In 2022, prosecutors registered more than 51,000 reports of domestic violence.<sup>93</sup> The law prohibits domestic violence, as well as conciliation in cases of violence and set out the creation of special courts for domestic and public violence.<sup>94</sup> Domestic abuse resulting in injury was punishable by three to six years' imprisonment, and the penalty for serious physical or psychological injury is five to 12 years in prison. However, of the 113,269 complaints of violence against women prosecuted between 2015 and 2018 (January to March), only 1,284 cases received convictions, i.e., in only 1.13% of cases the perpetrator did not get off 'scot-free'.<sup>95</sup> The UN Entity on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and human rights groups remain concerned that a lack of training regarding the law and slow judicial processes, among other factors, hinder full implementation of the law.<sup>96</sup> There is a high level of impunity due to structural deficiencies in guaranteeing women their right to a life free of violence and their right to access to justice.<sup>97</sup>
- Femicide: In January 2022, outrage was prompted by the case of Richard Choque, a serial rapist and murderer who was given house arrest and then continued to commit crimes. Following the conclusion of an investigation of a commission on femicide, Arce promulgated the *Law for the Protection of Victims of Femicide, Infanticide, and Rape of Infants, Girls, Boys, or Adolescents (2022)*. The legislation expanded the punishment for both rapists and corrupt officials, with an up to twenty-year sentence for judges found to have acted unlawfully and a ten-year sentence for prosecutors, judges, and police found guilty of acting against victims. Yet the Ombudsperson's Office still denounces "discretionary" handling of judicial cases for attempted femicide, resulting in alleged perpetrators being prosecuted for less serious charges. Activists state corruption, a lack of adequate crime scene investigations, a lack of specialised prosecutors, and a dysfunctional, underfunded judiciary hamper convictions for femicide.<sup>98</sup> Many of the perpetrators are either never caught, not punished or go free soon after. Bolivia's feminist collectives are trying to force government action against femicides – and the corrupt justice system that allows perpetrators to go unpunished.<sup>99</sup>



- Reprisals against women: In 2022, CEDAW reported on insufficient and ineffective protection from reprisals for women survivors of GBV seeking justice, the Committee recommended that Bolivia take measures to ensure that protection and expulsion orders are issued and enforced in a timely and effective manner in cases of domestic violence, and that appropriate penalties are imposed for non-compliance with such orders.<sup>100</sup>
- Harassment: The law considered sexual harassment a criminal offence punishable by up to eight years' imprisonment. There were no comprehensive reports on the extent of sexual harassment, but observers generally acknowledged it was widespread and said the law was rarely enforced.<sup>101</sup>
- Trafficking: A 2023 report on trafficking states that the Government of Bolivia does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so.<sup>102</sup> These efforts included adopting the 2021-2025 Plurinational Policy against Human Trafficking and Smuggling in Persons (May 2022) for the elimination of trafficking and reportedly sentencing three traffickers who had been in pretrial detention since 2016. However, the government did not demonstrate overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period. The government decreased prosecution efforts. Authorities did not report investigating, prosecuting, or convicting cases of trafficking, making it difficult to assess progress.<sup>103</sup>

**Education level:** Education can have a long-term protective effect against IPV, but the data from Bolivia suggests that recent experiences of violence may be influenced by other factors beyond educational attainment. Women who have no education are 10% more likely to experience IPV than women who have completed secondary education (during their lifetime). However, this gap closes when women are asked about experiences over the past 12 months.

	% (lifetime experience of violence)	Psychological	Physical	Sexual	Economic
Completed secondary school	71.2	89.0	65.5	40.9	42.3
No education	81.1	95.1	76.8	51.2	48.0

Source: <https://nube.ine.gob.bo/index.php/s/kiOdQc32Pp4jso8/download>

## 6. Climate change, extractive industries, migration and GBV

In this section, it is important to recognise the many ways climate change, mining and extractive industries, and migration are linked, and how they all link to GBV and VAWG. For example,

