

**FAU
LAC**

SUSTAINING THOSE WHO PROTECT

Feminist voices and lessons on digital violence, care,
and funding in Latin America





About this work

This publication draws on the study Soluciones feministas para una vida libre de Violencias Basadas en Género Facilitadas por la Tecnología en América Latina, carried out by the Rede Transfeminista de Cuidados Digitais (Transfeminist Digital Care Network), in collaboration with FAU LAC.

Through a questionnaire and focus groups with activists from 12 Latin American countries, the research explored the experiences of women and gender and sexually diverse people facing gender-based violence in digital spaces, alongside the strategies movements are building and sustaining to respond. These conversations also brought a less visible dimension into focus: what it takes to support others through this violence, and what those doing this work need to sustain it over time.

In these pages, we bring those voices to the forefront. Their experiences show that care is a feminist practice and an essential condition for people and organizations responding to this violence to continue supporting others, organizing, and defending rights.

For the full analysis, including its conceptual framework, regional overview, and the experiences of feminist helplines, read the [complete study here](#).

This publication was produced within the framework of the Alliance of Women's and Feminist Funds of Latin America and the Caribbean, through the "Nuestras Redes Funcionan" ("Our Networks Work") initiative, part of the Digital Democracy Initiative (DDI).

A woman human rights defender thinks twice before posting. An organization fears losing the account where it has spent years building its community. An activist begins participating less in public spaces, knowing that every time they speak, they may face new attacks. Meanwhile, those supporting people through digital violence face another question: how can they keep supporting others without burning out themselves?

These experiences reflect something feminist and digital rights movements in Latin America have known for years. Those who perpetrate gender-based violence also use technology to wear down, control, and silence women and gender and sexually diverse people, especially when they speak out, organize, and defend rights. These attacks have tangible consequences for their ability to participate, organize, and remain active in public life.





Across the region, feminist and LGBTIQ+ networks have developed ways to support people facing this violence. They help assess risks, recover accounts, protect information, and navigate reporting processes. They also offer emotional support to people experiencing violence. This work enables many people to keep participating and defending rights, but it also takes time, knowledge, resources, and care for those who make it possible.

The voices shared in these pages bring this dimension of the response into focus. **Sustaining feminist responses to digital violence also means sustaining those who provide care and support, and ensuring they have the conditions and resources to continue doing so over time.**

“I always think twice before posting”

Technology is part of movements’ everyday work. Digital spaces are where they organize, mobilize, speak out against injustice, build community, and bring visibility to struggles that have long received little attention in other media. Those seeking to silence these voices also understand how much these spaces matter.

Attacks may come from strangers coordinating harassment and smear campaigns, groups using mass reporting to try to shut down feminist accounts, or partners and former partners monitoring devices and accessing passwords. Misogyny intersects with racism, transphobia, lesbophobia, and other forms of discrimination, and the impacts reach into people’s lives both online and offline.

When an activist steps back from participating, an organization avoids addressing an issue, or a woman defender leaves a space to protect herself from exhaustion, the impact reaches far beyond an account or a screen. These attacks weaken relationships, make collective organizing harder, and limit participation in public debate. Some participants even spoke of closing their social media accounts, leaving activism, or leaving their countries. Being able to remain in these spaces is a matter of protection, security, and care.

“It affects my emotional well-being because the attacks or hostile messages cause anxiety, insomnia, and worry. It also changes how I participate on social media: I’m more careful about what I say, I limit my public exposure, and sometimes I stop taking part in debates to avoid being attacked.”

Another participant described very directly how this violence changes their participation:

“I censor myself: I always think twice before posting something or taking part in public events that will be streamed online.”

Within organizations, fear of attacks can also shape collective decisions:

“The main impact is fear and being silenced. We’re afraid of losing the organization’s account, all the work we’ve done, and the community we sustain. It’s our main way of staying in dialogue with people. That makes us rethink what we do and don’t post.”

When institutions fail, feminist networks sustain us

Someone facing digital violence may need much more than a button to report content. They may need to understand what is happening and how much risk they face, recover an account, preserve evidence without exposing themselves to further harm, decide whether to report the violence, find legal support, secure their device, or talk to someone who will listen without judgment.

