



Meaningful Engagement of Young People in the Prevention of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Guayaquil, Ecuador

CEPAM-G's Success Story

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Ecuador

In 2021, the Government of Ecuador declared an **internal armed conflict** against local and transnational criminal gangs seeking to control drug trafficking routes following simultaneous riots in three prisons and numerous acts of violence against civilians. Guayaquil, the capital of Guayas Province in Ecuador and a major port city, has become the epicenter of the country’s drug trade. This conflict situation has not only led to a sharp rise in homicide rates, but it has also **intensified sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)**, disproportionately affecting women, girls, and gender-diverse people.



Of the **1,208 murders** recorded in Guayas during the first quarter of 2025, **61%** occurred in Guayaquil alone[1]. 58 of these were homicides of women, where 2 cases were formally classified as femicides. This is the most recent data in a context of escalating violence, as the number of **homicides of women in Guayaquil increased by 158% in the last four years, rising from 53 cases in 2021 to 137 in 2024**. At the national level, this represents **27%** of all cases of female homicides in Ecuador, making Guayaquil one of the cities with the highest risk of SGBV in the country[2].

This context has led to **additional forms of sexual violence against young people**, including human trafficking, abduction, non-consensual sexual practices, and forced “relationships,” especially targeting adolescent girls. At a structural level, physical and racial violence related to gender stereotypes also persist. Afro-descendant people and sexual minorities face targeted psychological violence rooted in discrimination and intolerance. Cases of cyberbullying and other technology-facilitated violence against young people have also been reported.

Through the *Feminist Futures Free From Violence* project, CEPAM-G — in collaboration with Equimundo and Fòs Feminista — implemented **innovative and participatory initiatives in Guayaquil to prevent these rising prevalence of SGBV, engaging young people under the age of 25** in the process of understanding, exercising, and promoting their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

CEPAM-G’s Approaches for Preventing SGBV Among Young People

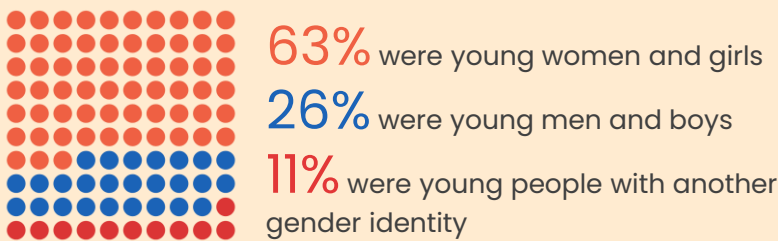
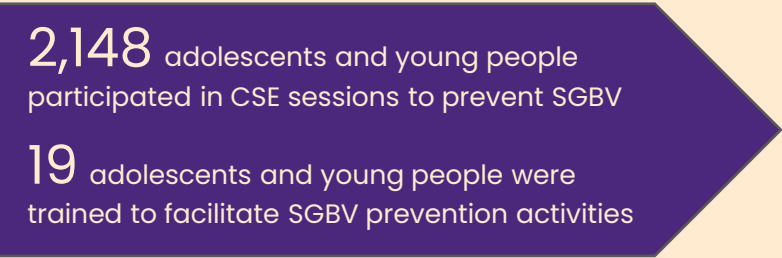
Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE): Evidence-based workshops focused on primary prevention of SGBV. These curriculum-based sessions promote the development of skills to identify risky situations and encourage young people to question the social norms that perpetuate SGBV.

Continuous assessment processes with adolescents and young people: Pre- and post-tests with adolescents and youth explored changes in gender norms and roles that perpetuate SGBV, complemented by focus groups to capture perceived shifts and experiences.



Youth Power: A network of youth groups for the prevention of SGBV in Guayaquil. As part of this network, the “[Toolkit: A Manual to Promote Gender Equality](#)” was developed, which includes key concepts and participatory methods to promote gender equality.

