

# Case study

## EXPLORING CLIENT APPROACHES TO GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

CLIENT:

Energia del Pacifico - Acajutla LNG project

Energy, **EL SALVADOR**

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



Pictured: Natalie Labrador  
Employee, Invenergy

## Policy Overview

# El Salvador



**Economy name:**  
Republic of El Salvador

**Main business city:**  
San Salvador

**Region:**  
Latin America &  
Caribbean

**Income level:**  
Lower middle income

**Population (2020):**  
6,486,201

**Female population:**  
3,449,777 (53.2%)

**Labor force participation rate:**  
45.4% female  
75.7% male

**Proportion of wage and salaried workers:**  
52.6% female  
66.8% male

**Proportion of self-employed workers:**  
47.4% female  
33.2% male



### Global rankings

Women, Business and the Law Indicator*	88.8/100
Gender Inequality Index†	85/162
Global Gender Gap Index‡	59/146
Latin America and Caribbean Gender Gap Index‡	10/26
Wage equality‡	136/156
Economic participation and opportunity‡	106/156

In 2020, El Salvador was one of only 14 countries in the world where at least 50 percent of government ministers were female<sup>¶</sup>



### Women, Business and the Law\*

Can a woman get a job in the same way as a man?	Yes
Does the law prohibit discrimination in employment based on gender?	Yes
Is there legislation on sexual harassment in employment?	Yes
Are there criminal penalties for sexual harassment in employment?	Yes
Are there civil remedies for sexual harassment in employment?	No
Is there legislation specifically addressing domestic violence?	Yes



### Gender-based violence (GBV)<sup>§</sup>

Prevalence of lifetime domestic violence	14.3%
Prevalence of child marriage	25.5%

Unless otherwise indicated, all data for this overview were taken from WBG, *World Development Indicators*:

*Labor force participation rate, female (% of female population ages 15+) (modeled ILO estimate), (2019)*

*Labor force participation rate, male (% of male population ages 15+) (modeled ILO estimate), (2019)*

*Wage and salaried workers, female (% of female employment) (modeled ILO estimate), (2019)*

*Wage and salaried workers, male (% of male employment) (modeled ILO estimate), (2019)*

*Self-employed, female (% of female employment) (modeled ILO estimate), (2019)*

*Self-employed, male (% of male employment) (modeled ILO estimate), (2019)*

\* WBG, *Women, Business and the Law Indicator* (2021)

† UNDP, *Gender Inequality Index* (2019)

‡ WEF, *Global Gender Gap Report* (2022)

§ UN Women, *Global Database on Violence Against Women* (accessed on August 27, 2021)

¶ See: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/latinamerica/progress-without-women-not-possible>

## Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

# El Salvador

### PREVALENCE<sup>1,2,3</sup>

70

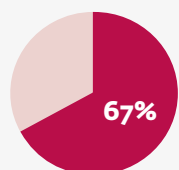
Cases of violence against women reported per day (2019)

230

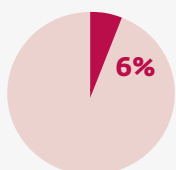
Annual femicides registered (2019)

1,218

Women reported missing annually (2019)



Percent of women who have experienced violence in their lifetime (2017)



Percent of women who have reported an incident of violence (2017)

#### Women's experiences of reporting to police (2017)



### SERVICES

Some progress has been made to ensure women who suffer violence have improved access to services.

- In 2011, the national government promoted a program named *Ciudad Mujer* (Women's City) through the Secretariat for Social Inclusion. The program has helped build six headquarters throughout the country that provide women with access to sexual and reproductive healthcare, comprehensive care in cases of GBV, and economic empowerment opportunities.<sup>4</sup>
- In response to the government imposed lockdowns at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, a collective of local women's organizations created a hotline offering psychological and legal support.<sup>5</sup>
- The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) is working with the government of El Salvador to provide protection, emergency shelter, livelihoods support, and other assistance to vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers, including GBV survivors.<sup>6</sup>
- Oxfam has led a "Program to Prevent Gender Violence" in El Salvador since 2005 to target GBV in public and private spheres.<sup>7</sup>
- The International Rescue Committee (IRC) has developed an app called *CuéntaNos* (Tell Us!) through which users can access information about service providers of health, education, and GBV protection.<sup>8</sup>



### LEGAL CONTEXT

In March 2011, the General Assembly approved the Law of Equality, Fairness, and the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women – a suite of regulations that aim to improve the judicial framework for the protection of women's rights.

