16 Days of Activism against SGBV
Americas Region
25 November – 10 December 2017

“Leave No One Behind: Working Together to End Sexual and Gender Based Violence”

Across the Americas Region, UNHCR and its partners engaged in multiple activities to highlight the **16 Days of Activism against Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV)** taking place annually from the 25th of November, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, to the 10th of December coinciding with Human Rights Day.

SGBV is a global phenomenon existing in all social strata of society that disproportionately affects women, girls and persons with diverse sexual orientation and gender identities but also affects men and boys. People who are forced to flee their homes are at greater risk of SGBV. Moreover, in situations of forced displacement, social networks that usually provide a certain measure of protection break down creating greater vulnerability and lack of access to basic services and resources.

In the Americas, the 16 Days of Activism campaign aims to raise awareness on SGBV as a widespread social, health and economic issue in all corners of the world rooted in gender inequality and unequal power relations. SGBV, wherever it is found, can be a consequence and also a cause of forced displacement and affects families as well as entire communities.

**Situation in the Americas**

This year’s 16 Days of Activism campaign took place at a time when receiving countries registered 164,000 refugees and asylum-seekers fleeing from the North of Central America during 2016, a tenfold increase from the 5 years prior with violence, including SGBV, cited as one of the major causes of displacement. The number of persons of concern in the Americas, however, is estimated to be higher with more than 800,000 persons deported from the USA and Mexico between 2010 and 2015, of which more than 40,000 were children. In 2014 alone, the number of deportations from the two North American countries reached 213,000 representing a 50% increase in the span of 5 years since 2010. Of the 240,255 deportations from the U.S. in 2016, the countries of origin with the largest numbers

---

1 UNHCR. *NCA Situation*, 2017.
2 Domínguez, R., Retig, V., "Migrants Deported from the United States and Mexico to the Northern Triangle: A Statistical and Socioeconomic Profile", Migration Policy Institute, 2015.
3 Ibid.
included Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador.\(^4\)

As of December 2017, in another developing situation, the number of Venezuelans who have registered as asylum-seekers between 2014 and 2017 reached 104,238.\(^5\) This figure does not include the 590,537 Venezuelans entering Colombia for various reasons from January to October 2017 according to government statistics.\(^6\)

In many countries throughout the Americas refugees, displaced persons, stateless persons, returnees and others with international protection needs continue to be exposed to higher risks of sexual and gender based violence.

**What UNHCR does**

UNHCR in the Americas works to **mitigate the risk of SGBV through prevention and response interventions** organized in partnership with communities, NGOs, government counterparts and host populations in countries of origin, transit or destination.

**Prevention**

Developed in consultation with women, girls, boys, men and the LGBTI community, outreach and awareness-raising campaigns provide information on forms of SGBV, risks involved and services available in a particular geographic area.

UNHCR organizes events for, and also supports events organized by, community groups, NGOs and government officials using an age, gender and diversity approach to reach more persons at risk and build the capacity of those working to address SGBV and effect behaviour change in the community. Efforts to promote the empowerment of girls and boys and engage different community members in prevention of SGBV are realized through workshops, recreational activities, cultural events, lectures, social media posts and informal chat sessions among other types of activities.

---


Response

In recognition of the complex root causes and far-reaching consequences of SGBV including life-threatening situations, UNHCR’s Framework for Action against SGBV employs a multi-sectoral model to emphasize the need for interagency as well as internal coordination between all areas of work to address SGBV prevention and response. This involves the development and strengthening of networks of actors from different sectors across organizations, agencies and institutions to help provide a coordinated and coherent response for SGBV survivors in need of protection under UNHCR’s mandate.

The **minimum package of SGBV services** includes: 1) mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS); 2) health or medical services, in particular sexual and reproductive health services and Clinical Management of Rape (CMR); 3) legal assistance including access to justice and other legal procedures; and 4) SGBV case management. Capacity building activities emphasize SGBV basic principles and approaches and SGBV case management and information management. The RSSN project has an information dissemination component and also explores the use of mobile services.

The RSSN works in collaboration with civil society organizations, UN, government organizations, national, state and local institutions as well as between UNHCR offices in the Americas Region to bring services closer to the survivor.

**Services available to SGBV survivors in the RSSN**

- **CARE**
- **Psychosocial Support**
- **Health Care**
- **Legal Aid**
- **SAFETY**
- **GBV Case Management**
- **Psychosocial Support**

The Regional Safe Spaces Network (RSSN) project in the Americas aims to build on existing multi-sectoral services in a geographic area to **promote a minimum package of services** accessible to SGBV survivors in a single location, during outreach and community awareness-raising activities or through a system of referrals.
Interagency coordination with civil society and government institutions improves the delivery of SGBV services, reduces duplication of interventions and increases the efficiency of precious resources to raise awareness on SGBV prevention and continuously build the capacity of service providers to aid in the recovery of SGBV survivors.