- Climate change is a driver of displacement and migration, including during climate-related disasters and rural-urban migration,<sup>104</sup> as it exacerbates environmental conditions that make parts of Bolivia increasingly uninhabitable. Areas most affected by climate-related displacement are the east with its disrupted Amazon basin weather cycles, the south with increasing desertification, and the north where mountain temperatures in the Andes are rapidly changing.<sup>105</sup>
- Mining and extractive industries heighten the impact of climate change, and cause deforestation, water contamination and environmental damage, negatively impacting on rural and Indigenous communities and small-scale farmers. They also cause land dispossession, displacement, resettlement and migration.<sup>106</sup>
- The nexus of extractive industries, climate change, “narco-deforestation”, and associated money-laundering and corruption, has negative impacts on Indigenous, Afro-descendant and rural people. These include forcible displacement, forced labour, high levels of violent and non-violent crime due to disputes over territory and routes, and trafficking in persons, including for sexual exploitation, as well as sexual violence.<sup>107</sup>
- Indigenous communities and particularly women, are threatened and attacked for protesting against mining pollution, water scarcity and land use change.<sup>108</sup> (Note that any form of resistance to mining and its many impacts can bring on violent reprisals. Women’s very resistance to violence, or trying in any way to assert or claim their rights puts them at risk – whether or not they identify as environmental or human rights defenders.<sup>109,110,111</sup>)

However, while there is global evidence of the links between GBV and climate change, migration and extractive industries, this review finds that such links are rarely the focus of studies or reports on Bolivia. Some key actors in Bolivia (such as UNODC<sup>112</sup> and UNFPA<sup>113</sup>) do explicitly recognise GBV linked to these interconnected issues, and sexual violence and other forms of GBV as one of the negative impacts on Indigenous, rural and Afro-descendant people of this nexus of issues.

## 6.1. Impacts of climate change and weather-related disasters on GBV

### Climate change in Bolivia

The Plurinational State of Bolivia is among the ten countries most vulnerable to the effects of climate change globally. During the last decade, it has experienced approximately 700 floods, 500 hailstorms, 300 droughts and 50 forest fires. Poverty, reduced resilience and limited access to sexual and reproductive health services and rights and GBV services, especially in areas with high climate change vulnerabilities (Chiquitania and Gran Chaco), particularly affect women, children and indigenous people.<sup>114</sup>

Deforestation is a major issue. In 2022, Bolivia lost more primary forest than any previous year on record, with deforestation rates in Bolivia increasing by 259% over the last eight years.<sup>115</sup> In 2022 alone, Bolivia lost almost 596,000 hectares of forest and had the third-highest rate of primary forest loss after Brazil and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.<sup>116</sup> Deforestation is largely commodity-driven: of most concern is the expansion of soy plantations to meet growing demand for livestock feed. Between June 25 and July 2, 2024, there were 229,501 deforestation alerts reported in Bolivia covering a total of 2.72 kha.<sup>117</sup>

### Evidence on the impact of climate change on GBV

**Globally**, there is a strong body of evidence on the impact of disasters and extreme events caused by climate change on GBV. Studies cover a range of extreme events likely to be exacerbated by climate change, including both sudden (e.g. storms, floods, wildfires) and slow onset or prolonged crises (e.g. droughts).<sup>118</sup>

However, this review found a lack of specific evidence focused on **GBV in the context of climate change** in Bolivia.

There is growing evidence of the violence that occurs at the nexus of the **drugs trade, deforestation, and climate change**. UNODC's 2023 report observes that the Amazon regions of Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia and Peru are at the intersection of multiple forms of organised crime that are accelerating environmental devastation, with severe implications for the security, health, livelihoods and well-being of the population across the region. The report presents growing evidence of drug traffickers financing and providing logistical support for illegal gold mining operations across Amazonian Brazil, Colombia, Peru and Bolivia, including on protected territories, and expanding into illegal logging and trafficking in wildlife. These organised criminal networks are not just exacerbating deforestation but are also accelerating convergent crime ranging from corruption, tax and financial crimes, to homicide, assault, **sexual violence**, exploitation of workers and minors, and the victimisation of those defending the environment, including Indigenous Peoples and those of African descent.<sup>119</sup>

More broadly, there are some studies that show the impact in Bolivia of climate change on **gender inequality**.<sup>120,121</sup> Rural women in Bolivia, who are responsible for food security and

household care, are those most affected by the economic, social, and environmental uncertainty caused by deforestation, water scarcity, soil degradation, and extreme weather events caused by climate change: droughts, floods, frosts, fires, sudden temperature changes, and imbalances in the production calendar. Female farmers are on the frontlines of change – but the gender gap in access to resources and opportunities, low economic participation, limited access to education, and a lack of decision-making power all act as barriers.<sup>122</sup>

