

BRIEFING PAPER

ENDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

A FOUNDATION FOR INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

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Acronyms

GBV	gender-based violence
GDP	gross domestic product
IPV	intimate partner violence
LGBTQI+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and other gender and sexual identities
ODA	official development assistance
TF-GBV	technology-facilitated GBV

Glossary

Gender-based violence (GBV) – Violence directed at a person based on their (perceived) gender and/or sexuality. GBV can be physical, sexual, psychological and economic. While women, girls and gender-diverse people face the highest risk, GBV can also be perpetrated against boys and men.

Gender norms – Social norms (see separate entry) specifically related to gender. ‘Patriarchal gender norms’ refer to those that sustain gender inequality and discrimination against women and LGBTQI+ people. They are thus about masculinity and femininity, and heterosexuality.

Inclusive societies – Societies anchored in human rights, where the economy is oriented towards achieving wellbeing, where the system of governance is democratic and accountable, and where the social fabric is strong and resilient. Inclusive societies are ultimately those where everyone is equal and lives with dignity.

Intersectionality – How individual identities and power relations are influenced simultaneously by multiple systems such as gender, race, sexuality, class and age. The concept is based on the work of black feminist scholars and activists.

Social norms – Informal rules that shape people’s socially acceptable behaviour, roles, entitlements and expression. Social norms can relate to gender, sexuality, age, class and religion, among other aspects of identity – and they can intersect. Sanctions and rewards help to maintain social norms.

Key messages

- Addressing gender-based violence (GBV) has become a strategic priority because it offers an opportunity to promote inclusive societies. It can lay the foundations for and nurture inclusive societies that are more equal, more prosperous, more democratic and more interconnected for all.
- GBV has high economic costs for victim-survivors, governments and society as a whole. Efforts to eradicate GBV create stronger economies for everyone by improving labour-market participation, reducing inequality and enhancing service provision.
- By limiting political participation, GBV jeopardises civil and political rights and undermines democratic principles. Additionally, through government inaction and even perpetration, GBV can violate the duty of a state to guarantee people's rights and safety. Therefore, addressing GBV also contributes to building accountable governance and to the maintenance of healthy and resilient democracies.
- GBV severely weakens the social fabric because it reinforces inequitable social norms, reduces social connection and damages people's sense of belonging. Working to end GBV provides a pathway to address social polarisation and fragmentation, strengthen community networks, and build pluralistic and caring societies.

Foreword

There is no magic bullet – no single solution – to the fragmentation faced by so many societies today. Trust between people and institutions has been weakened by economic insecurity, widening inequalities, democratic backsliding, conflict, climate disruption, political polarisation and the erosion of rights. This global polycrisis is exposing fault lines that are easily exploited by those who seek power, political advantage or both. Governments wrangle with potential solutions, often focusing on economic incentives but rarely pursue the profound economic transformations that are needed to significantly reduce inequalities. Meanwhile, open civic space, human rights, equality and mutual trust are fast becoming issues of national security, their maintenance essential for democracy.

The fundamental duties of elected governments include creating the conditions for shared prosperity, upholding democratic governance and the rule of law and protecting the rights and dignity of all people. These are not separate ambitions. At the heart of these duties lies the need for a renewed social contract that no longer excludes and subordinates parts of society, views individuals as entirely autonomous, or shields privileged actors from accountability. Recent campaigns, such as #Metoo and Black Lives Matter, illustrate a deep-rooted desire for equality and accountability for all.

Powerful entry points already exist, ones that could offer lasting solutions, but are often overlooked. These are options that look beyond economic growth to emphasise human dignity and accountability, and their impact can be both profound and far reaching.

This report argues that addressing gender-based violence (GBV) is one of these key entry points. GBV is both a consequence of gender inequality and a mechanism through which inequality is maintained. Preventing it and supporting its survivors can generate effects far beyond the immediate essential goal of safety and redress.

This matters, because the pressures of the polycrisis are not experienced equally. They interact with gender, sexuality, class, race, age, disability, migration status and other dimensions of inequality. Women, girls and LGBTQI+ people are disproportionately exposed to the impact of crises, including GBV. The result is a vicious cycle: the crises of our time intensify the conditions in which violence occurs, while GBV further undermines the economic, democratic and social capacities needed to navigate them.

Violence in homes, workplaces, schools, public spaces and digital environments has ripple effects beyond the immediate impact on individuals and is never solely private. It shapes people's ability to participate in economic life, to exercise political voice, to form relationships and to belong. Action to address GBV, therefore, offers a powerful point of entry for the building of more inclusive societies. The benefit to individuals of freedom from fear, injury and coercion, and the ability to participate fully in society has enormous collective benefits. It can help to generate economic spillovers and build more prosperous economies for everyone. It can strengthen democratic governance and accountability. And it can improve community relationships, creating societies that are more connected, caring and resilient.

This makes the lack of focus on GBV profoundly disappointing. Those in power are those least likely to be affected by it. The majority of leaders and powerful people enjoy all the advantages of their gender, class and

race, living lives that are far removed from the daily threat of violence and protected by policed privilege. As a result the implications of GBV are unseen or misunderstood by those who shape political priorities.

Against this background, the scale of recent international funding cuts to gender equality and GBV work is shocking. In an area where funding was already profoundly inadequate, the abrupt reductions in overseas development aid since 2025 have had immediate and severe consequences for women's rights organisations, feminist funds, prevention initiatives and frontline survivor services, as this report documents.

Some governments are beginning to recognise gender inequality as a security issue. Others may only listen to the economic case. And here it is: the most recent global estimate cited in this report places the cost of violence against women at approximately US\$1.5 trillion each year, equivalent to around 2% of global GDP (Puri, 2016). As an estimate, and not including LGBTQI+ or other victims, this may well be on the low side. This is the cost of lost income and employment, reduced productivity, healthcare and justice expenditures, pressure on social services, and the enduring effects on children who experience or witness violence. Yet even this figure cannot fully capture the losses: pain, fear, diminished well-being, foregone opportunities and the curtailment of human potential.

Economics notwithstanding, ending violence is an obligation to ensure the equal rights and dignity of all people, and it is central to democracy. When women and LGBTQI+ people are threatened, harassed or attacked for speaking, organising, voting, standing for office, reporting the news or defending human rights, violence becomes a means of deciding who is permitted to occupy public space. The evidence here is sobering: In a 2026 IPU study of 519 parliamentarians, 71% reported violence or intimidation by members of the public, online, offline or both; the figure was 76% among women MPs. In a separate IPU-African Parliamentary Union study, 80% of women parliamentarians interviewed in Africa reported psychological violence in parliament, while 42% had received threats of death, rape, beating or abduction, usually online. The spread of digital technologies offer unprecedented possibilities for connection and political participation, but technology-facilitated GBV is increasingly pervasive against women and LGBTQI+ people in politics, including through doxxing, synthetic image abuse, threats and coordinated smear campaigns.

The chilling effect of this violence, skewing representation, diminishing accountability, constraining policy, and biasing priorities alongside the narrowing of civic space with self-censorship among journalists and activists and the impoverishment of information, is incompatible with genuinely democratic societies. A democracy in which some people must calculate the personal risk of participation before exercising their rights is not fully democratic.

The solutions for governments managing multiple polycrises, do not only lie in wealth redistribution, economic growth or defence strategies that build ever sophisticated arsenals. For what use are wealth and weapons if society itself fragments and collapses. The solutions for societies to cope with crises and respond effectively, depend also on social cohesion, mutual trust and solidarity. This report argues that one way to build cohesion is hidden in plain sight – tackle the alarming and growing rates of GBV to build the economic well-being, democratic resilience and social solidarity on which more equal, peaceful and inclusive societies depend.

Caroline Harper, Director ALIGN, ODI Global

1 Introduction

In the last few years, democratic backsliding, growing emphasis on state austerity and higher geopolitical tensions have motivated a reallocation of public and private spending away from social welfare and development priorities. As states and organisations reassess their commitments, investments to advance gender equality are at risk. This could jeopardise not only the wellbeing of girls, women and LGBTQI+ people or other gender and sexual identities, but also the wellbeing of society as a whole. Efforts to advance gender equality are about improving lives for women but importantly are also about improving the lives of all people, whatever their identity. At their core, such efforts are about understanding and dismantling structures and relations that create and perpetuate inequalities – those very same inequalities that stand in the way of a prosperous future for all.

This briefing paper is a call to resource gender equality agendas as a crucial component of, and a pathway to creating, inclusive societies. By this we mean societies anchored in human rights, where everyone is recognised and treated as equal and lives with dignity. It is a society where the economy is oriented towards achieving wellbeing, where the system of governance is democratic and accountable, and where the social fabric is strong and resilient. Together, these characteristics protect the realisation of people's rights, as well as individual and collective prosperity. Because gender-based violence (GBV) has a central role in the creation and perpetuation of unequal structures and relations, this paper focuses on how tackling GBV can help bring about inclusive societies. However, it is important to recognise that any form of harm based on inequalities will undermine the possibility of an inclusive society.

GBV refers to violence directed at an individual or a group of individuals based on and motivated by their (perceived) gender. GBV can be physical, sexual, psychological and/or economic. It can also be perpetrated online, offline or both.