Regional activities for the 16 Days of Activism

Awareness-raising activities

In commemoration of the 16 Days of Activism campaign in the region, activities ranged from community forums, films, and public demonstrations against SGBV to graffiti art exhibits for youth, messages shared via social media and workshops for community members with police or other government officials.

Central America

In San Pedro Sula, Honduras a Women’s Forum was held to share the Forum Report on Violence against Women and Forced Displacement together with operational partners of UNHCR. The participation of persons of concern, in this case women, in fora, discussions and other focus group activities is central to UNHCR’s community-based and age, gender and diversity approaches and ensures that their needs and preferences are at the heart of program design and targeted interventions related to SGBV.

Partnership and Coordination

Recognizing that SGBV cannot be addressed by one sector or a single actor, UNHCR uses a multi-sectoral approach to SGBV prevention and response. Across the region, UNHCR’s involvement in national and local SGBV coordination mechanisms and working groups, such as the Protection Working Group, helps to ensure the integration of SGBV mitigation measures in all sectors together with UN agencies, NGO partners and government institutions.

This cross-cutting issue requires engagement with other sectors involved in addressing SGBV including coordination with relevant government institutions to ensure the inclusion of refugees and asylum-seekers in national services, for example, through access to education, the labour market and health services.

Colombia. Banner for a march against SGBV, part of the 16 Days of Activism, with positive messages about women. Photo: UNHCR/2017.

Honduras. Dance activity during the community fair organized as part of the 16 Days of Activism by the women’s teams from Quality of Life and Women United to the Rescue for Spain City. Photo: UNHCR/2017.

During the community fair developed by Women United to the Rescue for Spain City and UNHCR, the women’s group carried out recreational activities in a high risk neighbourhood of Honduras based on priorities identified before the fair: recovery of public spaces, capacity building and women’s rights. The key message of the fair was to reaffirm the value of women in the community.

In San José, **Costa Rica** an SGBV photograph course and exhibition for women was organized in collaboration with Veritas University. The event shed light upon the varied experiences of women SGBV survivors and challenged what participants expect and understand about SGBV through thought-provoking images.

Also in San José, a video created about a mural painted by women refugees and migrants showed part of the Blue Diamond women’s group’s work within the community and shared their messages of protection, hope and inclusion during the 16 Days.

A conference entitled “International Protection of Women’s Human Rights” took place in San Salvador, **El Salvador** at the beginning of December. The conference helped to highlight from the perspective of both prevention and response, a rights-based approach can help focus attention on SGBV as a human rights violation that cannot be condoned or justified by cultural norms.

The UNHCR Regional Legal Unit (RLU) in Costa Rica and Regional Office in **Panama** presented the **Regional Safe Spaces Network (RSSN)** project in Panama City to UN agencies and UNHCR partners as part of the UN Secretary-General’s **UNiTE Campaign to Eliminate Violence against Women**. A refugee art exhibit organized by UNHCR and UN Women for the 16 Days in Panama City told stories of forced displacement, SGBV and resilience through visual arts.

In lead-up to the 16 Days, a Health Campaign was held in Izabal, **Guatemala** to also commemorate the International Day for Prevention of Sexual Abuse against Children and Adolescents.

**Mexico**

Several activities took place in cities and towns across Mexico. In Tapachula recreational activities against violence, including SGBV, were held for women, children and men as well as an information session by Doctors of the World France about women’s reproductive health. An awareness-raising event by UNHCR about SGBV also offered general information on the national campaign “Gender Alert”.

[Image 26x685 to 586x792]

[Image 83x261 to 294x407]

[Image 317x83 to 528x240]

[Image 313x494 to 524x619]
In Mexico City, an SGBV awareness-raising and beauty module event was hosted by the participants of the LGBTI support group “Time of the Butterflies”. The fair was organized for the International Transgender Day of Remembrance and to kick off the 16 Days of Activism against SGBV. The LGBTI persons that participated prepared and sold local dishes from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. In addition, a “TRANS-formation” beauty station offered services of haircuts and styles, makeup and eyebrow threading by the transgender women. Profits from services, food and products offered at the fair supported the purchase of materials to find dignified work and help overcome the denial of resources and opportunities experienced by some transgender persons due to gender discrimination.

A Learning Program organized by the RLU and Global Learning Center on “Working with LGBTI Persons in Forced Displacement” took place the first week in December and included sessions on identifying and addressing protection risks, respectful communication with LGBTI persons of concern and international protection of persons with diverse Sex, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identities (SSOGI) and LGBTI persons.

**The Caribbean**

In Port of Spain, **Trinidad and Tobago**, UN agencies and local health officials jointly organized a Health Campaign to raise awareness on the health needs of SGBV survivors. A community discussion for men and women with a specialist in Boca Chica, **Dominican Republic** talked about the cycle of violence and addressing issues related to SGBV.