### **Action to address GBV and climate change in Bolivia**

There are examples of women in Bolivia coming together to address **GBV and climate change**. For example, in the women-led community of María Auxiliadora in Cochabamba in peri-urban Bolivia, women are working together to free themselves from physical and other forms of abuse, and at the same time building in climate resilience.<sup>123,124</sup>

The women of María Auxiliadora joined together to support each other in liberating themselves from gender violence and to gain independence. But their unity has also resulted in a community that responds to climate change by drawing on their resilience and developing new economic and social systems that promote sustainability and justice – for example by growing and preserving their own food, sharing communal tasks, and working to conserve resources. The experiences of María Auxiliadora can inspire alternatives which not only respond to unjust climate impacts but also to the violence and discrimination that women face in other areas of their lives.<sup>125</sup>

There is also programming in Bolivia by UN agencies and INGOs to address **climate change, and to determine and address its gender impact** (for example, SIDA<sup>126</sup>, UN Women<sup>127</sup>, FAO and the Green Climate Fund FP202<sup>128</sup>, Practical Action<sup>129</sup>). However, these often focus on **livelihoods and economic impacts**, and rarely make direct links between climate change and GBV. (Note that in the case of the FAO, a gender assessment conducted in 2023 includes 80 mentions of the word ‘violence’, yet the corresponding gender action plan includes a single mention, and does not incorporate any explicit actions on violence.) UNFPA’s country programme in Bolivia is an exception – it promotes the incorporation of sexual and reproductive health and rights, and gender-based violence in national and subnational climate change adaptation/disaster-risk reduction policies, strategies and plans, in coordination with the humanitarian country team and the protection cluster.<sup>130</sup>

## 6.2. GBV and extractive industries

### Extractive industries in Bolivia

The Bolivian economy is highly dependent upon natural resources. Bolivia relies on its extractive sector to generate foreign reserves that are essential for financing imports. Hydrocarbons were predominant between 2005 and 2015; gold was the largest source of foreign currency in 2021.<sup>131</sup> In 2022 the growth of economic activity was being driven essentially by three sectors: manufacturing, mining and hydrocarbons, in that order; in particular, the production of soybean derivatives, fertilisers, zinc and natural gas.<sup>132</sup>

### Evidence on the impact of extractive industries on GBV

Globally, the IUCN's 2020 report on GBV and Environment Linkages<sup>133</sup> offers the following main conclusions on the links between extractive industries and GBV:

- The activity of extractive industries and large-scale agribusiness disrupts ecosystems and social and economic norms, often displacing local communities, degrading the environment, interrupting access to increasingly stressed or scarce natural resources, and changing socio-economic systems, which can result in loss of livelihoods and a rise in gender-based inequalities and violence.
- Exploiting and reinforcing patriarchal norms, extractive industries also bring high numbers of male workers to remote areas, creating conditions for coerced prostitution and sexual exploitation and commodification in particular of women and girls.
- Intersecting forms of marginalisation and discrimination put Indigenous women and girls at heightened risk of multiple forms of gender-based violence.
- Reinforcing power asymmetries pave the way for violence to occur throughout the agriculture sector, from smallholder farms to large-scale industrial farms, mirroring patterns prevalent in mining and infrastructure to support resource exploitation.

### Traditional mining and GBV

**In Latin America**, the impact of mining on women has been classified as:

- Gender violence, political violence, and human rights violations.
- Land dispossession (noting also that the 2016 survey found high levels of property violence against women by non-relatives, which may be related to land dispossession), economic insecurity, food insecurity, and devaluation of women's work.
- Exclusion from spaces of social participation, the denial of women's ethnic and cultural rights.
- Deterioration of women's and children's health.
- Disruption of social fabric due to the loss of protective and secure environments.<sup>134</sup>

**In Bolivia**, the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) has documented the impact of traditional mining on women's health, with **femicides, physical and psychological violence**, and mercury contamination the most common of its consequences.<sup>135</sup>

Evidence of GBV and related impacts of traditional mining **in specific areas** includes:

- Potosí, Oruro, La Paz, and Cochabamba: negative impacts of mining include land dispossession, contamination and loss of water and soil sources, health problems, impoverishment, **marginalisation of women, and multiple forms of institutionalised violence**.<sup>136</sup>
- Madidi: The accelerated growth of gold mining has affected biodiversity, extremely high levels of mercury have affected the health of the residents, and Indigenous peoples are being displaced from their territories – all accompanied by **violence**, organised crime and drug trafficking.<sup>137</sup> The low presence of the State, the border location, and the remote nature of the area, make local residents vulnerable to **violence and coercion by the drug traffickers**.<sup>138,139</sup>
- Pókerani, Potosí: Since the 1940s, the Unified Southern Mining Company (EMUSA) has operated the Caracota mine. The company dispossessed people of their lands and natural resources, and transformed the lives of **women, who have been subjected to multiple forms of violence-from the economic, psychological, and physical violence to feminicides that have gone unpunished**. Women face intimidation as they continue to seek justice, and the macho and patriarchal pattern of mining is reproduced to this day.<sup>140</sup>

These impacts have been normalised in communities, and there are few areas where the presence of these companies is really challenged. Traditional mining sites are clear examples of state abandonment and a population 'constantly seeking to enter the mine or obtain some economic income to help their meagre economy'.<sup>141</sup>

### **New mining settlements and GBV in Bolivia**

Non-traditional mining areas, such as the northern Amazon of La Paz, pose other problems that transform social structures due to the migration of male workers, which has led to the growth of human trafficking, sex work, sexual exploitation, and alcoholism.<sup>142</sup>

- New mining settlements cause a **rapid influx of men** into communities, with and large numbers of men **seeking alcohol and sexual services**.
- An increase in bars and centres of sexual commerce is tied to **child sex exploitation and the trafficking of women**.
- There has been an increase in reporting of **sexual and psychological violence** towards women and girls.
- Women in communities find themselves in a situation of **permanent vulnerability**.<sup>143</sup>



## Artisanal and informal mining and GBV in Bolivia

Women who work in small-scale or artisan mines as 'palliris', a Quechua term meaning 'to harvest' which is used for women miners, are reported to frequently contend with physical and sexual assault. This is low-paid, insecure and dangerous work often carried out by women whose husbands have died due to mining-related ill-health or accidents. Palliris work without work contracts, health insurance or the right to maternity or holiday time. The work involves pulverising rocks to sort the minerals extracted from the mines. According to the country's national mining corporation, COMIBOL, there are around 3,000 female mining employees today in Bolivia, 600 of whom work inside the mines. In 2019, hundreds of palliris protested in Potosí after two women were sexually assaulted then killed in a double femicide on August 4, 2019.<sup>144</sup>

## Illegal mining and GBV in Bolivia

Globally, the illegal mining industry's estimated costs (revenue and loss) are between US\$ 12–48 billion and include the illicit mining of gold, diamonds, precious metals and other minerals. Bolivia is a hotspot for illegal mining in Latin America, along with Ecuador, Colombia, Peru and Venezuela, with a regional review highlighting that lucrative, illicit mining accounts form a major part of economies around the world.<sup>145,146,147</sup> A regional review highlights the ways in which lucrative, illicit mining accounts for a major part of economies around the world.<sup>148</sup> Illegal mines often operate in areas controlled by organised crime, resulting in deep ties between illegal mines and the well-connected and powerful illegal drug trade, creating a climate of impunity that facilitates the exploitation of vulnerable people, including young, impoverished men, but particularly **women and children, who are treated as commodities**. Widespread cases of labour trafficking and exploitation, **sex trafficking** and child labour are therefore commonly linked to illegal mines. Across these abuses, there is a clear, consistent motive: to use human trafficking as a means to fuel the needs of illegal mining camps. Taken together, the lucrativeness of these criminal activities set the backdrop for a competition over resources that can result in abuses of power and GBV.

In December 2017, **women miners of Bolivia came together for a symposium** to outline challenges for gender equality in the sector, and highlight the contribution of women in the sector and their current socio-economic situation, as well as to address issues related to international cooperation, cooperatives and government relations. The symposium explored the results of research on women in three groups: members of mining cooperatives, independent miners and employed miners. It found that exploitation is widespread in small-scale mining communities, both in conflict and non-conflict areas. Women and children are particularly at risk. This can take many forms, including debt bondage, extortion and modern-day slavery, as well as trafficking and sexual abuse of women and girls at the mines and in nearby communities.<sup>149</sup>

## Extractive industries and human trafficking and sexual exploitation of children

While there is an abundance of reports and journalistic pieces that link extractive industries with human trafficking and sexual exploitation, including those referenced in this review, there is very little systematic documentation of evidence highlighting the seriousness of the issue.