Worldwide, at least one in three women are subjected to physical and sexual violence at some point throughout their lifetime, and nearly two in three transgender and gender-diverse adults experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime (UN Women, 2025; McLellan et al., 2026). In 2024, around 50,000 women and girls were killed by their partner or family members – that is 137 women each day (UN Women and UNODC, 2024). In the same year, at least 350 trans and gender-diverse people were killed in hate crimes (TMMP, 2026). The fear of GBV affects many millions more, limiting the autonomy and freedom of women, girls and LGBTQI+ people (Gqola, 2022; Jiménez Thomas Rodríguez, 2022). The current defunding of gender equality work and the backlash and regression of hard-won rights is leading to increased rates of GBV.

GBV is both a consequence of and a tool to create and maintain inequalities. Harmful gender norms – such as those that deem attributed traits of masculinity as superior over femininity; male control over economic and financial resources; and narrow ideas of masculinity as related to toughness, power and heterosexuality – underpin and enable GBV against girls, women and LGBTQI+ people. Moreover, GBV enforces and reproduces these and other unequal gender norms. It is a mechanism to punish and discipline girls, women and LGBTQI+ people who are perceived as transgressing or challenging patriarchal norms. Unequal norms are replicated and reinforced – and thus GBV can be perpetrated – by individuals,

groups and institutions, including those linked to the state such as the police, schools, and the health and justice systems. Unequal gender norms interact with economic inequality and poverty, exclusion from political decision-making processes, and other forms of marginalisation or vulnerability – all of which heighten the risk of GBV (Jiménez Thomas Rodríguez, 2022).

Box 1 A note on terminology

This paper is about gender-based violence (GBV) rather than violence against women and girls (VAWG). While the concept of VAWG should also encompass violence against trans women and non-heterosexual women and girls, studies and policies relating to VAWG have tended to focus on intimate partner violence (IPV) in heterosexual relationships. Furthermore, conservative actors may use the term to refer exclusively to gendered violence against cisgender women and girls (Lewin, 2021; Khan and Michalko, 2026). GBV refers to violence that occurs against a person based on their (perceived) gender and/or sexuality. While women, girls and gender-diverse people face the highest risk, GBV can also be perpetrated against boys and men. GBV can be physical, sexual, psychological and economic and can occur online and/or offline.

This paper argues that addressing GBV offers an opportunity to promote an inclusive society. It is vital for creating more equal and peaceful societies, for maintaining healthy and resilient democracies, and for creating more prosperous economies. Addressing GBV can:

- generate economic spillovers, building more prosperous economies for everyone
- strengthen democratic governance and accountability, contributing to the maintenance of a healthy and resilient democracy
- improve community relationships, creating more connected and caring societies.

The paper first presents a working concept of inclusive societies. This is followed by a brief overview of the multiple crises exacerbating gender inequality and GBV today. The paper then discusses existing evidence of how GBV hinders economic prosperity, democratic and accountable governance, and a strong social fabric – and thus how addressing GBV is a pathway to building the three core components of an inclusive society. The paper concludes with recommendations for future work to further explore the relationship between GBV and efforts to build inclusive societies.

2 What are inclusive societies and why do they matter?

Inclusive societies are, at their core, societies where no one is left behind, where everyone ‘realises their rights, achieves their potential and lives in dignity’ (Browne et al., 2015: 3, citing DFID, 2015). This brief argues that individual and collective prosperity is achieved through a wellbeing economy, accountable governance and a strong social fabric (see [Figure 1](#)).¹

The paper’s approach to inclusive societies draws from initial conceptualisations of the term, which emphasised full and equal participation of marginalised groups in economic, political and social life (ibid; UN DESA, 2009) and the realisation of just and thriving societies where all people can achieve their full potential – as captured by the Millenium Development Goals and the subsequent Sustainable Development Goals. The paper also draws from more recent feminist debates that emphasise the importance of alternative economic paradigms capable of providing equal material wellbeing within planetary boundaries, of moving towards equitable social norms and of understanding the potential but also the harms associated with the digital realm (Gibson and Dombroski, 2020; Harper et al., 2020; Diepeveen, 2022; Washington and Marcus, 2022; Dickel and Evolvi, 2023; Kabeer and Plomien, 2026). The concept captures an aspiration that has not yet been realised but that can guide action towards creating prosperity for all within planetary boundaries.

Figure 1 Key components of inclusive societies



¹ The conceptualisation of the term ‘inclusive society’ offered in this paper is initial. For instance, it does not cover the implications of an inclusive society in the international and multilateral arena. Further conceptualisation is needed on this and other dimensions.

A wellbeing economy. Inclusive societies are those with low levels of economic inequality, where everyone can access and participate in the economy and where everyone can reach a minimum level of economic prosperity. Inclusive societies are thus anchored in a wellbeing economy model – a model guided by a multidimensional understanding of wellbeing, rather than by increases in production and consumption (Raworth, 2017; Fioramonti et al., 2022; Kabeer and Plomien, 2026). This means that inclusive societies recognise and value how all types of work (paid, unpaid, formal or informal) and how living environments enable and contribute to human wellbeing (Fioramonti et al., 2022: 3). Inclusive societies are therefore based on an economy that is socially embedded, regenerative and distributive by design (Raworth, 2017). Furthermore, the state plays an important role within this economy to ensure essential services such as healthcare and education to all its members (UN DESA, 2009; Nemčok et al., 2026).

Accountable governance. Inclusive societies are based on democracy and rule of law, and they recognise equal civil and political rights for all their members. They are societies where everyone enjoys full, equal and meaningful political participation and, thus, are able to exercise agency to influence the decision-making processes that affect their lives (Kabeer, 2005; Gardes and Cordenillo, 2014; UN DESA, n.d.). This includes full, equal and safe access to and participation in digital spaces, as these increasingly encompass part of public life and political participation (OECD, 2024; Fuchs, 2026; Michalko, 2026). An open and safe civic space is also a key component, as it is through a healthy civic space that people can monitor and hold governments accountable (OECD, 2026a; CIVICUS, n.d.). While inclusive societies would find mechanisms to ensure the participation of non-citizens (for example, migrant and refugee communities) in the decision-making processes that affect their lives, access to safe public and civic spaces is especially important to ensure governance is accountable to these communities too. Accountable governance also means effective, accountable and transparent institutions that guarantee access to justice.

A strong social fabric. Lastly, within inclusive societies there are dense and robust connections holding communities together peacefully. As this requires everyone to be treated with equal dignity and respect, inclusive societies are based on human rights and equitable social norms, ensuring that ‘everyone is seen and acknowledged as part of the community’ (Therborn, 2012). This includes gender and sexuality norms, but also those related to race, class, age and origin, among others. A strong social fabric also requires strong ‘mutual trust, sense of belonging and inter-connectedness’ alongside difference and diversity (UN DESA, 2009). Pluralism, conciliation, care and rich associational lives underpin communities that can connect and cooperate across – and thrive through – diversity (Putnam, 1995; UN DESA, 2009; Berger, 2018; Jenson, 2019).

These three dimensions of inclusive societies are interconnected: work in one can support progress in another. For example, by providing the mechanisms to hold governments and the private sector accountable to a different economic objective – that of nurturing human and planetary wellbeing – accountable forms of governance support efforts to build a wellbeing economy. Developing a wellbeing economy where socioeconomic inequality is low can help efforts to strengthen the social fabric, because economic prosperity can create more fertile ground for progressive norm change (McCarthy and Zald, 1977; Inglehart, 2019). In turn, a strong social fabric with a rich associational life can strengthen accountable governance, because these spaces help develop civic and democratic skills (Putnam, 1995).

The three dimensions are also rooted in a renewed social contract between people and governments – one that establishes the government's duty to create the conditions for shared economic prosperity, to uphold democratic governance and the rule of law, and to protect the rights and dignity of all people. Critically, this is not the historical social contract that excluded and subordinated women and other marginalised groups, that shielded the private sphere from legal accountability, or that conceived of people as autonomous and self-sufficient individuals (Pateman, 1988; Richardson, 2017). Rather, it is one predicated on the recognition of human rights, on the understanding that the personal is political, and on the premise that societies are constituted not by isolated individuals but by webs of care and interdependence.

Inclusive societies matter because they offer a pathway out of the current global polycrisis (discussed in [Section 3](#)), protecting and furthering people's wellbeing and dignity.

3 Current context

Globally, communities and governments are struggling with simultaneous, interconnected crises: stagnant economies, growing socioeconomic inequalities within and between countries, democratic decline, climate emergencies, environmental degradation, conflict, insecurity, social polarisation, and the rolling back of the rights of women and LGBTQI+ people (Edström et al., 2024). The polycrisis – that is, the multiple and interconnected challenges we currently face (WEF, 2023) – represents a major challenge for countries at the national level. But global and multilateral institutions are also struggling to adapt effectively to a rapidly changing geopolitical and environmental landscape, protect international law, and ensure continued international cooperation (Khan and Michalko, 2026). Moreover, this is complicated by the significant changes that have occurred in the funding landscape since 2025. As multilateral and development assistance budgets are squeezed by the policies of the United States under the Trump administration and by increased threats to global peace, funds are shifting away from social and economic inclusion, democratic governance, peace, climate adaptation and mitigation, and gender equality and instead moving towards security and defence (Romero, 2025). This accentuates these crises and it jeopardises advances made in the previous 50 years (Zulver and Breimann, 2025).