Yet governments and technology companies continue to leave major gaps in these responses. Among participants who reported the violence they had experienced, 80.95% said their report did not lead to a positive outcome, and 95.24% considered the response they received unsatisfactory.

A participant from Bolivia explained what this means in practice:

“Here, we don’t have a public policy requiring institutions that respond to violence, especially gender-based violence, to address digital violence. [...] That makes it much harder to report it, receive support, have it investigated, or even obtain redress.”

A participant from Colombia described a similar difficulty:

“If you go to the prosecutor’s office to report it, they won’t treat your case as gender-based digital violence.”



Faced with these gaps, movements have developed their own responses. Across the region, feminist organizations and networks combine emotional support, technical knowledge, risk assessment, guidance on documenting attacks, account recovery, and, where possible, legal support.

[Maria d'Ajuda](#) in Brazil, [Navegando Libres por la Red](#) in Ecuador and other countries in the region, and [Centro S.O.S. Digital](#) in Bolivia are three examples. Although their approaches differ, they share a commitment to centering each person and their decisions throughout the support process.

These experiences draw on knowledge that movements have built over many years. Among other things, they show that recovering an account or a password may resolve an urgent need, but the response does not end there. Being able to decide what to do next, and feeling supported through that process, matters too.



There is a person behind every response

Behind every helpline are people who listen to accounts of threats, review screenshots, assess risks, help recover accounts, and support others through difficult decisions. This work calls for technical knowledge and political understanding. It also takes time and carries a heavy emotional burden.

Those providing this support may themselves face threats and attacks, while also living with the daily effects of repeated exposure to violence. One participant described how this strain is felt in the body:

“When we defend life, when we defend rights [...] it ends up affecting our bodies emotionally or mentally, but it also shows up as physical pain.”

Another participant spoke about the practical barriers to accessing mental health care. In their context, they explained, a therapy session can cost between USD 20 and USD 50, and a psychiatric consultation around USD 100, while waiting lists in the public health system are very long. The conversations also highlighted basic working conditions needed to make this work sustainable:

“It would make a huge difference in helping people working on helplines avoid exhaustion if they had, say, paid leave, access to health insurance, and contributions [...] to pension funds they could draw on when they’re older.”



Paid leave, health insurance, pensions, therapy, and time to rest are all part of the material conditions that make care possible.

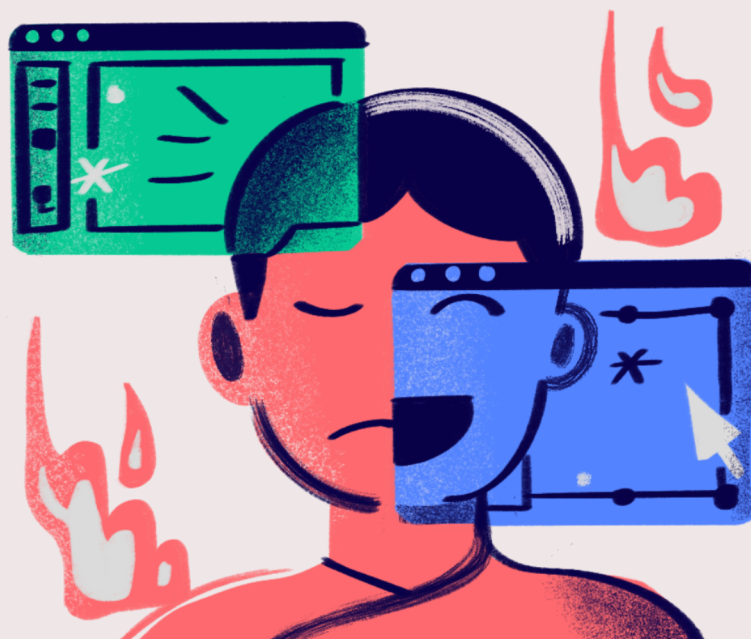
When we fund a project without funding the conditions needed by the people who make it happen, those costs do not disappear. People end up absorbing them through their time, their income, or their bodies. Sustaining these responses also depends on those providing support being able to sustain their own lives.

Care needs funding

Organizations supporting people through digital violence have developed concrete practices to share responsibility and care for their teams. Some rotate on-call shifts and agree on which situations require an urgent response. Others create spaces to process cases together, protect sensitive information, or develop protocols for responding when those providing support become targets themselves. They also document and share knowledge so that experience and responsibility do not rest with just a few people.

