



Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response: **What Has Changed?**



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Benue State

Food Basket of the Nation

Benue Economy Status

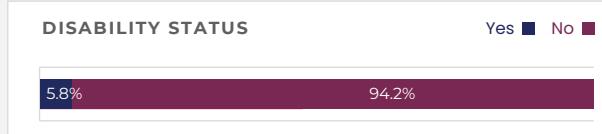
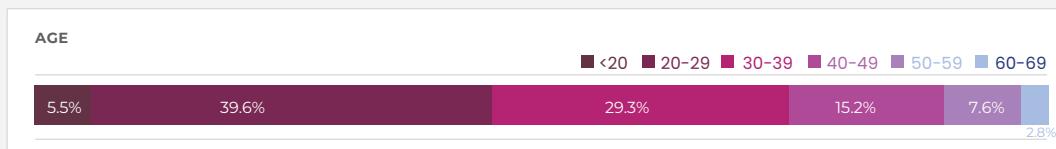
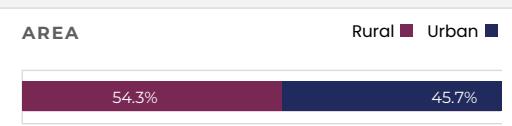
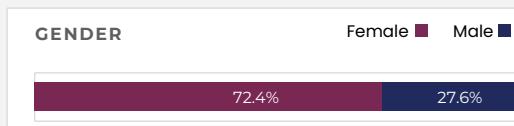
Benue State

Population: 7,299,277

50.6% Female 49.4% Male

Overall Grade 54.2%

Respondents Demography (n = 1,057)



Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development

BUDGET ALLOCATION

₦4.09bn

(This accounts for 0.7% of the total state budget)

BUDGET PERFORMANCE

₦586.28m

(This accounts for 14.3% of total allocation to the ministry)

14.3%

Capital ■ Personnel ■ Overhead ■ Others ■ (Actual spend)

18.4% 46.9% 17.5% 17.2%



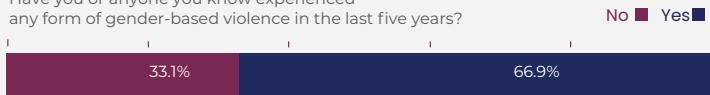
Per Capita Spending

₦158.86

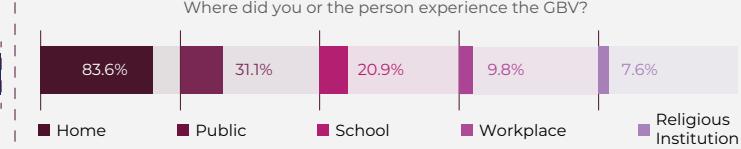
Indexes	Indicators				Total Grades
Laws and Policies	LP ₁	LP ₂	LP ₃	—	58.3%
Access to Legal Justice	ALJ ₁	ALJ ₂	ALJ ₃	ALJ ₄	62.5%
Support Services	SS ₁	SS ₂	SS ₃	SS ₄	62.5%
Information and Awareness	IA ₁	IA ₂	IA ₃	IA ₄	62.5%
Budget and Spending	BS ₁	BS ₂	BS ₃	—	25.0%

GBV Context 2025

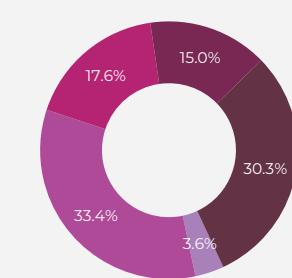
Have you or anyone you know experienced any form of gender-based violence in the last five years?



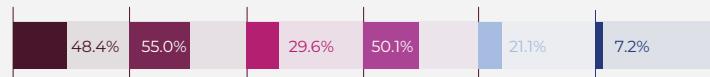
Where did you or the person experience the GBV?



Why did you or the person choose where you sought help?



What form of GBV did you or the person experience?



Family/relatives

Police/law enforcement authority

Friends/neighbors

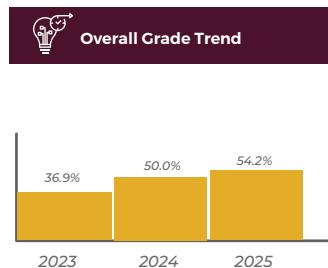
Traditional/community leader or group

Religious leader (Pastor, Ulama, Imam, Deity)

I did not seek help

Employer/Work colleague/Labour group

Lawyer



Index Grade Trend

Index	2023	2024	2025
Laws and Policies	LP 48.3%	LP 50.0%	LP 58.3%
Access to Legal Justice	ALJ 61.3%	ALJ 56.3%	ALJ 62.5%
Support Services	SS 25.0%	+1 ▲ SS 50.0%	SS 62.5%
Information and Awareness	IA 25.0%	+1 ▲ IA 56.3%	IA 62.5%
Budget and Spending	BS 25.0%	+1 ▲ BS 33.0%	-1 ▼ BS 25.0%

What Has Changed

Positive Developments

Benue established its first Sexual Assault Referral Centre in January 2025, providing one-stop medical, legal, and psycho-social support for survivors.