One key study by UNICEF, ICCO Cooperación Sudamérica y Vuela Libre (2018) examines **commercial sexual exploitation (CESC) of adolescents and young people** in mining and extractive industry zones in Bolivia in three regions: La Paz, Oruro, and Potosí.<sup>150</sup> The field work for this study took place over seven months in La Paz (municipalities of Caranavi, Guanay, Tipuani, Teoponte, Mapiri and the sub-municipality of Mayaya), Potosí (Potosí, Uncía y Llallagua) and Oruro (Oruro y Huanuni).

Key findings:

- State institutions are weak. The Ombudsman's Offices for Children and Adolescents have limited staff, working tools and infrastructure.
- High vulnerability of children and adolescents.
- Indigenous communities are marginalised.
- There is evidence of increased sexual exploitation in mining camps.
- Proliferation of risk areas.
- Social disinterest in and normalisation of commercial sexual exploitation.

**Action by mining companies:** Many leading extractive industries companies have made **commitments to gender equality**, as have relevant industry associations including ones operating in Bolivia. However, it is evident that extractive industries companies need to take additional steps to make their existing commitments to gender equality and non-discrimination a reality across project contexts.<sup>151</sup>

### Six proposals on violence prevention in the mining sector

During the 2020 general elections in Bolivia, the National Network of Women and Mining presented its sectoral proposals to candidates and institutions on October 6th. An online meeting was attended by 80 participants, including candidates for the Legislative Assembly representing mining districts as Cochabamba and La Paz. The [six proposals](#) include proposal 1 on conducting a census of women in mining, and **proposal 6 on violence prevention**.<sup>152</sup> This proposal emphasises that GBV threatens mining women, both physically and psychologically, clearly breaching their fundamental rights. The proposal demands dissemination of and compliance with current laws that promote the rights of women to a life free of violence (Law #348), and against political harassment (Law 243). These actions must include men so that they also understand and comply with the legislation.

### 6.3. GBV and migration

Given the different forms of migration, the numerous drivers (including environmental and climate change drivers), and the relationship to different forms of GBV, there is more to cover on migration than this review can address. There is also a lack of research linking GBV and migration in (or from) Bolivia.

This section provides a snapshot of key types of migration, highlighting any relevant evidence identified on the links to GBV for each type of migration.

**Internal migration:** Bolivia is currently undergoing a rapid urbanisation process, accelerated by the economic hardships and natural disasters in rural and mining areas that hit the country in the 1980s and 1990s. By the 1990s, 58% of Bolivia's population was urban, rising to almost 70% by 2020.<sup>153</sup> The majority of rural migrants in Bolivia settle in informal neighbourhoods in peripheral areas of the country's largest cities, where environmental risks are greatest and infrastructure scarcest. It is estimated that 45% of Bolivia's urban residents reside in an informal neighbourhood. Typically, informal neighbourhood residents are more exposed to violence and insecurity, given that police do not often service these neighbourhoods but there are no official crime statistics in Bolivia for these neighbourhoods. There are also no formal statistics on **violence against women**, however key risk factors - *'family history, early cohabitation, alcohol abuse, and low level of education'* - are highly prevalent in informal neighbourhoods'.<sup>154</sup>

**Migration into or through Bolivia:** In recent years there has been growing cross-border migration flow into Bolivia. Migrants from outside Bolivia include Venezuelan migrants who are 'in-destination' and 'in-transit' as well as 'in-transit' migrants of other nationalities from Venezuela.<sup>155</sup> As of June 2023, Bolivia was hosting 16,810 people who had been forced to flee or were stateless. Additionally, it is estimated that during the first half of 2023 there were more than 28,800 people who transited through Bolivia bound for Chile and Peru.<sup>156</sup>

In 2022, UNFPA reported that the number of Venezuelan migrants and refugees had nearly doubled between 2020 and 2021, from 10,000 to 19,000. Of those, 68% are on irregular migratory status, which restricts their rights to access health and protection services. An estimated 45.8% of Venezuelan refugees and migrants surveyed in the Plurinational State of Bolivia reportedly suffered discrimination or exclusion. Women and girls aged 18-35, who represent 67.2% of Venezuelan migrants, face high vulnerabilities to **sexual exploitation or other types of violence** including trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation. An estimated 45.8% of Venezuelan refugees and migrants surveyed in the Plurinational State of Bolivia reportedly suffered discrimination or exclusion.<sup>157, 158</sup>