In 2012, a Special Comprehensive Law for a Violence-Free Life for Women was adopted, guaranteeing respectful treatment, protection from the aggressor, and access to support services to any woman who experiences violence.

In 2012, the Attorney General also approved a "Protocol for Investigating Gender-Related Deaths: Femicide" that was created in partnership with the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).



### CULTURAL CONTEXT

A deep-rooted culture of male privilege continues to affect the rights and safety of women and girls in the country. Widespread acceptance of a *machismo* (masculinity) that emphasizes the control of women means that many people do not see GBV as a major problem.<sup>9</sup>

Across the country, it is estimated that up to 60,000 people are members of gangs, whose actions often perpetuate toxic masculinity and normalize violence against women.<sup>3</sup>

In 2018, the United Nations reported that the official femicide rate in El Salvador was one of the world's highest, with an average of 13.49 deaths per 100,000.<sup>4</sup>

In a landmark case in January 2021, Mario Huevo was convicted of femicide and given the maximum sentence of 50 years for killing his girlfriend Karla Turcio. Generally, however, conviction rates for gender-based crimes remain extremely low.<sup>5</sup>

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### PROJECT BACKGROUND

Located in Sonsonate, the Acajutla liquid natural gas (LNG) project involves the construction and operation of a 378-megawatt thermal power plant at the port. Construction began in early 2020 and is expected to be finished in 2022. A floating storage regasification unit will be permanently moored at the marine terminal. A natural gas pipeline will run from this storage unit to the power plant. The power plant will be connected to El Salvador's electrical grid through the construction of a 44 km, 230 kV transmission line and related substations. On completion, the project will contribute approximately 30 percent of the country's total energy demand.

Energia del Pacífico (EDP) is responsible for the construction and operation of the LNG facilities. As of 2021, the project had attracted around \$1 billion of foreign investment, including from the International Finance Corporation (IFC). Invenergy – a global developer and operator of sustainable energy solutions based in the United States – is the majority shareholder of EDP. This parent company has led the development of the project with El Salvador based partners.

Progress of the project was impacted by the declaration of the COVID-19 global pandemic in March 2020. In response, EDP adopted and implemented its Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan for COVID-19 following national legislation.



**“Energia del Pacífico (EDP) is the largest private investment in the history of El Salvador. This is a transformational project for the country and its population that will help diversify the country’s energy matrix. It will significantly reduce the nation’s carbon footprint, help reduce dependency on heavy fuel oil, and reinforce the stability of the national electric grid. At Invenergy, we feel proud to be part of this important state-of-the-art project.”**

**Alberto Osorio Liebana, Project Director,  
Energia del Pacífico**



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### HOW EDP WORKS TO PREVENT GBV

For EDP, 2020 was a year focusing on implementation of a framework for the prevention of GBV:

- Code of Conduct
- GBV Risk Management Plan
- Training
- Internal grievance mechanism

IFC Environmental and Social (E&S) Specialists assisted EDP with the implementation process to promote alignment with the [IFC Performance Standards](#).

#### Code of Conduct

Consistent with good industry practice and IFC's Performance Standard 2, the Code outlines the company's commitments:

- To prevent and respond to acts of GBV.
- To protect employees from workplace violence and harassment.
- To comply with all aspects of El Salvador's Special Integral Law for a Life Free of Violence for Women.

The Code defines discrimination as any behavior that shows hostility towards a person based on a range of identity characteristics, including sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Sexual harassment is defined as "unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, which makes a person feel offended, humiliated and / or intimidated". Specific behaviors include sexual innuendos, the displaying of suggestive images, obscene gestures, and unwanted physical contact.