These practices show that care is part of the work and needs to be funded. This includes staff time and working conditions, as well as psychosocial support, rest, digital security, training, emergency response, and case follow-up.

How those resources reach people matters too. A threat can change quickly, and the people and organizations facing it know their context best and can decide what kind of response they need.





At FAU LAC, we have learned that feminist funding can respond to this reality when it is rapid, flexible, and grounded in trust. Through our rapid response grants, women defenders, activists, and organizations can decide how to use resources according to their needs and current circumstances. This may mean strengthening their physical or digital security, accessing psychosocial or medical care, sustaining collective care practices, or meeting other urgent needs that allow them to continue their work.

Flexibility means adapting how we move resources to the realities of movements, rather than asking movements to adapt their responses to our rules as funders. The Urgent Action Sister Funds emerged from a call by activists who needed a mechanism that could respond quickly to urgent threats and opportunities. This experience has shown us that speed, accessibility, autonomy, and trust are essential to funding: they shape which responses are possible when conditions change rapidly.

Funding care from this perspective means recognizing that those experiencing and responding to this violence have the knowledge to decide what they need to care for themselves, support others, and keep organizing.

Care is organized collectively, too

The experiences shared in this research show that organizations are already finding ways to care for themselves and share the work of supporting others, so that their responses do not depend on the exhaustion or extraordinary efforts of a few people. These practices include:

- Rotating on-call shifts and sharing workloads so that the same people are not always responsible for responding.
- Agreeing on what constitutes an emergency, scheduling breaks, and respecting the right to disconnect.
- Creating regular spaces to listen and process experiences together, addressing the emotional impact of cases.
- Ensuring access to therapy and other forms of care for those providing support.
- Establishing security protocols for situations in which those providing support also become targets of attacks.
- Protecting sensitive information and ensuring it can be accessed securely by the team members who need it.
- Documenting and sharing lessons so that knowledge is not concentrated in a few people, and continued support does not depend on them alone.

These practices show that collective care is woven into political work. It is part of how movements organize and create the conditions to keep going. Sustaining these practices requires time, resources, and working conditions that recognize their importance.

What this asks of us as movement funders

The experiences of those facing this violence and those supporting them also raise questions for feminist philanthropy. If we want to contribute to responses that can be sustained over time, funding must extend beyond a project's most visible activities to include the people and conditions that make those activities possible.

This means recognizing salaries, benefits, rest, psychosocial support, digital security, and team protection as legitimate parts of the work. It also requires resources that can arrive quickly and be used flexibly when risks change or needs emerge that were not anticipated in a work plan.

The resources to sustain this work exist, but they are not reaching the people doing it. In 2022, women's rights organizations, movements, and institutions received just 0.34% of total global aid flows, and only 1.2% of humanitarian funding went directly to local or national actors. The disparity becomes even clearer when compared with other actors: between 2013 and 2017, anti-gender movements received more than three times as much funding as the global LGBTQIA movement. The issue is where resources go: they exist, but are concentrated in funding mechanisms and actors that do not reach those sustaining care and support work.¹