**Migration from Bolivia:** About two million Bolivians live abroad, corresponding to a fifth of the country's population. International migration can be triggered by environmental degradation and climate change: droughts and land degradation have led to migration of people from Chuquisaca and Tarija to move, temporary and permanently, to both urban areas in Bolivia and Argentina; and migrants from rural areas of Potosí, Oruro and La Paz have moved to Chile to

look for better jobs and also when climate-related challenges affect their agricultural practices.<sup>159</sup>

There is increasing feminisation of migration from Bolivia to neighbouring countries, including Chile, Argentina and Brazil among other countries. The ILO's assessment of the international labour migration situation of Bolivian female labour migrants states that migration can expose women to **serious violations of their human rights, including violence**. Whether in the recruitment stage, the journey or living and working in another country, women migrant workers, especially those in irregular situations, are vulnerable to harassment, intimidation or threats to themselves and their families, economic and sexual exploitation, racial discrimination and xenophobia, poor working conditions, increased health risks and other forms of abuse, including trafficking into forced labour, debt bondage, involuntary servitude and situations of captivity.<sup>160</sup>

There is a demand for labour generally arising from apparel plants in Argentina and Brazil; but also in agriculture in Spain, northern Chile and Argentina and in local mining industries in countries such as Chile.<sup>161</sup> Although women and men share apparel industry jobs, women and girls in particular work in housekeeping, personal and non-personal service labour in general, "escort services", sex work, and other such positions, all of which tend to be provided through illegal trafficking. These routes of entry to the receiving countries place the women and children in conditions of greater vulnerability to abuse.<sup>162</sup> In addition many Bolivian female migrants are involved in trade and street selling. There is also an important demand for household workers.

There is significant xenophobia against Bolivian emigrants, whose racial roots are Aymara, Quechua, or any other Indigenous group, who experience brutal robberies, physical and sexual violence, and other forms of abuse which may include the collusion of the local police themselves.<sup>163</sup> Because of their lack of documentation and illegality, male and female migrants keep their savings in their homes and not in banks. These circumstances make them an easy target for assaults, robbery, and other crimes, and according to the ILO women appear to be the more frequent victims.<sup>164</sup>

**Travelling on route to Mexico and the USA:** Migrants from Central America have to cross more than 3,000 miles on foot through Mexico to reach the US border and there are reports of Bolivian men, women and children making the journey. Doctors Without Borders has identified sexual violence along migratory routes as a serious problem in Mexico and Central America. Last year, the medical NGO handled 61 direct cases of sexual assault and more than 3,200 for consultations on sexual and reproductive health. The victims are often not treated in public hospitals, due to their status as irregular migrants.<sup>165</sup>

**Migration linked to climate change:** As noted above, climate change impacts migration due to both sudden changes caused by severe weather events and slower, persistent changes over a longer timeframe, which affect water, agricultural, and livestock conditions. More than 2.7 million Bolivian boys, girls and adolescents live in places with high risk of floods and droughts.<sup>166</sup>

## Evidence on migration and GBV:

**Regional evidence:** A 2023 scoping review of gender, migration and health in Latin America<sup>167</sup> finds that GBV among migrants is a crucial dimension of health in these populations. It emphasises the importance of intersectional approaches to dismantle the apparent homogeneity of the 'migrant woman' category, and make visible the multiplicity of experiences of migrant women and the impact that class, ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity have on the migratory experience.

A 2021 InterAmerican Development Bank paper<sup>168</sup> notes that for many women and girls in Latin America, migration may be a way of escaping from sexual and gender-based violence, including rape, domestic violence, forced early marriage, female genital mutilation and sexual harassment. Unfortunately, GBV may continue during the migration journey, and when people reach a destination.