The company promotes a "lead by example" and "learn from mistakes" approach. When in doubt about whether a particular action is ethical or respectful, or not, workers are encouraged to consider if the action is something they would be proud to tell others they have done and if it is an action that sets a good example for others. The company views mutual respect as important in helping build a comfortable work environment.

The Code applies to all employees and contractors, including managers and executives. It covers how employees are expected to behave in the workplace, including on business trips and during social events, and in communities.

Employees are encouraged to report any breaches of the Code to their line manager and / or the HR manager, or through one of the anonymous reporting channels. In response to a report, senior personnel are asked to ensure they clarify the concerns of reporting employees and consult with them before taking actions. The Code provides assurances of non-retaliation and confidentiality for filing grievances.



**"EDP is committed to raising awareness among men and women working in the project about gender-based violence prevention. We are convinced that education is the only way to stop violence. Our programs have been designed to go beyond the project, reaching out to homes and into communities, sharing information so that children, teenagers, and adults can recognize the signs of violence and stop incidents on time."**

**Mónica Flores, Human Resources Manager,  
Energía del Pacífico**

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### Gender-based violence risk management plan

EDP's GBV Risk Management Plan outlines the company's commitments to prevent and respond to all acts of gender-based violence. In creating this plan, the EDP team worked closely with IFC's E&S Specialists and independent consultants, and were guided by the following key component of IFC's Performance Standards:

**Gender-differentiated impacts should be assessed and the risks and impacts identification process should propose measures designed to ensure that one gender is not disadvantaged relative to the other in the context of the project.**

**IFC Performance Standard 1, Guidance Note 50, 2012**

Implementation of the Plan is monitored using two key performance indicators:

- Number of workers who have completed GBV prevention training.
- Number of GBV cases registered and solved via the internal grievance mechanism.

### Commitments on training

#### Training delivery:

- All staff will receive GBV prevention training.
- New staff will receive this training in their first week of employment.

- Contractors will ensure all workers receive the training within the first month of their contract.
- All existing staff are required to receive the training within one month of the training program being implemented.

#### Training content:

- Education on basic GBV concepts and principles.
- Discussion about GBV causes, contributing factors, and consequences.
- Introduction to relevant sections in EDP's policies and El Salvador's law.
- Information about how to report incidents.
- Information about possible sanctions and consequences for committing GBV.
- Contact details for local GBV support services.

The company acknowledges the sensitivity of GBV training and how important it is to get it right to ensure sense of emotional safety and learning for participants. The plan therefore also includes guidance on training logistics, such as how training participants should be seated, how the room should be organized, and the kinds of materials that should be used.

### Commitments on internal grievance mechanism

- All reports will be analyzed and addressed.
- Respect for confidentiality.
- Appropriate action will be taken to prevent retaliation or repeat behaviors.
- Managers and supervisors who knowingly tolerate GBV or fail to report incidents may face disciplinary actions, including termination of employment.



**"We want every woman working in the project to feel safe and supported, knowing that we have zero tolerance for gender-based violence. No women should suffer any kind of violence or harassment in our work environment. We are here to watch over our workers' rights and to protect women from any type of violence."**

**Mario Ayala, Director of Legal Affairs,  
Energia del Pacifico**

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### Training

EDP offers two types of training on GBV prevention.

The first module is targeted at all EDP staff and contractors. The objective of this training is to teach participants about the different types of GBV, the national legislation dealing with violence against women, and the company's policies and grievance mechanism. In response to the COVID-19 situation, EDP adopted a virtual delivery model. In 2020, a total of 284 workers were trained through the virtual platform. In 2021, EDP engaged a gender expert from UNDP

to manage the in-person training targeted for supervisors. The training content was updated and the delivery format was changed. During the second quarter of this year, 390 employees received face-to-face training, which was found to be more effective.

The second module is targeted at field workers and supervisors, and focuses more on improving skills in identifying risks and addressing GBV grievances adequately. This training was delivered by the gender expert to 127 participants across multiple sessions in May, 2021.