All police station now has a Gender Unit, and all government agencies have Gender Desk Officers to guide survivors.

The IOM Directory was launched in 2024, strengthening coordination among service providers through clear referral pathways.

Areas of Concern

Public awareness of GBV laws increased from 26% in 2023 to 45.6% in 2025, while trust in customary systems rose from 17% to 68.4%.

Knowledge of GBV convictions fell from 47.5% in 2024 to just 24.3% in 2025.

Awareness of legal aid services declined from 47% in 2024 to 26% in 2025.

Public awareness of GBV information programs dropped from 53% in 2024 to 29.3% in 2025 after NGO-funded campaigns ended.

Willingness to testify in GBV cases fell from 75.6% in 2023 to 53% in 2025, with residents citing lack of witness protection as the primary concern.



Key Actions



Laws and Policies

- Benue State initiated a review of the VAPP law with assistance from Lawyers Alert NGO to create a legal framework for Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs).
- Amendments were proposed to remove consent signature requirements on forms and redefine rape ingredients, including recognition of marital rape.

Access to Legal Justice

- Gender Units were established in every police station across the state to receive and process GBV reports.
- Gender Desk Officers were appointed in all government agencies, including at IDP camps, to provide guidance and referral support to survivors seeking justice.

Support Services

- The state government established Benue's first Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) at the Benue State University Teaching Hospital in January 2025, providing medical, legal, and psycho-social support.
- The IOM Directory (Referral Pathway) was launched in 2024 through collaboration between the Ministry of Women Affairs and SEMA, mapping service providers and their contacts across all sectors.

Information and Awareness

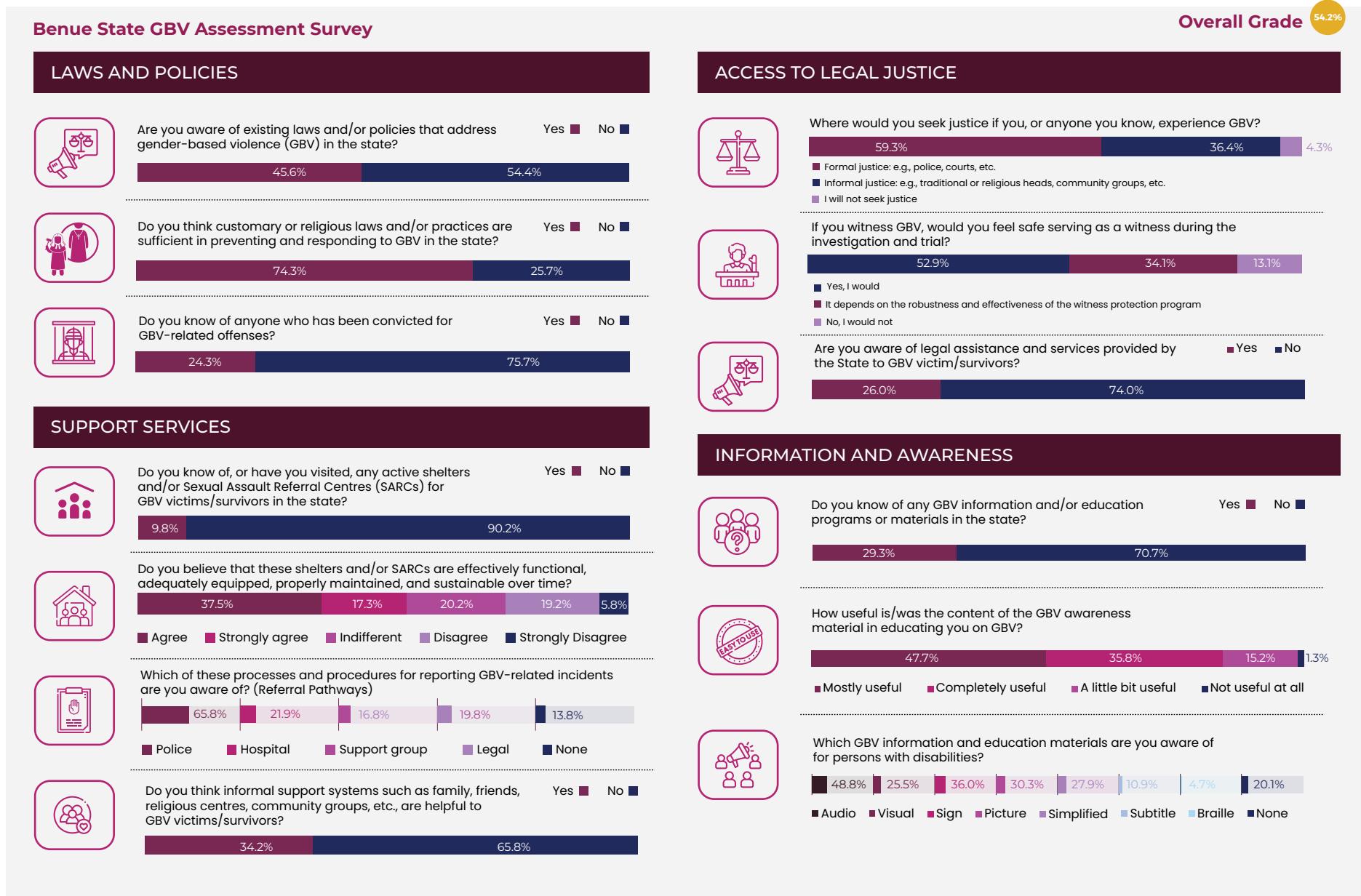
- The Side-by-Side Movement was established by Centre LSD, bringing together religious leaders, traditional rulers, and the Ministry of Justice for regular advocacy and sensitization sessions across communities.
- Structured engagements were organized with Wives of Local Government Chairmen to extend GBV awareness efforts across all local government areas.
- The Disability Bill was passed at the State House of Assembly in 2025 to guarantee inclusion of persons with disabilities in all GBV awareness and response efforts.