3.1 The polycrisis and GBV

Democratic institutions have experienced a global decline in the last five years. There are currently – for the first time in two decades – more autocracies in the world than democracies (Nord et al., 2025). Authoritarian governments gather power into their hands, with a common strategy being to restrict civic space, especially for human rights-based actors (Roggeband and Krizsán, 2021). For example, Viktor Orbán in Hungary changed the law and reorganised the non-governmental organisation (NGO) funding coordination board to allocate more funds to those that support the government and to defund women's rights organisations (ibid.). Shrinking civic space leads to exclusion, because struggles, demands and perspectives are squeezed out of public debate and silenced (ibid.).

Authoritarian governments have also restricted freedom of expression and freedom of the media, and conducted online surveillance and misinformation campaigns (Vosyliūtė and Luk, 2020). Russia's state-led assault on LGBTQI+ people, for instance, used the media to spread moral panic messages, among others blaming queer people for alleged social disintegration (Edenborg, 2023). The erosion of independent courts and human-rights legislation institutions are also common features of authoritarian regimes. For example, the right-wing Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP or Justice and Development Party) in Türkiye has captured judicial institutions, eroding checks and balances (Esen, 2025). Along with the rise of autocracies, far-right politics have gained prominence too, especially across Europe and the Americas (Parmar and Furse, 2023; Sethi, 2025; Jiménez Thomas Rodríguez et al., 2026).

Authoritarian and far-right governments can lead to increased rates of GBV. The closure of civic space, the erosion of freedoms, the dismantling of human rights structures, and the loss of checks and balances can lead to greater tolerance for discrimination and violence and to increased impunity for crimes, including GBV (Browne, 2024). The politics of authoritarian and far-right governments can also increase GBV as they

promote laws and policies that attempt to regress or block progress towards gender equality and LGBTQI+ rights (Khan et al., 2023). Such policies reinforce the drivers of GBV (e.g. patriarchal gender norms, and lack of economic autonomy and decision-making power) and increase resistance against progressive gender norms (Brechenmacher, 2025). Moreover, as feminist civil society provides a significant proportion of GBV prevention and response services, the closure of civic space and the roll out of regressive policies hinder their capacity to address GBV.² In Argentina, for instance, Javier Milei's government has seen a rapid increase in incidents of femicide and other forms of GBV across the country, as it dismantled state institutions related to gender equality and GBV, dramatically defunded GBV services, reduced overall funding for gender equality, and expressed plans to remove the legal recognition of femicide (Barber, 2025).

Supporting the rise of far-right governments, there is a global anti-rights movement which shares a regressive stance on gender equality and LGBTQI+ rights (Khan et al., 2023; Khan and Michalko, 2026). This movement has changed political and civic spaces at the multilateral level because gender equality language is now at risk of losing political support (Goetz, 2020). Contesting gender equality vocabulary in national and international commitments has become a key tactic of anti-gender actors, who increasingly challenge agreed terminology during negotiations to weaken normative commitments. They are attempting to dilute, omit or replace terms such as 'gender', 'gender equality' and 'women's rights' by introducing concepts such as 'family values' (Lewin, 2021; McEwen, 2021). In relation to GBV, discussions of family values promote so-called 'parental rights' (e.g. ADF International's white paper *Parental rights: protecting parents, empowering generations* – see du Plessis, 2024) to allow parents to deny their children access to comprehensive sex education. This can lead to uninformed choices or lack of choice about sex, opening up young people to coercion (Venegas, 2022). Anti-gender actors also often solely promote heterosexual and faith-based marriage as the idealised relationship, normalising values that deny LGBTQI+ people their rights and placing women in unequal heterosexual relationships. Thus, the anti-gender movement is legitimising a resurgence of patriarchal norms that are associated with interpersonal and structural GBV (Edström et al., 2024).

The rapid expansion of digital technologies and concentration of power within these companies have also created new avenues for misogyny and GBV. Technology-facilitated GBV (TF-GBV) – that is, GBV that is committed, assisted, or amplified using digital tools or in online spaces – can take the form of harassment, threats, doxing,³ non-consensual distribution of intimate images and stalking, to name a few. Studies suggest that between 16% and 58% of women have experienced this type of violence (Hicks, 2021).⁴ As [Section 4.2](#) discusses, TF-GBV is extremely pervasive, especially against women and LGBTQI+ elected representatives (Matlach and Drath, 2025; Michalko and Jiménez Thomas Rodríguez, 2026). Digital technologies have also supported the rise of the 'manosphere' – that is, of an ecosystem of interconnected misogynistic communities that operate, in some cases, both online and offline (Bates, 2020; Gerrand et al., 2025). Among some groups, these spaces have started to normalise the idea that gender equality is a threat to men's status and that GBV is an acceptable behaviour or a legitimate punishment (Kennedy-Kollar, 2024; Nicholas et al., 2026).

² This is in addition to the impacts of the funding cuts, which are discussed in [Section 3.2](#).

³ Revealing and publicising an individual's personal records.

⁴ Some regional studies find higher rates. For example, a study in the Arab States found that 60% of women internet users have experienced TF-GBV (UN Women, 2021).

Loneliness and social polarisation are, in turn, contributing to the damaging effects on GBV of technologies and online spaces. Recent studies have found high levels of loneliness across various contexts.⁵ Male loneliness, in particular, has been found to create fertile ground for online radicalisation against women and LGBTQI+ people. For example, a study on incels⁶ found that not only is loneliness prominent within the incel community, but that the community exploits, exacerbates and externalises this pain (Tietjen and Tirkkonen, 2023). Through the explanation provided by the incel community (i.e. that women are responsible for men's loneliness because some men are actively discriminated against by women), loneliness is mixed with feelings of entitlement and transformed into resentment and hate against women. This, in turn, generates solidarity and unity within the incel community and fuels GBV against women (ibid; Bates, 2020).

According to V-Dem (2026), political polarisation – defined as the extent that society is divided into mutually hostile camps according to political differences – has increased between 2006 and 2026.⁷ It finds that societies' political differences have created an 'us versus them' attitude, affecting people's everyday relationships and discouraging interactions across ideological lines (ibid.). This trend also affects gender norms. A 2025 survey of approximately 24,000 people across 30 countries – including Australia, India, South Korea, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US) – found that Gen Z is more divided than any other generation on gender norms (King's Global Institute for Women's Leadership and Ipsos, 2025). On average, young women across these countries are moving towards more gender-equitable norms, while young men are stagnating or, in some cases, entrenching unequal gender norms. In South Korea, for instance, 64% of men said they believe that gender equality has gone too far in their country, while only 35% of women agreed; in New Zealand, 53% of men and 28% of women agreed (ibid.).

Because social platforms quickly expose male users to misogynistic content, regardless of whether they are searching for it or not, they are an important driver of polarisation in relation to gender norms.⁸ On average, social media algorithms show boys aged 11-14 harmful content within 30 minutes of platform use; 10% of boys see it within the first 60 seconds (Vodafone, 2024). Over half (52%) of boys have engaged with manosphere influencers and 69% have been exposed to online misogyny. Of these, 59% arrived at this type of content via unrelated searches. Exposure to this type of content is likely contributing to unequal social norms, as 22% of parents in the study noticed a change in how boys talk about women and girls and 70% of teachers saw a rise in sexist behaviour in school in the last 12 months before the survey (ibid.).

Moreover, rapidly changing digital technologies and the consolidation of artificial intelligence (AI) are exacerbating this problem, for instance, by contributing to the spread of mis- and disinformation worldwide and enabling new forms of abuse and violence (Garimella and Chauchard, 2024; Törnberg and Törnberg, 2024; OECD, 2026b). While technology companies are increasingly influential, there is a crisis

5 In the UK, for example, a 2025 survey found that a significant proportion of young men feel disconnected: around half of the 2,100 men and women surveyed felt 'no one really knows them' (Lewis et al., 2025).

6 'Incel' stands for 'involuntary celibate' and it refers to a community of men who claim to be unable to find a romantic/sexual partner and who blame women for their inability to find the relationship they desire (Bates, 2020).

7 It has increased from -0.42 in 2006 to 0.29 in 2026. In this final standardised scale, 0 represents the approximate global average across all countries and historical years. Negative scores mean a country is less polarised than the historical global average, while positive scores mean a country is more polarised than average.

8 In fact, most boys and men approach social media platforms searching for advice – romantic, fitness or economic advice – or in search of entertainment (Cala et al., 2026; Hayes et al., 2026).

of governance as their transnational character hinders the regulation of social media platforms and other digital tools. As long as they operate without the checks and balances of government and without increased accountability, the right of women and LGBTQI+ people to live free from violence is at risk.

Environmental, health and conflict-related crises are increasing the risk of GBV as well. During the Covid-19 pandemic, IPV increased as lock downs confined people to spaces shared with perpetrators that were thus unsafe (Bourgault et al., 2021). For example, a recent study found that IPV against women increased in 9 of 11 countries during the pandemic, with prevalence ranging from 8.3% to 45.29% (Uzoho et al., 2023).⁹ The pandemic also led various governments to shut down or reduce their GBV services – including in South Africa, Kenya, Uganda and Nigeria (John et al., 2023) – and while some governments were able to shift response services to remote forms of support such as hotlines, this was not enough to meet the demand (Blofield et al., 2021). The economic stress created by the pandemic likely exacerbated GBV too, because women were more likely to have dropped out of the labour force than men, which placed them in a more vulnerable position (Harvey, 2021).