### Internal Grievance Mechanism

Consistent with IFC's Performance Standard 2, 'Labor and Working Conditions', EDP's grievance mechanism has been built based on the principles of equal access, respect for confidentiality and anonymity, fair treatment, non-discrimination, and the right of victims not to report to authorities if they choose.

Any employee who is subjected to GBV is encouraged to ask the harasser to stop. If they feel uncomfortable doing so or if the harasser does not respond positively to this request, employees and contractors can submit a report through multiple channels – to a manager, to the HR Department, to a worker representative, or anonymously via email, telephone, or the grievance box. The worker is then referred to a special point of contact who has received training on how to handle GBV reports. Workers submitting a report can, if they wish, remain anonymous throughout the grievance process.

All grievances are recorded in an Internal Grievance Log using a code system to help protect confidentiality. This Log is maintained by the HR Department. Access to any information about a grievance is only shared within the company on a need-to-know basis.

EDP has adopted a 30-day timeframe for managing grievances, including three days to acknowledge the report and 15 days to conduct an investigation. Because reports of sexual harassment are considered to be highly sensitive, the response may be expedited. It may also need to involve multiple personnel to help with the resolution, and involve external parties such as medical personnel and the police.

EDP has plans to engage a third party to undertake an audit of their overall internal grievance mechanism on a quarterly basis. The audit assesses EDP's performance of grievance management by looking at percentage of grievances resolved, time taken to resolve grievances, communication of resolutions, and functioning of the reporting channels.



**"It was important for me to have access to a channel through which I could go and ask for help. As women, we seek to do our work in peace and have our rights respected. We want to be treated the same as men because that is both possible and fair. With the grievance mechanism and programs implemented by EDP, discrimination is avoided. It also gives us the confidence to talk about our problems, which can range from harassment to payment issues. I have felt supported and valued. I believe that with these mechanisms in place the rights of men and women are equally protected."**

**Olga Yamileth Sánchez, EDP project worker**

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### COMMUNITY AWARENESS

To commemorate the International Day of Elimination of Violence against Women in November 2020, EDP worked with UNDP and UN Women to stage a theater play named *Vecinas* (Neighbors). The play is set in a popular neighborhood of El Salvador and tells the story of women who are physically abused and humiliated. It was originally developed by Santiago Nogales in 2006 as part of the national project *Ciudad Mujer* (Women City) – an initiative of the then First Lady of El Salvador, Vanda Pignato, to help create a unified and consistent approach to supporting women who had suffered violence. It was replicated for the Acajutla project and was performed by a local professional theater group named *Moby Dick Teatro*.

The first performance took place at the Complejo Deportivo IVU y San Juan Maria Vianney in Acajutla. The audience comprised 60 people from EDP, contractors, subcontractors, and community leaders. After the performance, staff from UNDP and UN Women facilitated a [brief discussion](#) on GBV and provided the audience with some information about local organizations for women to contact if they experience any type of violence. The play was performed again for International Women's Day in March 2021.

In total, EDP has hosted the play five times – twice for EDP employees, contractors, and municipalities; and three times for communities in the project's areas of influence. Most of the community performances were arranged with support from the Acajutla Municipality's Women's Office, which has been working

with a number of national and international organizations to strengthen GBV prevention and the protection of GBV survivors in El Salvador. One performance was arranged at the request of a leader of the El Milagro community, where high rates of GBV and femicide were reported.

The Community Relations Team of EDP took the approach of liaising with leaders of the various communities to identify locations for the performances that were most accessible for the intended audiences. These locations included churches and outdoor spaces. The performances reached audiences from 15 different communities, with these audiences comprising 80% women and 20% men.

Community members who attended a performance of the play were also provided with a copy of a book – *La violencia estructural contra las mujeres por ser mujeres* (Structural violence against women, because they are women). This book explains inequalities against women, types of violence against women including domestic violence, and causes of this violence. The book was based on existing material created by [Equipo Maiz](#), a local company that specializes in publishing educational materials dealing with social issues. EDP adapted the content, which included replacing a lot of the text with drawings to help make the book accessible to a wider audience. In total, 1,500 copies of the book were printed for the project.