Change Spotlight

In 2024, the Ministry of Women Affairs, in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA), launched a GBV Referral Pathway Directory. This directory outlined civil society organizations and service providers, detailing their services and contact information. It was distributed to police stations, health facilities, NGOs, and community organizations to improve service coordination for GBV survivors.

Now, when a GBV case is reported, service providers can quickly connect survivors with appropriate support, such as medical care, legal aid, and counseling. Police refer cases directly to the SARC, and SEMA helps connect survivors in IDP camps to necessary services. This initiative has led to increased awareness of police reporting, rising from 44.8% in 2023 to 65.8% in 2025, and improved case follow-through. While there are still gaps in public awareness of healthcare and legal options, the directory has created a more efficient GBV response system, ensuring survivors receive timely support.





Benue State GBV Context Trend (2024-2025)

Overall Grade 54.2%

Have you or anyone you know experienced any form of gender-based violence in the last five years?



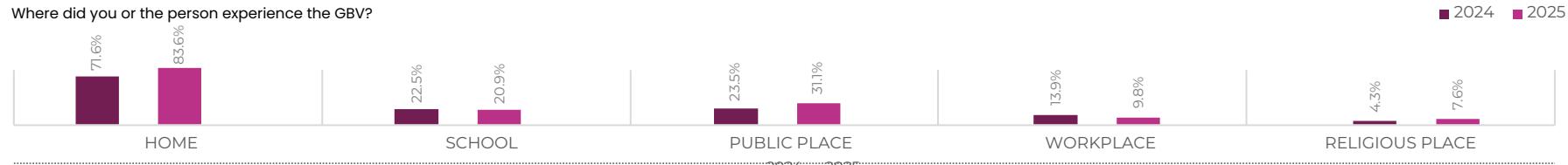
66.9%

of Benue State population have either experienced GBV or knows someone who have experienced GBV

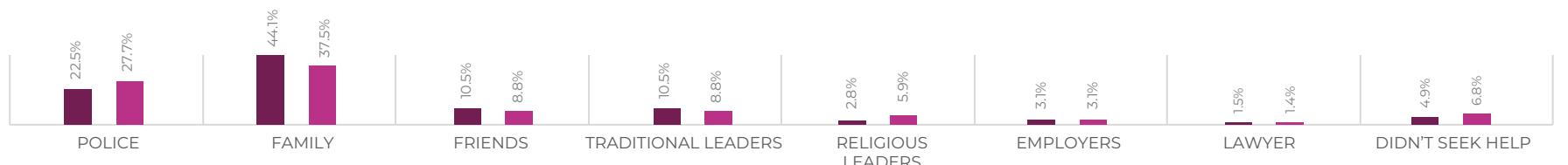
What form of GBV did you or the person experience?



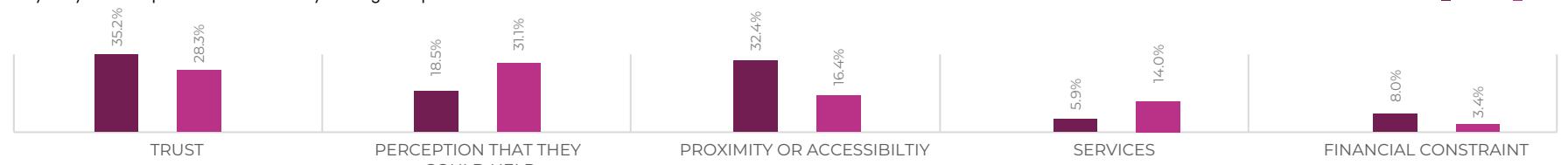
Where did you or the person experience the GBV?