Extreme events have also been shown to increase GBV. Climate shocks, like floods, droughts and heatwaves, are linked to increased rates of GBV due to the economic instability, food insecurity, mental stress, disrupted infrastructure and gender inequality that these crises bring about (van Daalen et al., 2022). Other environmental pressures can deepen gendered insecurity where access to land and resources is already unequal. Conflict, displacement and lack of protective systems are also known to increase the risk of GBV, including conflict-related sexual violence (Murphy et al., 2024). The collapse of legal and protective institutions can facilitate sexual violence, forced marriage, trafficking and exploitation, while displacement to unsafe camps can be a risk for women, girls and LGBTQI+ people (Humanitarian Action, 2022). Conflict-related GBV disrupts social cohesion and trust among communities and has intergenerational impacts (Woldearegay et al., 2025).

These multiple and interconnected stresses have created a global polycrisis that is intensifying the drivers of GBV. Crisis conditions increase the pressures felt by people, institutions and governments that lead to violence. Greater economic insecurity, food scarcity, competition over resources, insecurity or gaps in government support magnify gender inequalities and discriminatory norms, making violence more likely. In the midst of this, changes in the funding landscape are straining our ability to prevent and respond to GBV.

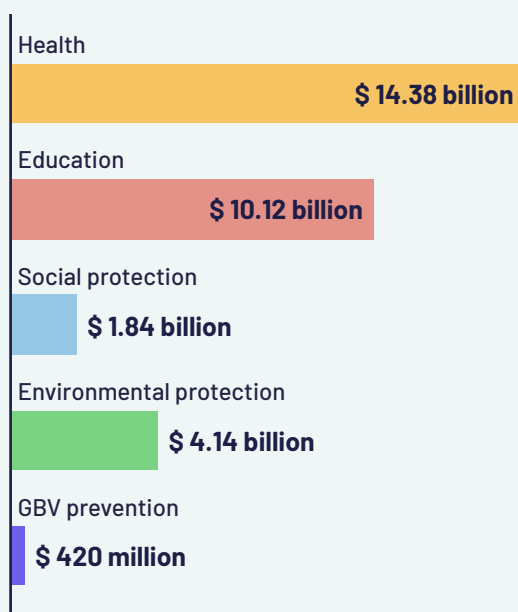
3.2 The impact of funding cuts to GBV prevention and services

International funding for GBV prevention and services has always been inadequate: in 2021–2022, investment in GBV prevention amounted to \$410 million, a mere 0.2% of overall official development assistance (ODA) (Equality Institute and Accelerator for GBV Prevention, 2023). [Figure 2](#) shows the proportion of funding allocated directly to GBV prevention in 2021–2022 in comparison to other human rights priorities.

⁹ Increases were documented in Bangladesh, Czech Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Peru, Türkiye and Spain. No increase was documented in Kenya, while contrary evidence was found for the US (Uzoho et al., 2023).

This longstanding underfunding has been dramatically worsened by the steep fall in ODA in the last three years. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimates that Development Assistance Committee (DAC) member countries' ODA dropped by 23.1% in 2025, the largest single-year decline in history (see [Figure 3](#)). While ODA declined in previous years, the unprecedented 2025 cuts were largely prompted by the US withdrawal from international co-operation under President Donald Trump, which saw ODA from the US drop by 56.9% between 2024 and 2025 (OECD, 2026c). The US cuts are important because the country has historically been the biggest funder to the GBV sector, providing 25% of total funding (Deitch, 2025).

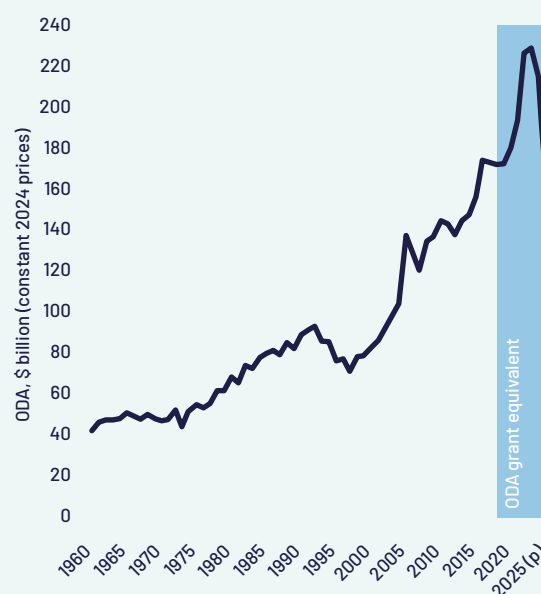
Figure 2 ODA allocated to GBV prevention, 2021-2022



Source: UN Women (2026).

Note: Health, education and social protection spending also encompass some aspects of GBV prevention and response.

Figure 3 Total ODA contributions from DAC countries over time



Source: OECD (2026c)

Simultaneously, there has also been a shift in ODA priorities away from gender equality. For example, major donors (such as the US) are cutting their gender equality and social inclusion programmes (Zulver and Breimann, 2025), while other donor governments are reorienting towards defence and military spending instead of human rights as a result of increased geopolitical tensions (Romero, 2025). The US also withdrew funding from United Nations (UN) agencies, including those that lead on GBV programmes and policy.¹⁰ Private philanthropy organisations are closing their gender equality departments and reorienting their grants, reflecting changes in political decisions rather than people's needs or evidence (Zulver and Breimann, 2025). These cuts signal that the rights and safety of women and girls are considered negotiable or non-essential by some (Deitch, 2025).

¹⁰ UN Women, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO).

Many GBV programmes in the Global South are heavily reliant on international funding and thus faced immediate consequences following the cuts in 2025 (Stern et al., 2026). Rapid surveys through 2025 showed the scale of the cuts on women's rights and feminist organisations. For example, by mid-2025, 78% of the 45 women's and feminist funds surveyed by Prospera reported losses totalling \$65.3 million, with two-thirds of funds anticipating cuts to programmes and staff (Prospera, 2025). GBV prevention and support services experienced immediate capacity loss: 78% of organisations reported service reductions, 73% suspended or ended programmes, 59% laid off staff and 35% faced cash flow crises (Stern et al., 2026). This meant that, in South Sudan, 75% of safe spaces for women and girls run by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights closed, leaving up to 80,000 survivors without care (Emaajo, 2025). Across Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Nigeria, the International Rescue Committee (IRC, 2025) estimated that over 55% of survivors lost access to essential, comprehensive services.

These changes in public spending mirror changes at the domestic level in both Global North and Global South countries. The US, for example, has also defunded domestic rape crisis centres, hotlines and sexual-assault forensic services, and it has cut staff in federal departments (Stern et al., 2026). Similarly, in Argentina (see also [Section 3.1](#)), the Acompañar programme that provides financial and psychological assistance to victim-survivors had its funds reduced by 82% and its beneficiaries by 98.7% (Corti and Marina, 2024).¹¹ In the UK, leaders of women's charities wrote to the Prime Minister warning that cuts to GBV services would leave organisations with no choice but to fire staff and close services (Bartlett, 2024). Over the longer term, defunding the GBV sector risks permanent loss of expertise and services. Staff will shift to other sectors and new staff may not take their place. Reducing services to the most immediate crises and most marginalised survivors means that psychosocial and empowerment activities are no longer taking place (IRC, 2025).

Finally, funding cuts have changed the political discourse and further emboldened anti-gender actors to attack women's rights organisations and delegitimise feminist organising (UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women, 2025). Civil society organisations have reported finding it harder to retain space for gender equality and GBV prevention on policy agendas worldwide (Austin and Holder, 2024). This means feminist civil society will face incredible pressures to continue their frontline work and advocacy, and, when successful, they will have to constantly navigate tougher conditions (Zulver and Breimann, 2025).

Yet hope remains. Despite the overall decrease in funding observed, some governments have retained a focus on ending GBV and protecting gender equality. For example, the *All in to end GBV* strategy¹² was launched in 2025 to bring together global leaders and generate momentum on ending GBV. The UK's *2025 Violence against women and girls* strategy pledges £1 billion across three years to safe accommodation, counselling, court guidance and children's services (UK Government, 2025). The UK has also launched a new international coalition to tackle violence against women and girls, alongside Australia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Jamaica, Morocco, South Africa and Spain (UK Government, 2026). South Africa has signalled a strong commitment in this area, pledging 1.6 billion rand (R) in 2026 and appointing the country's first National Council on GBV and Femicide to coordinate the country's response (Gcwabe, 2026; SANews, 2026). Under President Lula, Brazil has launched a National Pact for Zero Femicide (Fernandes, 2026).

¹¹ Between 2023 and 2024. There were only 434 beneficiaries in 2024.

¹² Supported by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and philanthropic foundations. See www.allintoendgbv.com/.