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"Our theater performance generates a direct dialogue with the audience. The stories that we tell provoke emotions that prevent the spectators from being indifferent to the reality of gender-based violence. We have seen how silently women approach the information booths that are there to help them. We have seen in the eyes of children who watch the performance the realization that violence should not be normal, should not be allowed, and cannot be ignored. On those days, we know that we have changed something. This gives meaning to my work, my profession, and my life."

- Rosario Ríos, actress who plays the role of Salvia in *Vecinas*

"There are harrowing truths that emerge for the people who have watched this performance. We have no doubt that it has given many people the courage to question their actions and to denounce violence. Our theater proves that it is possible to transform society. I am thrilled to be doing this work. We receive a lot of goodwill and I know we are trying to give a lot back. Thank you to Energía del Pacífico for this beautiful opportunity in my life."

- Mercy Flores, actress who plays the role of Cosima in *Vecinas*

"The existence of theater depends on its reception by the people. Art has to find a place in the collective imagination. That said, nothing can be more necessary than using theater to help eradicate violence against women."

- Santiago Nogales, Director and Playwright of *Vecinas*



Images from a 2020 production of *Vecinas* staged at the Complejo Deportivo IVU y San Juan María Vianney in Acajutla. In attendance were an audience comprised of 60 people from EDP, contractors, subcontractors, and community leaders.

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### ADDRESSING GENDER BARRIERS

#### Employment Opportunities for Women and Diversity

To encourage more employment of women, EDP's Local Hiring Plan provides for specific guidance on how to formulate job advertisements:

- Describe the requirements of the job instead of the type of person deemed to be suitable for the job.
- Be clear about work hours and flexible work arrangements.
- Review language and images to ensure representation of gender-diverse people.

To ensure equity throughout the recruitment process, the Plan also suggests a set of standards:

- Members of the selection team are to be provided with unconscious bias training.
- These members are also to be guided on how to avoid interview questions that may lead to gender bias (marital status, number of children etc.).
- There must be gender diversity within the selection team.

The company committed to review implementation of these standards every three months.

Before the Local Hiring Plan was implemented, EDP received some phone calls inquiring if women could apply to certain positions. While they had been encouraging women to apply, they still found they were not receiving a high number of applications from female candidates. The company therefore took further action to ensure job opportunities were being positively communicated as positions suitable for women and ensuring this information was reaching women in local communities.

In collaboration with the local municipalities and the Ministry of Labor, EDP's Community Relations Team ran a job fair to attract and recruit female candidates from neighboring communities. They advertised job opportunities on the local radio and conducted house-to-house visits to share information about available positions. These outreach activities proved successful. EDP received applications from women for a range of positions which were previously only attracting men – carpenters, welders, and electricians. At the peak of the construction in 2021, 150 women were working for the project.

To increase visibility of job opportunities for women, the HR Department strategically posted job advertisement in places where community members could see them. They took the initiative of using pictures of women working on site in these advertisements. The HR Department also worked with contractors to promote job opportunities and the hiring of women. This involved providing

### POLICY STATEMENT ON GENDER EQUALITY

**“EDP is committed to promoting gender equality and to ensure equality of opportunity and outcomes for all staff. All staff will be expected to use language and behavior that:**

- Promotes equal power relations between women and men
- Harmful gender stereotypes are avoided; and/or
- Promotes respect for women

**EDP will work to ensure all staff feel respected, safe, and valued in the workplace, and will take proactive measures to prevent and eliminate gender discrimination and provide equal opportunities for all staff.”**

**EDP has produced a video to encourage more women to apply for available positions.**



[Click this link](#) to open the video in YouTube.

support to identify how best to advertise available positions to women; and, after applications had been received, helping contractors analyze the pool of candidates and encouraging them to proceed with the employment of suitable female candidates.