Young People Meaningfully Participated in CEPAM-G’s Initiatives to Prevent SGBV



CEPAM-G’s SGBV Prevention Initiatives Generated Positive Impacts Among Adolescents and Young People



[1] Ecuadorian National Secretariat of Planning. (2025). *Intentional homicides*. Open Data of Ecuador. <https://datosabiertos.gob.ec/dataset/homicidiosintencionales/resource/cb8f704e-2b27-4d7f-9431-d40c4e27fa48>

[2] Ecuadorian Ministry of Women and Human Rights. (2025). *Statistics of Femicides in Ecuador*. National Information System. <https://www.derechoshumanos.gob.ec/>

Effective Strategies for Successfully Implementing SGBV Prevention Initiatives with Adolescents and Young People



Recognition of Intersectionality: It is essential to actively listen to the needs of adolescents and young people and adapt methodologies to reflect their specific realities. This involves understanding how overlapping social identities shape their experiences, particularly within contexts of violence and insecurity.



Peer Learning Methodology: Implementing a model in which trained young people educate their peers has proven effective in expanding outreach and engagement in the prevention of SGBV. This approach not only strengthens learning but also fosters youth leadership by giving young people an active role in their schools and communities. It promotes a sense of belonging, responsibility, and empowerment.



Safe Spaces: Creating environments where young people feel secure and comfortable expressing themselves is essential. These spaces foster trust and openness, encouraging active participation and meaningful learning. In turn, this supports shifts in attitudes, behaviors, and skills needed to prevent SGBV.



Collective Monitoring and Evaluation: Ongoing monitoring and evaluation, with the active participation of adolescents and young people in providing feedback, makes it possible to adapt and improve activities and approaches in real time. This ensures that the processes remain relevant, responsive, and effective.



Use of Resources: Providing appealing elements such as refreshments, transportation, and learning materials helped motivate and enable adolescents and young people to actively participate in the training sessions. These supports also contributed to a stronger sense of connection and relevance to the overall process.



Ongoing Challenges in the Ecuadorian Context

Increased insecurity and violence, which exposes adolescents and young people to multiple risks.

Normalization of SGBV, which leads to resignation, silence, and even social tolerance of these forms of violence.

Gaps in access to accurate and reliable information on sexual and reproductive rights, which hinders young people's ability to make informed decisions.

A socio-political climate that fosters anti-rights narratives, undermining gender-based approaches and obstructing the development of prevention and protection policies

“ I think the challenge for us as adolescents is not knowing where to start. When we held these workshops, it was really impactful to see, for example, that many young people and adolescents don't see themselves as rights-holders. The topic of sexual and reproductive rights is one of the least talked about.

Participant, Youth Power initiative



Key Components of CEPAM-G's Successful Model for SGBV Prevention Among Adolescents and Young People

Resilient and Innovative Methodologies

The initiative focused on creating **safe, permanent, and recreational spaces that serve as refuges and support networks** for all interested adolescents and young people. These spaces provided an environment free from violence, fostering integration, recreation, and a sense of belonging.

Among the strategies implemented were **playful and experiential methodologies grounded in a gender transformative approach**. These methodologies challenged traditional paradigms and encouraged collective, inclusive, and dynamic learning, effectively integrating digital tools and resources.

Collective Work

From a **feminist and critical perspective**, CEPAM-G fosters the **active participation of adolescents and young people in decision-making processes**, challenging adult-centrism and traditional power hierarchies. The organization prioritizes horizontal relationships grounded in respect, shared responsibility, and collective leadership within community processes. Age or position is not a basis for hierarchy, ensuring that all voices are valued equally.



Sustainability Strategies

CEPAM-G uses a **peer learning methodology** that empowers trained young people to share knowledge and facilitate safe, reflective spaces focused on sexual and reproductive health and rights. This approach not only deepens learning but also nurtures youth leadership and broadens impact by reaching peers, friends, and families.

Additionally, CEPAM-G has developed a comprehensive Toolkit featuring activities and content on the prevention of SGBV. This resource is available for young people to use with their peers, further reinforcing youth leadership and supporting ongoing training efforts.

Monitoring and Evaluation

CEPAM-G transforms power dynamics by actively involving adolescents and young people not only in decision-making, but also in the implementation of initiatives. This shift is supported by **participatory monitoring and follow-up processes designed with and for youth**, emphasizing continuous feedback, open dialogue, and mutual learning.