## Evidence from Bolivia

### Studies exploring the links between internal migration and GBV:

- In a qualitative study looking at domestic violence in an informal settlement, very few men expressed concern about violence within the housing unit, but when women spoke about more access to alcohol in the neighbourhood, they invariably spoke about intra-family violence within the household.<sup>169</sup>

### Studies exploring the links between migration of Venezuelans into Bolivia and GBV:

- This review was unable to identify relevant studies. Some sections of the regional 2023 Refugee Needs Analysis cover Bolivia, though Bolivia data is lacking. Information is provided for other countries on sexual assault, IPV and physical violence against Venezuelan migrant women and girls and LGBTQI+ people, as well as information on human trafficking, sexual exploitation and PSEA by humanitarian workers. However, there is no Bolivia data in the section on GBV, other than a mention that pregnant women migrants in Bolivia receive free health care.<sup>170</sup>

### Studies exploring external migration from Bolivia and GBV:

- Argentina: A 2021 ethnographic study examined the violence faced by six women from Bolivia and northern Argentina between 2014 and 2018 during their migration for agricultural work. It revealed a complex map of violence, including psychological, economic, and sexual abuse from employers and co-workers, physical and psychological violence from male relatives, and racist and xenophobic mistreatment in communities. Public institutions often failed to protect these women, perpetuating further violence and fear of seeking help..<sup>171</sup>
- Chile: A study exploring the experiences of violence of Bolivian migrant women residing in the Tarapacá region of northern Chile found that VAWG and migration are of great relevance both in the regional capital, Iquique, and the other municipalities of the region.<sup>172</sup> All the ten interviewees were direct or indirect survivors of physical and

psychological violence during their childhood within their family of origin. Later, this was repeated with the father of their children, which sometimes became normalised by the interviewees. Violence suffered by the interviewees, particularly domestic violence, motivates women to migrate to the Chilean region of Tarapacá where they faced further violence within their intimate relationships there. Although many of the interviewees came to have support networks and financial independence, this economic empowerment did not translate into a safeguard against male violence.

In Tarapacá there are two shelters run by the current National Service for Women and Gender Equity of Chile (Spanish: *Servicio Nacional de la Mujer y la Equidad de Género de Chile*, Sernameg). These shelters protect women who were victims of the most serious crimes of violence. In 2019, 56% of the residents were foreigners, and of these, 68% were Bolivian.<sup>173</sup>

### Studies on migration linked to climate change and GBV

IOM described the links between change-related migration and GBV in Bolivia as follows: 'Finding themselves in situations of mobility as a result of disasters, environmental degradation and the adverse effects of climate change, women and girls are at greater risk of experiencing gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and face greater barriers to finding lasting solutions to their situation'.<sup>174</sup>

However, this review was not able to find any studies on this issue. UNFPA points out that the availability of quality disaggregated data is a critical challenge. There are significant data gaps due to limited national surveys and administrative records. This gap undermines the monitoring of GBV and other aspects of gender inequalities, and the 2030 Agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development, and ICPD goals. A statistics law introduced in 2021 may contribute to filling these gaps.<sup>175</sup>



## Annex 1: Methodology

This research query has been conducted as systematically as possible, under tight time constraints. Given the wide scope of the evidence, the review prioritised research studies and human rights reports from recognised human rights bodies. However, due to the lack of evidence from Bolivia (particularly recent evidence on extractive industries, climate change and migration and links with GBV) we also drew on newspaper articles and NGO reports. Searches were conducted through online searches using Google and relevant electronic databases.

**Key search terms included:** “Bolivia” AND “GBV” or “violence against women” or “gender-based violence” or “VAWG” or “femicide” or “early/forced/child marriage” or “sexual violence”. We also searched for “Bolivia” AND “GBV” AND “climate change” or “environmental degradation/deforestation” or “migration” or “extractive industries/mining”. We also searched these terms in Spanish.

**To be eligible for inclusion in this rapid review, evidence needed to fulfil the following criteria:**

- Focus: GBV, Bolivia and climate change, extractive industries and migration
- Countries: Bolivia
- Time period for written research and evidence: Information on websites or documents from January 2013. We did not include many resources from before 2013 because Bolivia passed Law 348 in 2013 (The Internal Law to Guarantee Women a Life Without Violence).
- Language: English and Spanish

**Limitations:**

- Limited time: This report is based on a rapid mapping of the evidence conducted under tight time constraints.
- Lack of recent studies: The main prevalence study on GBV is extensive, providing data on a whole range of actors related to survivors and their experiences of GBV, as well as their attempts to seek justice. However, it was conducted in 2016.

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