As [Section 4](#) discusses, working to end GBV clearly benefits not only women and LGBTQI+ people; it can help build inclusive societies too. In turn, this can steer us out of the polycrisis by:

- increasing material wellbeing for everyone, addressing economic inequality and poverty
- protecting and building thriving ecosystems, addressing our current climate and environmental crises
- increasing democratic resilience, shielding countries against far-right and authoritarian politics
- countering backlash against gender equality and other forms of social exclusion and protecting human rights international law
- ensuring and future-proofing good-quality basic services, such as health and education.

4 Addressing GBV to build inclusive societies

Addressing GBV can generate economic spillovers, creating more prosperous economies for everyone. It can strengthen governance and accountability, contributing to the maintenance of a healthy and resilient democracy. And it can improve community relationships, nurturing more connected and caring societies. The following sections discuss in turn how GBV affects the economy, democracy and social fabric, outlining why and how eliminating GBV will improve each sphere.

4.1 How does addressing GBV help build wellbeing economies?

The direct and indirect economic costs of GBV

GBV is costly to people, communities and governments. It has direct costs, a knock-on effect on work and spending, and a long-term impact when it affects children. In 2016, UN Women estimated that the global cost of GBV against women stood at around \$1.5 trillion (Puri, 2016).¹³

GBV can lead to productivity losses through absenteeism, reduced performance or withdrawal. For instance, victim-survivors may miss work due to injuries, visits to police stations or court appearances, or poor mental health. They can also see their performance reduced for the same reasons. Both absenteeism and reduced performance can ultimately lead to victim-survivors losing their jobs (Muller et al., 2014; Ouedraogo and Stenzel, 2021). In Ghana, GBV against women and girls cost the country around 0.9% of its gross domestic product (GDP) in 2017 due to the impact on work absences alone (Raghavendra et al., 2019). Earlier research found comparable GDP losses across a range of countries due to work absenteeism, poor job performance and job/pay loss. For example, Vara-Horna (2013) found that missed days of work because of IPV cost 3.7% of Peru's GDP and Duvvury et al. (2013) found these missed days cost 1.6% of Vietnam's GDP.¹⁴

GBV also hinders economic productivity by pushing women and LGBTQI+ people to withdraw from formal or informal work altogether (ICRW, 2020). This can be because it is demanded by abusive partners – a form of control in and of itself, and also instrumental in reducing someone's ability to exit an abusive relationship (Adams et al., 2024). People can also withdraw from work to reduce exposure to GBV in the workplace, to reduce exposure to work-related GBV (e.g. women in politics who face high levels of abuse in online spaces, see [Section 4.2](#)) or to reduce GBV on their journey to work (ICRW, 2020; Steinert et al., 2023; Michalko and Jiménez Thomas Rodríguez, 2026). A recent study in Finland found that women who live with an abusive partner see a 6.7% fall in employment compared to women living with non-abusive partners – an effect that persists even after the relationship has ended, indicating long-term damage a woman's ability to work (Adams et al., 2024).

¹³ This is the most recent global estimate available.

¹⁴ Pre-2013 research also finds a comparable impact in Nicaragua, Chile, Vietnam and Bangladesh, due to productivity/income loss, where the cost of IPV was estimated between 1.4% and 2% of GDP (see Duvvury et al., 2013).

GBV also reduces consumer spending. This can be because it impacts the ability of victim-survivors to work and therefore reduces their income, or because of increased out-of-pocket expenses personally borne by victim-survivors. In 2021, a study in 18 sub-Saharan African countries found that a 1 percentage point increase in rates of GBV against women – physical, psychological or sexual – reduces economic activities by up to 8% due to a reduction in female employment (Ouedraogo and Stenzel, 2021).¹⁵ The study in Finland found that women who live with an abusive partner have an income that is 12% lower than women living with non-abusive partners – an effect that also persists after the relationship has ended, indicating permanent damage to career progression (Adams et al., 2024). Consumer spending can also fall because of GBV (EIGE, 2021; UN Women, 2022), because economic GBV includes controlling the spending of victim-survivors, restricting access to their bank accounts and income, destroying their property, and/or withholding contributions to household expenses (Sarac and Odabas, 2025).

Additionally, GBV impacts the economy through related costs in public services such as healthcare, criminal justice, social services and specialised GBV services like helplines and shelters (see [Box 2](#)) (see also EIGE, 2021; UN Women, 2022). Incidents of GBV may require emergency care, mental health support or reproductive health services, as well as police time, prosecution and incarceration. A study in 2019 estimated that the cost of domestic abuse in England and Wales was approximately £66 billion per year (£34,015 per victim) – excluding femicides, each of which cost approximately £2.2 million in services (Oliver et al., 2019). [Box 2](#) shows the estimated costs per sector. UN Women (2022) found that GBV accounted for 6.5% of Jamaica's GDP in 2018 – 2.39% of which covered costs for healthcare, law enforcement and courts, and specialised services.

GBV in schools or other education institutions – or vicarious exposure to GBV at home – can also have a knock-on effect on the future economy (Ludwick et al., 2022; Leon-Himmelstine et al., 2025). Experiencing or witnessing GBV can cause children physical and emotional harm, which impacts their health, self-esteem, behaviour and, thus, their academic engagement and performance (UN Women, 2022). Studies in Lesotho and Seychelles estimated that children lost between 25% and 35% of learning time due to domestic violence (ibid.). In Jamaica, children were found to have lost approximately 15% of school time due to domestic violence, representing a cost of 0.48% of the country's GDP in 2018 (ibid.). In the US in 2016, being exposed to IPV during childhood had an average lifetime cost¹⁶ of \$50,000 for victim-survivors (Holmes et al., 2018).¹⁷ This means that, over an annual birth cohort, children's exposure to IPV costs approximately \$55 billion.

Box 2 The cost of GBV by sector in England and Wales

Of the total estimated cost of £66 billion per year of in England and Wales (Oliver et al., 2019), domestic abuse was estimated to cost:

- £2,333 million in health services
- £723 million in victim services
- £1,257 million in police costs
- £476 million in criminal or legal costs
- £6 million in awareness and prevention activities.

Source: Oliver et al. (2019)

¹⁵ Pre-2013 research also shows a comparable impact in the UK and Australia, where most comprehensive costing models find a total cost of 1.9% of the UK's GDP and 1.2% of Australia's. A study in Uganda and Morocco that costs out-of-pocket expenditures finds a cost of 1.6% and 6.5% of GDP, respectively (Duvvury et al., 2013).

¹⁶ Calculated up to the age of 65.

¹⁷ This includes healthcare (\$11,000), crime (\$14,000) and productivity losses (\$26,000) (Holmes et al., 2018).

All of these calculations are underestimates. They follow a conservative methodology (Muller et al., 2014; Vyas et al., 2023), and they also necessarily underestimate the economic cost of GBV because they rely on reported prevalence. Additionally, many of the figures discussed only account for IPV or domestic abuse, rather than all the different manifestations of GBV (e.g. in public spaces, work or school). Moreover, TF-GBV is rapidly increasing and there is an important gap in available estimates (see [Box 3](#)). And none of the calculations include the cost of violence against LGBTQI+ people, for which there are no equivalent estimates.

Box 3 The cost of TF-GBV

The only available data on this form of violence comes from the European Union (EU). Lomba et al. (2021) found that TF-GBV* costs the EU between €49.0 billion and €89.3 billion per year – approximately 40% of which relates to impacts on the labour market, the costs of response services or support, and lost tax revenue.

*Note: *Including cyberstalking, cyber-harassment, online hate speech, non-consensual image sharing and doxxing.*

Nonetheless, the figures emphasise that GBV is not a personal or private problem: it is a collective one. GBV affects the economic prospects of women and LGBTQI+ people, but it also affects the economic potential of whole countries and thus their possibility of moving towards a wellbeing economy.

How addressing GBV promotes wellbeing economies

Increasing economic access and participation for women and LGBTQI+ people: Eliminating GBV will prevent economic violence and promote the economic empowerment of women and LGBTQI+ people, as this reduces the power asymmetries that enable violence and increase the ability of victim-survivors to leave abusive situations. An established body of literature shows that increasing women's access to economic opportunities and control of resources helps reduce GBV (Eggers del Campo and Steinert, 2022).¹⁸ Moreover, addressing GBV in the workplace, on public transport and in other public spaces promotes people's participation in paid employment (formal or informal), because it means having a safe commute to and from work and safe conditions within which to work (Marcus and Somji, 2024). Increased economic access and participation for women and LGBTQI+ people can, in turn, boost economies.

Tackling economic inequality: By improving the economic access and participation of women and LGBTQI+ people, efforts to address GBV not only contribute to increased economic activity, but they also help tackle economic inequalities, especially when working through an intersectional approach. Moreover, addressing GBV calls attention to the importance of remedying economic inequalities across the board, as the disempowerment experienced by many men in the context of deepening economic inequality has been a driver of GBV too (True, 2012). Thus, addressing GBV also entails addressing class and racial economic inequalities, which are core tenets of wellbeing economies.