In 2021, based on an assessment of the capacities of all employees by department heads, a total of 32 women received promotions across the contractor companies. These promotions were achieved in both administrative and technical roles, and many of them resulted in additional training and a salary increase for the female workers.

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### Enhanced Training for Women

To promote career development opportunities for their female employees, EDP has created a Diagnostic Tool that aims to identify what training topics are of interest to women. Through a range of questions about academic level, skills, areas of interest for further development, and types of trainings needed, the tool helps to understand how female workers can be supported through enhanced training, during the demobilization phase, to be successful in the job market post-project. EDP also plans to develop a database to connect women with other job opportunities in the future.

Women who joined the project as assistants to electricians and carpenters have been provided with training opportunities that enable them to explore further career development. Several female trainees were promoted to become electricians or carpenters. Contractors have also offered technical skills training for women who want to work as electricians or machine operators.

**Reina Francisca Valencia Villacorta started working in September 2020 with subcontractor DYMEL. Later that year, she accepted a new contract with PRINEL, where she now works as an electrician's assistant. She has completed vocational training in working at heights, working in confined spaces, occupational safety training, and basic electrical training.**

**“Since I started working on the EDP project, I have acquired a lot of knowledge from vocational training. Now, I can work in administrative areas and in the field in the areas of construction and electrical, which are areas that are typically only for men. When I started working on the project, I had a dream of building my own house, and I accomplished it! My training has motivated me to continue with my university studies. I am considering a career in Electrical Engineering or Business Administration because I am sure that I will have further opportunities if I get more knowledge.”**



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### **OTHER ACTIONS TO ADDRESS GBV AND PROMOTE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION**

EDP continues to look for creative ways to address GBV and to promote inclusion and diversity in the organization.

#### **Gender-Based Violence Field Workers Committee**

The company created this committee to help gather firsthand information from women who work in the field in a male-dominated industry. Its members include female supervisors and frontline workers from contractors and subcontractors, all of whom are being trained on how to recognize, prevent, and respond to GBV. These people act as focal points in the construction zones, to collect information from their peers through informal conversations, observations, and formal surveys. The committee meets weekly to report on any inappropriate behavior and to provide feedback to EDP management on how to address identified issues. One example of an action taken by EDP in response to this committee's work is the installation of suggestion/grievance boxes in the female washrooms.

#### **Survey on gender issues**

EDP recently ran a survey to help understand the experiences of female workers relating to gender discrimination and GBV in the workplace and in the community. The results have been tabulated and were shared with the Gender-Based Violence Field Workers Committee, who considers measures to reduce the risk of GBV, further promote gender inclusion, and strengthen a culture of respect within the organization.

#### **Adapting GBV training**

During the implementation of its GBV activities, EDP became aware of the need to make some modifications to maintain people's interest in and attention on GBV. They learned that traditional forms of training needed to be complemented by other initiatives that could reinforce knowledge on the topic. This is why they decided to include the theater performance, public discussions, and the book as part of their efforts to raise awareness about GBV and to promote a more open and comfortable debate about it.

#### **Exploring intersectionalities**

EDP plans to explore the issues of masculinity, sexuality, and gender with male employees in the project. They believe it is important for the men to understand the social and historical construction of gender, so they can fully appreciate the root causes of GBV, improve their awareness, and achieve changes in their perceptions and behaviors. The company believes this will also help the male workers become more involved in creating a workplace that is free of violence. They see diversity and inclusion as important in their efforts to address GBV. They are therefore also considering running workshops for children and adolescents in the community, with information on GBV that has been adapted to suit their ages.



**“EDP and the larger family of Invenergy companies are committed to a workplace free of harassment and retaliation. Such behaviors are unacceptable regardless of which individuals engage in them. We are proud of the company culture and the values that we are continuously promoting through the programs and trainings on gender-based violence that EDP has developed. We are proud that these programs fit into the larger expectations of IFC and EDP’s other key project stakeholders.”**

**Will Borders, Senior Vice President and Chief Compliance Officer,  
Invenergy**

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### ABOUT IFC

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