Moving beyond traditional pre- and post-evaluations, CEPAM-G prioritizes the collective construction of knowledge as a foundation for meaningful and effective implementation.

“Being part of this process made us feel that we are capable of doing things. I never thought I would be trained for this, because I had always been the one attending the trainings, but I was never on the other side. So yes, it felt like a dream—I never believed I would be there, and in the end, I did it! It was something truly great; there were real results. The participants were always engaged and responsive. You could tell the information really stuck with them. If I had to describe it in a few words, **it was a transformative process**.”

Participant, Youth Power initiative

Lessons Learned

1 Create a **permanent youth-friendly space** where young people feel welcomed and understood. This space should allow them to express themselves and feel like they are part of a community.

2 Continue raising **awareness and strengthening the capacities of parents**. This not only encourages the active participation of adolescents and young people in these processes but also helps ensure consistent support from their families.

Adolescents and young people highlight:

3 **Encourage active communication** (“I hear you; you hear to me; we hear each other”). The ability to express ideas and feelings in a clear and respectful way allows for better understanding and collaboration among youth participants in SGBV prevention activities.

4 **Practice emotional regulation and collective care among participating adolescents and young people.** This includes recognizing moments of tension and being sensitive to the needs of the group, which contributes to creating a safe and supportive environment.

5 **Promote learning through experience and play.** Young people emphasized that meaningful learning goes beyond theory. By using playful tools and encouraging reflection on lived experiences, the process became both engaging and participatory—making learning not just effective, but also fun.

Sustaining and Scaling SGBV Prevention with and for Adolescents and Young People

1. **Implement context-specific methodologies grounded in an intersectional approach.** This allows for the recognition of and meaningful response to the diverse realities and needs of young people, taking into account factors such as gender, age, race, and social class, among others.
2. **Consider the previous experience and community base of the organization leading the process as essential.** This means having an implementing partner who understands factors such as the culture, economy, and social structures specific to each community.
3. **Engage the community and adults in the prevention of SGBV through intergenerational spaces for dialogue.** For adolescents and young people, this not only helps raise awareness among adults about their needs but also creates a supportive environment that encourages their active participation within their own community.
4. **Offer continuous training on SGBV prevention and response to adults in the community,** such as school principals and teachers, so that they are prepared to intervene if needed.
5. **Maintain safe spaces where young people can express themselves and share their experiences without fear of being judged.** This includes a confidential physical space and the creation of support networks that help them feel supported in their learning and transformation process to prevent SGBV.
6. **Continue co-creating thematic materials and tools with adolescents and young people to ensure the continuity of existing processes.** This not only enables other facilitators to replicate the experiences and lessons learned in different contexts but also ensures that the content and materials remain responsive to a changing reality.
7. **Use fun and dynamic methodologies instead of passive approaches.** This includes activities that continue to encourage active participation, helping to strengthen young people's interest and engagement.

Conclusions

This case study highlights the success of CEPAM-G's initiatives to prevent sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) through direct engagement with adolescents and young people, which were carried out in partnership with Equimundo and Fòs Feminista, thanks to the *Feminist Futures Free from Violence* project.



The effectiveness of this model is proven by the fact that 89% of youth who participated in CEPAM-G's prevention activities reported that they were better prepared to prevent, recognize, or respond to situations involving SGBV due to their engagement in these initiatives. This successful case also demonstrates that the active participation of youth in SGBV prevention not only enhances their individual skills and confidence but also contributes to transformation in broader community norms and practices. A central feature of CEPAM-G's approach to meaningfully engage young people in preventing SGBV is its peer-to-peer methodology, which has been particularly effective in building support networks for youth rooted in mutual care, shared responsibility, and critical self-reflection.

Additionally, by embracing a playful, participatory, and intersectional approach, the CEPAM-G's SGBV prevention approach has empowered young people to challenge systemic forms of oppression such as racism, adult-centrism, and heteronormativity. At the same time, it has equipped them with tools to make informed decisions about their bodies and life trajectories, including a future free from violence.

These outcomes reinforce the importance of recognizing adolescents and young people as central agents of change, whose meaningful participation is essential to advancing sustainable, transformative processes to prevent SGBV and collectively reframe of gender norms to be more equitable.