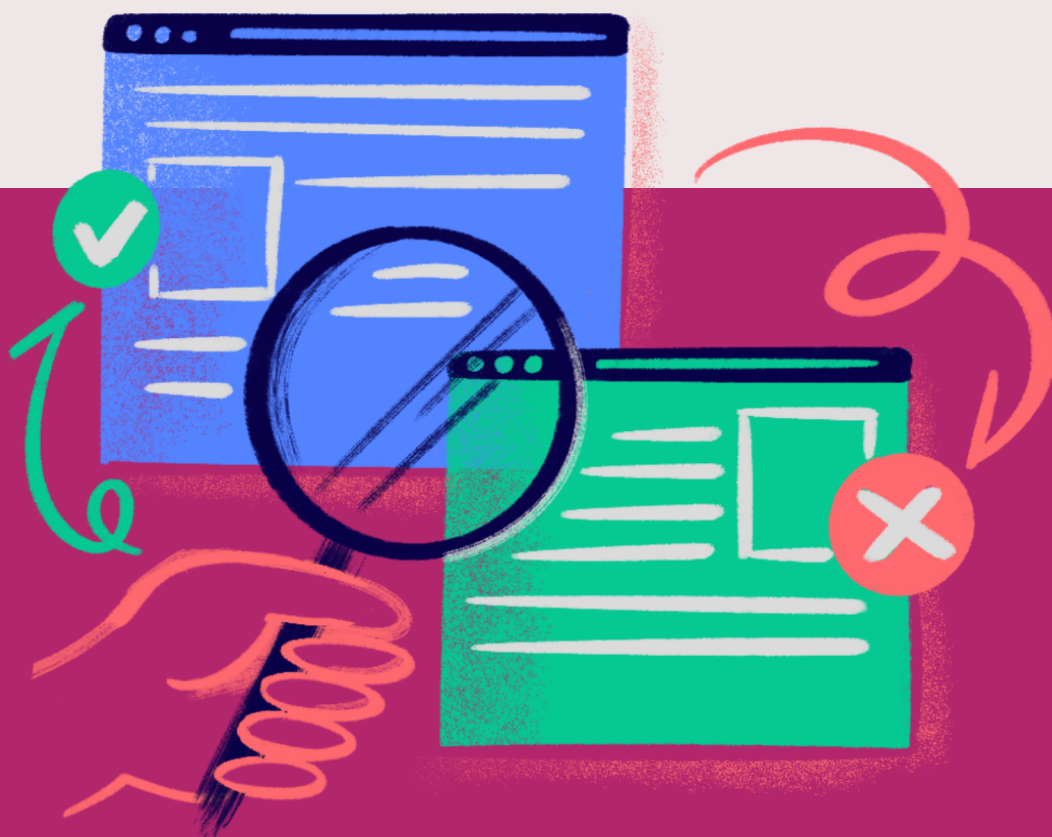
1. For more on how feminist funds mobilize and redistribute resources, see [Resourcing Strategies in an Era of Permacrisis: Critical Lessons from Feminist Philanthropy](#), by the [Urgent Action Sister Funds](#) and the Centre for Applied Human Rights (CAHR) at the University of York.



The Urgent Action Funds emerged precisely from the need to move resources swiftly to movements. They act as a bridge, reshaping funding from foreign aid and traditional philanthropy to make it accessible to those usually excluded from these channels. Between 2021 and 2024 alone, the [Sister Funds](#) mobilized around USD 55 million through more than 7,000 rapid response grants in 162 countries. This shows that resources can be directed toward care when speed, flexibility, and trust take priority over conventional procedures.

How we mobilize resources can also change how we understand sustainability and results. If we want organizations to continue supporting people over time, counting the cases they handle or the activities they carry out is not enough. It also matters that they can set limits on workloads, ensure their teams have time to rest, and dedicate time and resources to strengthening their security and care practices. Funding these conditions is part of sustaining the work.

Trust is at the heart of this approach to funding. The people and organizations facing this violence know their contexts, their communities, and the risks they navigate. Our role as a fund can be to put more resources and decision-making power in their hands, without replacing their knowledge with our own priorities or procedures.





Sustaining those who protect

Governments are responsible for providing effective pathways to support, investigation, and redress. Technology companies make decisions about platform design, moderation systems, and reporting mechanisms, and must be held accountable for how those decisions affect people's lives and safety. As we demand these changes, feminist movements are already building responses. They support people facing attacks, help assess risks and recover accounts, develop tools, and share knowledge so that women and gender and sexually diverse people can continue speaking out, organizing, and claiming space in public life.

Those of us who fund movements also have a role in sustaining these responses. We can provide resources that recognize the work and time involved, cover rest, psychosocial support, and security, and arrive with the speed and flexibility needed to respond to changing contexts. Above all, we can trust those closest to their communities to decide how to use these resources. Caring for those who care helps activists keep participating, women defenders keep speaking out, and collectives keep organizing. It also enables those supporting others to continue without jeopardizing their own ability to keep going.

Sustaining these conditions also sustains movements that can keep building digital spaces where women and gender and sexually diverse people can participate with freedom and dignity.

At FAU LAC, we work to put more resources into the hands of those sustaining these responses. Learn about our [Rapid Response Grants](#), share this publication, and join us in building an approach to funding movements that centers trust, flexibility, and care.

To get in touch, write to info@faulac.org.



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Fondo de Acción Urgente para
América Latina y el Caribe