In anticipation of the 16 Days, a UN-sponsored workshop with journalists was presented in Havana, **Cuba** on “Protection of Refugees and other Forcibly Displaced Populations against SGBV and Human Trafficking”. As part of the 16 Days and in coordination with the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator in Cuba, a group of refugee women participated in a “Bio-dance” session aimed at encouraging empowerment, self-esteem and women’s acknowledgement of their right to free will.

**Brazil**

UNHCR Brazil, UNFPA and SETRABES (Secretariat of State for Work and Social Welfare of Roraima), in partnership with Grafita Roraima, promoted the creation of a graffiti mural on a wall in Boa Vista, Roraima, on 5 and 6 December with the participation of Venezuelan and Brazilian women.
Under the theme “Violence against women has no border,” two rounds of talks were carried out involving Venezuelan women living in Tancredo Neves shelter and Brazilian women from different parts of Brazil with the aim of exchanging experiences of SGBV.

The original sketch created by local artists was finalized based on the outcomes of debates between the Venezuelan and Brazilian women who also participated in the mural painting on a public wall near the shelter.

Colombia

A participatory discussion in Arauca took place with the Municipal Committee of Arauca to analyse the situation of the movement of girls and adolescents from Venezuela with an aim to improve the identification of girls at risk of SGBV and raise awareness in the community on available services and basic assistance.

Putumayo held a bilateral meeting with UNHCR partners on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) and discussions with PSEA focus groups were held in Aruca by UNHCR and partners. UNHCR takes PSEA seriously and adheres to the zero tolerance policy established by the UN Secretary-General. Focus groups are one method to ensure persons of concern know about community-based complaint mechanisms, how to report an incident and are also an opportunity to repeat key messages that all services offered by UNHCR and partners are free of charge.

In Tumaco, SGBV survivors organized stands to share their experiences with livelihoods and strengthen the strategies of “Women's Circles” as part of a series of proactive efforts to build social networks that promote resilience and aid in the recovery of survivors.
Mexico: Community event with children’s activities to empower girls and boys and share SGBV prevention messages. Photo: UNHCR/2017.

A group discussion on public policies and the “Signed commitment to fight against SGBV” was presented in Ituango, Colombia. In Buenaventura a concert and cultural activity were organized entitled “Peaceful Evening with a Group Discussions on SGBV”.

Ecuador

In Ecuador, many activities took place in Sucumbios, Santo Domingo, Guayaquil, Ibarra, Tulcan and Quito including graffiti workshops, artistic exhibits, fairs, provincial meetings, marches, an artistic festival against SGBV, a mural, awareness-raising activities and an academic forum.

Venezuela

In Venezuela, a forum on sexual and reproductive health and a movie discussion forum on gender equity took place in the following cities: Cristóbal, Guasdualito, Elorza, El Nula, Puerto Ordaz, Tumeremo, Francisco Javier Pulgar, Colón, Maracaibo and Caracas.

An RSSN training was held in San Cristobal on SGBV case management for UNHCR and partners in Colombia and Venezuela to improve the quality of services provided to SGBV survivors and reduce revictimization occurring when a survivor who is seeking support is required to repeat their story an relive the trauma of an incident multiple times.


A multi-sectoral roundtable was developed in Maracaibo to discuss current issues Venezuelan women and girls must overcome, including SGBV, in order to meet the UN SDGs within the framework of the 2030 Agenda.

Finally, in Puerto Ordaz and San Francisco, community health brigades shared information on sexual and reproductive health and HIV/AIDS and provided free HIV tests.

Venezuela: Health brigades, or mobile services, in the community sharing information on sexual and reproductive health and offering HIV tests. Photo: Johan Leon/2017.

Venezuela: SGBV awareness-raising event for persons of concern in Bolivar State saying “No” to SGBV. Photo: Josselyn Guaquire/2017.

For a more detailed list of activities held during the 16 Days of Activism in the Americas Region in 2017, please visit UNHCR’s website.
Colombia. Community members march as part of the 16 Days of Activism against SGBV. Photo UNHCR/2017.

CONTACTS

Leloba Pahl, Protection Officer (SGBV), UNHCR RLU, San José, Costa Rica
pahl@unhcr.org

Ana Belén Anguita Arjona, Senior Regional Protection Officer (CP/SGBV), UNHCR RLU, San José, Costa Rica
anguita@unhcr.org

LINKS

http://www.acnur.org/noticias/noticia/16-dias-de-activismo-contra-la-violencia-sexual-y-de-genero-2017/
http://www.acnur.org/
http://www.acnur.org/a-quien-ayuda/mujeres/
http://lac.unwomen.org/es
http://lac.unwomen.org/es/que-hacemos/fin-a-la-violencia-contra-las-mujeres
http://www.unwomen.org/es/news/in-focus/end-violence-against-women