Strengthening the public provision of essential services that characterise a wellbeing economy: Efforts to increase prevention services and respond to the needs of victim-survivors require collective care through the expansion and improvement of public services – including health, justice and social welfare

¹⁸ However, women's greater access to and control of economic resources can also risk an increase in GBV, as it can be used as a mechanism to reassert male authority (True, 2012).

systems. This will benefit everyone. Training healthcare workers, police and teachers to recognise and respond appropriately to GBV cases leads to better-trained staff overall. GBV training improves, for example, skills in trauma-informed care and unbiased and sensitive service provision, which are skills that benefit people beyond victim-survivors and patients (Kimberg and Wheeler, 2019; Ahluwalia et al., 2025). This also applies to efforts to eliminate GBV within public services. Initiatives within schools and healthcare, for example, help make spaces free from discrimination and violence more generally, especially if GBV is addressed through intersectional initiatives (UNESCO and UN Women, 2016; CDC, 2024).¹⁹ Service provision also improves if GBV-related absenteeism and the underperformance of service providers are addressed, both of which can otherwise lead to lower quality care or services for all users (McCollum et al., 2024). Structural improvements can benefit other marginalised groups or the whole population too: for example, improving public spaces and transport to eliminate GBV tends to also improve safety and usability for other groups such as elderly people, children and people living with disabilities (UN Women, 2017). Importantly, efforts to address GBV can improve access to and use of public services among women and LGBTQI+ communities.²⁰

Freeing up resources in the long term that could be invested in developing wellbeing economies:

Eliminating GBV would release yearly resources in a country's public and private sectors (Ouedraogo and Stenzel, 2021). In other words, it would free up resources that could be invested in generating more sustainable economic activity, in tackling socioeconomic inequalities, in building human capital and in improving public provision of essential services (ibid; Muller et al., 2014). For example, reducing GBV would free up capacity in overstretched health, justice and social welfare systems, and it would free up public resources that could be re-invested to further strengthen systems to everyone's benefit (Muller et al., 2014).

Advancing a multidimensional concept of wellbeing that is at the centre of wellbeing economies: Some studies have calculated the impact of GBV on life quality by looking at the personal cost of pain, suffering, fear, loss of social networks and foregone opportunities (estimated by what people would be willing to pay to avoid these). In such studies, these harms represent by far the largest proportion of the overall economic cost of GBV. For example, a study in the UK found that reduced life quality (measured through emotional and physical harm) accounted for 71% of the total economic cost of domestic abuse. This pattern holds consistently across studies (Oliver et al., 2019). The European Institute of Gender Equality's (EIGE, 2021) EU-wide assessment similarly found that physical and emotional impacts make up 55.6% of the total cost of GBV, and a comparable exercise focusing specifically on TF-GBV found that quality-of-life loss accounted for roughly 50–60% of its annual cost (see [Box 3](#)). The fact that reduced quality of life is consistently found across different studies to be the single largest cost shows that wellbeing must be understood to mean multidimensional needs to be integrated into economic thinking.

¹⁹ In schools, efforts to prevent GBV can focus on increasing students' sense of belonging, and on improving relationships between students and teachers, as well as among peers (Orr et al., 2022).

²⁰ Among over 5,000 LGBTQI+ respondents to a survey in the UK, 23% of LGBTQI+ patients had witnessed discriminatory remarks from healthcare staff while accessing services, and 14% had avoided treatment because they feared discrimination (Stonewall, 2018 cited in Jiménez Thomas Rodríguez, 2022).

4.2 How does addressing GBV advance accountable governance?

The effects of GBV on democracy and the enjoyment of political rights

GBV erodes democracy and the civil and political rights of women and LGBTQI+ people by limiting their participation in political life as citizens and as representatives. When perpetrated by the state, GBV represents a violation of the government's core duty, eroding state accountability.

GBV can limit political participation by reducing the quality of life of women and LGBTQI+ people through pain, fear, suffering and loss of self-confidence (as discussed in [Section 4.1](#)). In turn, this can affect people's interests, needs and ability to be politically active – either as engaged citizens or as government representatives or officials (Anitha, 2023; Hussain, 2023; Moulding et al., 2023).

As citizens or active members of society, women and LGBTQI+ people can also see their political participation undermined through multiple, often overlapping, pathways. GBV tends to restrict victim-survivors' mobility. Coercive partners or family members may control when and how someone leaves the home, and women and LGBTQI+ people may fear experiencing GBV in public spaces – with the latter being particularly acute for gender non-conforming people. Both of these dynamics can deter travel to and participation in community meetings, town halls or polling stations (Abdo-Katsipis, 2018; Rahman and Thompson, 2022; Root, 2024).

GBV can also undermine political participation through its economic effects (see [Section 4.1](#)). Where victim-survivors experience income losses, the need to secure additional income could crowd out available time and resources for formal or informal political engagement (for example, voting or participation in a social movement). Meanwhile, the isolation that frequently accompanies GBV – because abusive partners often deliberately cut victims off from family and friends (Pain, 2022) – can erode the social and information networks, support structures and sense of belonging that facilitate political participation (Moffett-Bateau, 2024; Root, 2024). Because GBV can entail close monitoring and control of how a partner uses digital technologies, or damaging or destroying someone's devices, victim-survivors can have restricted access to politically relevant information as well (ibid.).

GBV can also hinder someone's right to vote freely. GBV at home, in public spaces or at work can prevent women and LGBTQI+ people from voting or it can influence their vote (ibid.). A study by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems found that female voters face violence at four times the rate of male voters during elections (Bardall, 2011). Fear of GBV can discourage someone from voting if they are concerned about the privacy implications of voter registration systems. If women and LGBTQI+ people are not registered, they are less likely to be contacted by parties, creating a cycle of political disengagement (ibid; Klein, 2024).

As well as influencing voter behaviour, GBV can also greatly affect women's and LGBTQI+ people's participation as political representatives (Matlach and Drath, 2025; Stephenson et al., 2025). GBV against people in politics is perpetrated by: voters and constituents; opposing political party members and fellow party members; community leaders; journalists; members of the government such as those in the police,

judiciary and electoral management bodies; and, in some contexts, armed actors.²¹ A study from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU, 2026) found that 71% of 519 members of parliament (MPs) surveyed globally reported having experienced GBV from the public (online, offline or both), rising to 76% among women MPs. The study also found that MPs felt the situation is continuing to deteriorate (ibid). In the Balkans, for instance, 4 in 10 women in politics have experienced violence and 5 in 10 have witnessed it (Radičević, 2022). In Africa, 80% of women politicians have experienced psychological violence in parliament, 67% have been subjected to sexist behaviour or comments, 42% have received threats (of death, rape, beating or abduction) and 40% have been sexually harassed²² (IPU, 2021). In Asia-Pacific, 76% have experienced psychological violence, 25% have experienced sexual violence, and 24% have experienced economic violence.²³

TF-GBV is particularly and increasingly pervasive against women and LGBTQI+ people in politics (Matlach and Drath, 2025; Michalko and Jiménez Thomas Rodríguez, 2026). In the USA, two-thirds of LGBTQI+ candidates reported hate and harassment during their campaigns, and one in seven received an in-person death threat (LGBTQ+ Victory Institute, 2026). In Argentina, Benin, Italy, Malaysia and the Netherlands, between 65% and 77% of women MPs²⁴ reported online abuse (IPU, 2026). In Asia-Pacific, 60% of women parliamentarians reported experiencing online hate speech, disinformation, image-based abuse, or doxxing (ibid.). Research by the ALIGN platform in Nigeria and Brazil also found pervasive experiences of doxxing, synthetic image abuse, online threats and smear campaigns among women in politics (dRPC, 2025; Ricard et al., 2025).

GBV against women and LGBTQI+ people in politics specifically aims to discourage individuals from entering or staying in political roles by damaging their and their family's mental health, physical safety and financial protection (Ricard et al., 2025; Michalko, 2026). In Europe, for instance, 21% of women parliamentarians said they did not want to run again due to threats and harassment (Matlach and Drath, 2025). In a systematic review of 48 studies, 20% (10/48 studies) found TF-GBV was linked to women withdrawing from political office (Koch et al., 2025). Younger women, those from minority or marginalised groups, and those in conflict settings face greater exposure to political violence (IPU, 2021, 2026; Ricard et al., 2025; Stephenson et al., 2025) and thus are at greater risk of being pushed out of political representation. TF-GBV against women and LGBTQI+ people also aims to discourage individuals from participating in online spaces – meaning spaces that are increasingly central to political life are also being reshaped into sites of exclusion. In the same systematic review, 62% of studies (30/48) found that TF-GBV changed the online behaviour of women in politics: 39% (19/48) found reduced online engagement and 29% (14/48) found total withdrawal from online spaces (Koch et al., 2025).

Thus, GBV can be used to reassert male control over the public sphere (which includes digital spaces) and to reinstitute patriarchal gender norms that contradict democracy (Vlahakis, 2018; UNHRC, 2018). Hence, GBV hurts the political and civil rights of women and LGBTQI+ people and it narrows who participates in politics, affecting democracy as a whole. Its chilling effect on participation skews

²¹ Gendered violence in politics tends to increase with visibility of women and LGBTQI+ people (dRPC, 2025; Ricard et al., 2025). It especially occurs around election periods, key debates or the salience of polarising issues (dRPC, 2025; IPU, 2026).

²² The study was based on the experiences of 224 women parliamentarians working in 50 African countries and in one subregional parliamentary assembly.

²³ The study included 150 women parliamentarians across 33 countries.

²⁴ This includes spreading false or misleading information. Gendered disinformation often includes messaging that reproduces harmful gender stereotypes with the aim of portraying someone as less competent or legitimate. The figure speaks of GBV perpetrated by the public.

descriptive representation, deteriorates substantive representation, weakens accountability mechanisms, hinders policy deliberation and biases policy priorities in ways that are incompatible with truly democratic societies (Krook, 2020; Serrano Oswald, 2023; Hibbs, 2025; Zamfir, 2025). GBV can also subvert and weaponise democratic mechanisms or principles. In Bolivia, for example, manipulation of anti-corruption mechanisms (i.e. filing false corruption accusations), exploitation of alternate seat-sharing rules (i.e. pressuring women principals to share or give up their seats),²⁵ and misuse of the premise of ‘the will of the people’ have been used to inflict violence against women in politics, discredit them and pressure them to step back (Restrepo Sanin, 2022).

Civic space is also damaged by GBV. In a survey of 714 women journalists across 125 countries, 73% of respondents said they had experienced online violence (Posetti and Shabbir, 2022). Threats of physical violence were perpetrated against 25% of respondents, threats of sexual violence against 18% and threats to harm family members against 13%. For 20% of respondents, online abuse led to offline GBV too. Women active in social movements are also at increased risk of violence (Suarez Estrada et al., 2022). While all human rights defenders and activists tend to face high levels of violence – especially in Latin America (Global Witness, 2025) – for women and LGBTQI+ people, this is accompanied by a risk of suffering sexual violence, gendered smear campaigns, TF-GBV and femicide (Jiménez Thomas et al., 2023; Fundacion Multitudes, 2024). IM Defensoras (2024) documented 35,077 attacks against 8,926 women human rights defenders across Mexico and Central America between 2012 and 2023. Of the 58 killings of women's rights defenders between 2020 and 2022, 40% of victims were trans women activists, while indigenous and Afro-descendant women were disproportionately targeted too. As with women in politics, the risk of violence increases when journalists and activists are working on particularly controversial issues and/or in conflict zones (Posetti and Shabbir, 2021; CFWIJ, 2022).

GBV against women and LGBTQI+ journalists and activists can also push them to leave this space or lead to a chilling effect, thereby shrinking civic space. Posetti et al. (2026) found that 25% of respondents – human rights defenders, activists, journalists, media workers and other public communicators who identify as women – experienced anxiety or depression because of online abuse, 41% said they self-censor on social media, and 19% said they self-censor in their professional work in response to online abuse.²⁶ By shrinking civic space, GBV constrains the ability of societies as a whole – not only of journalists, defenders and activists – to exercise their rights and influence the political, social and economic structures and decisions that affect their lives. Crucially, it also thwarts one of the main mechanisms to hold the state accountable and thus limits the ability to ensure a mode of governance that is responsive and answerable to people's needs and priorities. As discussed in [Section 2](#), robust civic spaces are especially important to ensure governance is accountable and responsive to the wellbeing of people who may not have a right to formal political participation (such as migrants). Lastly, by driving women journalists out of the profession or into self-censorship, GBV can also weaken the information ecosystem that is key to democracies, and it can narrow democracy via the type of information and perspectives that reach or do not reach the public (Posetti and Shabbir, 2022).

²⁵ In some systems, such as in Bolivia, every elected member of Congress and the Senate runs on a joint ticket with a designated substitute holder for the post – that is, the person who would replace the principal if the person resigns, is absent or passes away.

²⁶ The study finds 41% of respondents reported offline harm connected to online abuse. Nearly one in four respondents reported AI-assisted online violence such as synthetic image abuse.

Moreover, when GBV is perpetrated by state institutions this threatens the very concept of accountable governance. Police, military officials and other public authorities have been consistently linked with GBV against women (especially marginalised groups) and against LGBTQI+ people (Willis, 2021; Girardi, 2022). For example, as IM Defensoras (2024) has documented, nearly half of attacks against women human rights defenders in Mexico and Central America between 2012 and 2022 were linked to state actors. GBV at the hand of government actors is particularly common in high-conflict and post-conflict settings because institutions are weakened, social structures are disrupted, general levels of violence increase, and GBV can be used as a tactic of war (Enloe, 2023; Rohwerder, 2017; Burt, 2019). Governments are also historic perpetrators of reproductive violence, having inflicted forced sterilisations and coerced contraception against women, particularly those who are indigenous, poor, from ethnic minorities or live with a disability (Jiménez Thomas Rodríguez, 2022). Governments have also used conversion therapy or surgery and treatment refusals in relation to LGBTQI+ people (Browne, 2018; 2019). GBV is often perpetrated by state actors in prisons and detention centres too (Aedo Rivera, 2025; Hilinski-Rosick, 2025).

How addressing GBV advances and protects accountable democratic governance

Upholding women's and LGBTQI+ people's civic and political rights, as well as their right to safety and dignity. Working to end GBV contributes to building inclusive societies where everyone is recognised as equal – the basis of a full democracy (Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2020).

Protecting government accountability from erosion and increasing trust in institutions. Governments are meant to guarantee people's rights and safety, therefore GBV committed or enabled by state actors represents a fundamental breach of a government's own duties. Efforts to end state-perpetrated GBV is to work towards holding governments to account against their core role and to increase accountability when the perpetrator and arbiter are one and the same. Therefore, working to end state-perpetrated GBV necessarily demands efforts to restore the very conditions under which government accountability is possible. This, in turn, is central to increasing trust in government authorities and institutions – which is a core facet of democratic governance.

Strengthening democratic institutions and spaces, including safe civic spaces. Addressing GBV advances the political participation of women and LGBTQI+ people. This strengthens democratic governance because women and LGBTQI+ people are free to be politically active, to influence the decisions that affect them, and to represent the needs and interests of their communities, increasing their representation (IPU, 2021, 2026; Restrepo Sanín, 2022). Eliminating GBV against women and LGBTQI+ people in politics would strengthen anti-corruption and transparency mechanisms – and prevent their misuse – that aim to improve democracy (Restrepo Sanin, 2022). GBV work also helps build and maintain an open and safe civic space. Without fear of violence, it becomes possible for defenders, activists and people without citizenship to freely exercise their political rights to influence the decisions that shape their lives and effectively monitor and hold governments accountable against their national and international commitments.

Protecting the information ecosystem that civil society and democracies depend on. Working to eliminate GBV can help protect well-informed and pluralistic reporting by ensuring that women's and LGBTQI+ people's perspectives reach the public (Posetti and Shabbir, 2022). Moreover, addressing GBV against women in politics increasingly requires greater attention to TF-GBV, digital technologies and online platforms.

Pursuing the regulations, modifications and/or dismantlement of these technologies and platforms to curb TF-GBV is also likely to reduce their negative impacts more widely, in terms of mis- and disinformation, radicalisation and polarisation (see [Section 3.1](#)). Addressing TF-GBV can thus help address a wider set of threats to democratic integrity.

Promoting the rule of law and an effective and transparent justice system. Ensuring access to justice for GBV victim-survivors also requires efforts to maintain well-resourced and fair justice systems – free from the discrimination and re-victimisation and stigmatisation that victim-survivors and their defendants frequently encounter (Solano and Marquez, 2024; Leon-Himmelstine et al., 2025). As discussed in [Section 4.1](#), any structural improvements to public institutions and services then benefit all users. For example, GBV protocols and procedures improve access to justice for GBV victim-survivors as well as others (Quast, 2008) and policies to make justice more accessible and responsive to GBV victim-survivors – such as specialised units, trauma-informed protocols or streamlined reporting mechanisms – improve overall institutional quality and responsiveness (Garcia-Hombrados et al., 2024). Because GBV is perpetrated by state actors too, strengthening the focus and capacity of the justice system to respond effectively to GBV also improves overall institutional transparency and accountability. Lastly, working to address GBV – in this case by investigating, prosecuting and providing redress – reiterates one of the principles of democracy (equality before the law) and helps strengthen the credibility of the justice system.

4.3 How does addressing GBV improve the social fabric?

The impacts of GBV on social norms and networks

GBV damages the social fabric by reinforcing inequitable social norms and by hindering social connection, both of which can ultimately reduce a person's sense of belonging.

GBV undermines the principle of equality that underpins a strong social fabric. As discussed in [Section 1](#), norms that link masculinity to heterosexuality, authority and toughness sit at the centre of GBV – which is both a symptom of these norms and a mechanism to maintain them. GBV therefore undermines the foundations of a strong social fabric precisely by signalling the existence of inequitable social norms that deny equal dignity and respect, that contravene people's human rights, and that entrench those very same norms. Impunity further reinforces and maintains such inequality, not only along gendered lines but along class and race lines too. This is because men from higher socioeconomic backgrounds across various contexts are less likely to face any consequences for GBV, especially when perpetrated against women or LGBTQI+ people belonging to other marginalised groups (Manne, 2017; Park, 2021). Impunity, moreover, also communicates societal tolerance or approval, eroding people's sense of value (Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2020).

GBV also damages interpersonal and collective relationships. Especially when perpetrated in the private sphere, GBV tends to dismantle the support network of women and LGBTQI+ people by isolating victim-survivors from family members, friends or colleagues. This is a common tactic to increase control over someone and reduce their ability to leave an abusive situation. Isolation can be short term, but it can

have long-term consequences if it leads to conflict with loved ones (Hing et al., 2021). GBV can also affect interpersonal trust. Victim-survivors – particularly of IPV but also people who have experienced GBV from other family members, friends or colleagues – frequently describe a sense of betrayal that shapes their future feelings of trust more broadly (Gobin and Freyd, 2014; Melin and Salkovskis, 2025). GBV in the public sphere (e.g. within school, work, digital platforms or public spaces) can also weaken collective trust when the threat of GBV prevents participation, interaction and willingness to rely on others. For instance, as discussed in [Section 4.1](#) and [Section 4.2](#), GBV in schools can motivate girls to drop out of education and TF-GBV can motivate women to exit digital spaces, thereby reducing their social interactions. IPV and GBV on public transport and in public spaces can damage associational life – that is, participation in voluntary, self-organised and recurring spaces such as religious communities, volunteering groups, unions, clubs or other organisations (Zahra et al., 2024; Dubey et al., 2025). In doing so, GBV can motivate or contribute to a reduction in the repeated contact that is central to community formation through cooperation and reciprocity (Putnam, 1995, 2000).

GBV can also contribute to the growing rates of social isolation and loneliness described in [Section 3.1](#). Some men are drawn to manosphere communities because they provide an outlet for, and they explain, the pain of disconnection and also because they offer a sense of belonging that an individual might otherwise be lacking (Botto and Gottzén, 2024). However, these spaces and communities can then exacerbate feelings of isolation offline. For example, Equimundo's 2023 *State of American Men* report found that 48% of young men felt their online lives were more meaningful than their offline lives. Adopting misogynistic beliefs and attitudes and perpetrating GBV can cause further isolation by estranging these men from their families, friends, colleagues and networks.

GBV can deepen social polarisation as well. As discussed in [Section 3.1](#), there is evidence that younger generations are more divided along gendered lines: young women are moving towards more gender-equitable norms, while young men are stagnating or moving towards less equitable norms (King's Global Institute for Women's Leadership, 2025). GBV contributes to a vicious cycle where it is used to enforce and uphold inequitable gender norms, causing greater polarisation that is then likely to motivate GBV.

By damaging the social fabric, GBV decreases the ability of a community to navigate crises successfully. A study of the Covid-19 pandemic found, for instance, that the countries that were able to best respond to the pandemic were those with stronger social fabrics: with more community connection, sense of belonging and caring relations (along stronger perception of institutional legitimacy) (Orazani et al., 2023).

How addressing GBV helps build a strong social fabric

Challenging and transforming unequal social norms. Mexico's Ley Olimpia illustrates this dynamic. Enacted between 2018 and 2022 following sustained advocacy by the Frente Nacional para la Sororidad, this was the first law to recognise and criminalise TF-GBV. Emerging ALIGN evidence suggests the reform and the movement's advocacy around it have begun to unsettle inequitable gender norms, prompting some institutions and civil society actors to question re-victimising beliefs and behaviours (Hernandez Oropa et al., 2024). GBV work, moreover, cannot only contribute to challenging harmful gender norms but unequal social norms more broadly. For example, addressing impunity requires challenging intersecting inequalities or privileges. According to a systematic review, countering unequal social norms is among the most

important and effective strategies to strengthen the social fabric (Orazani et al., 2023). By challenging unequal gender norms, preventing and responding to GBV strengthens the social fabric by enabling the realisation of human rights and the enjoyment of dignity by all.

Strengthening the density of the social fabric. GBV curtails the networks that women and LGBTQI+ people can access and sustain – family, friends, work colleagues, school peers, online communities or associational life – therefore eliminating GBV helps to maintain the everyday contact that builds trust, cooperation and ultimately community and a caring society. Moreover, reducing inequitable norms and isolation can increase social contact between people of diverse genders and thus protect communities from radicalisation and polarisation. Studies show that having more and better relationships with a diverse group of people (also referred to as intergroup contact) correlates with a decrease in discriminatory beliefs and behaviours, because it increases knowledge about a group, reduces anxiety about people seen as ‘others’ and increases empathy (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2008; Davies et al., 2011; Dovidio et al., 2017).²⁷ Studies have also found that increasing opportunities for positive and cooperative contact is another of the most effective ways to strengthen the social fabric (Orazani et al., 2023).

Providing a pathway to address the crisis of connection and fragmentation that many countries are currently facing. Countering GBV-related gender norms can have a positive impact on male connection because harmful associations between masculinity and toughness, stoicism, self-sufficiency and emotional suppression can deter men from showing their vulnerability and from connecting with others (Nordin et al., 2024). A study in Mexico, the US and the UK found that men who strictly adhere to inequitable gender norms are more likely to use violence to resolve conflicts and that they are more prone to feelings of isolation and depression (Heilman et al., 2017). While patriarchal gender norms encourage social bonding between men through shared rejection of diversity, derogatory banter and GBV (Segato, 2021; Nordin et al., 2024) – forms of bonding that the manosphere exploits and amplifies – such social fragmentation and resentment can lead in some cases to radicalisation into misogynist communities. In turn, this drives GBV that then causes women and LGBTQI+ people to withdraw from spaces or networks. Efforts to eliminate GBV can break this cycle of polarisation and promote a strong social fabric that is characterised by pluralism and conciliation. Participatory and community-driven programmes can strengthen communities by bringing people together who might otherwise not meet, and by increasing people’s sense of agency and ownership over the issues that affect them (Cornwall, 2008; Jiménez Thomas Rodríguez, 2024).²⁸

Advancing the regulation of the technology sector. Addressing GBV requires action on digital technologies, tools and spaces. As discussed in [Section 3.1](#), women, girls and LGBTQI+ people are increasingly experiencing TF-GBV and the growth of the manosphere is fuelling misogyny and GBV, as well as broader political polarisation. The fact that most boys and men are quickly exposed to hateful content, despite their initial interest to search for entertainment, or romantic, fitness or economic advice, points to the urgency of regulation (Hayes, 2026; Vodafone, 2024). Addressing GBV requires working with governments to legislate a duty of care and safety by design, as well as strengthening and scaling up critical

²⁷ Some literature shows that dense trust networks can also enable GBV, but these studies refer to dense networks among part of the population only, and thus not the strong social fabric that underpins an inclusive society.

²⁸ However, this potential will not be realised if participatory approaches are tokenistic. Community programmes can also reproduce power imbalances, rather than transform them.

digital literacy education that equips all the population with the necessary skills to use digital technologies and spaces safely. The benefits of this work would contribute towards preventing political and social polarisation more broadly and advancing pluralistic societies where people cooperate across and thrive through diversity.

Challenging the normalisation of violence more broadly. In contexts where levels of violence are generally high, efforts to end GBV can contribute to reducing violence overall. In Guatemala, for example, GBV is embedded within a recent history of civil conflict and organised crime-related violence, compounded by low levels of human rights awareness (only 25.4% of adults report a good understanding of their rights). Addressing GBV in this context can therefore help build rights awareness, confront historical trauma, and begin to denormalise violence more broadly (Leon-Himmelstine et al., 2026).

5 Conclusion and avenues for future research

GBV often operates as a mechanism to discipline and control people who contravene patriarchal gender norms; and GBV is also a consequence of gender inequality (Jiménez Thomas Rodríguez, 2022). It not only has deep impacts on survivors – restricting their wellbeing and their economic, political and social options – but it also affects everyone else in society too. GBV hinders economic progress and the possibility of reaching economic prosperity. It undermines democratic forms of governance and impedes accountability. And it weakens the social fabric, preventing a sense of belonging and interconnectedness. Moreover, at its core, no society can be truly inclusive if part of the population lives in fear of harm for who they are.

Ending GBV, therefore, provides a pathway to building inclusive societies: to build a wellbeing economy, democratic and accountable governance, and a strong social fabric – elements that are necessary to overcome the current polycrisis.

To deepen understanding of how efforts to address GBV help build inclusive societies, future research can do the following:

1. Generate empirical evidence on where and how addressing GBV has contributed to creating economic prosperity, strengthening democracy or supporting community-making in order to identify promising policies and approaches.
2. Examine how the relationship between inclusive societies and GBV flows in both directions. That is, how addressing GBV helps build inclusive societies, but also if and how building inclusive societies can help reduce GBV. Further research could explore, for example, if and how a strong social fabric protects communities from the influence of online misogyny, helping prevent an increase in GBV (both online and offline) or not. These findings could have implications for how to approach and design economic, political and social policies.
3. Examine the forms of collaboration needed (and possible amid the polycrisis) between government, the private sector and civil society to build more inclusive societies. Research could explore, for example, where and how there has been a successful reconfiguration of responsibility for GBV prevention and response work between government, civil society and the private sector.
4. Strengthen the evidence of how GBV against LGBTQI+ people affects the economy, governance and the social fabric, given that most existing evidence relates to cis- and heterosexual women. Evidence on the positive trickle-down effects generated by reducing violence against queer populations is also needed.

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ALIGN is a digital platform and programme of work that supports a global community of researchers, practitioners and activists, all committed to gender justice and equality. It provides new research, insights from practice, and grants for initiatives that increase our understanding of – and work to change – patriarchal gender norms.

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