Where did you or the person first seek help?

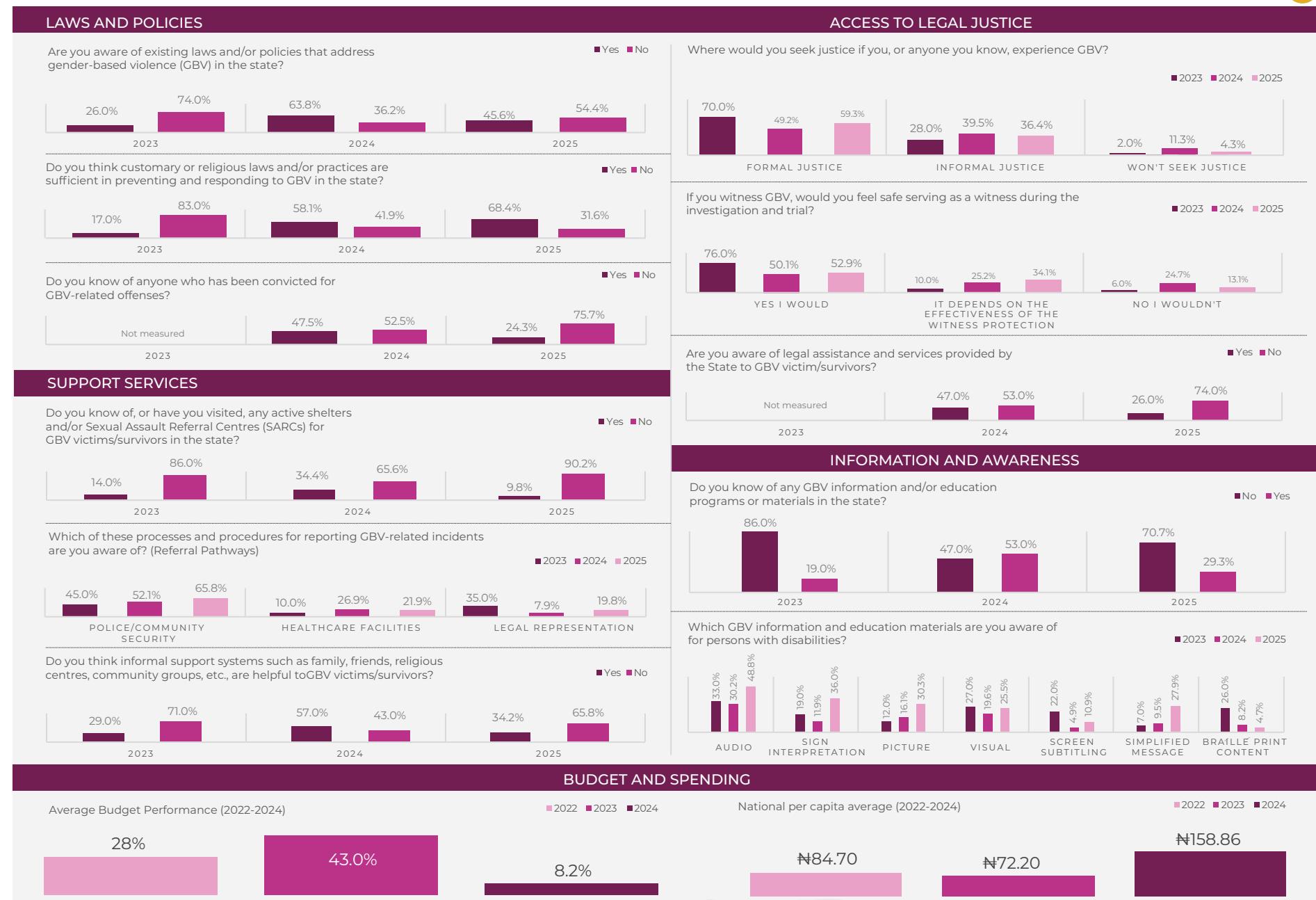


Why did you or the person choose where you sought help?



State Data Trend (2023-2025)

Overall Grade 54.2%





KEY INSIGHTS

Laws and Policies

Current State in 2025

Benue State has domesticated the federal VAPP Act of 2015 with minimal changes. While stakeholders agree that the law is adequate, they highlight weak implementation as the main challenge. Efforts to improve public awareness have included strategic partnerships, such as the Side-by-Side Movement, which engages traditional and religious leaders to help spread key messages within communities. Despite these efforts, public awareness remains average: only 45.6% of residents know that GBV laws exist. This gap between stakeholder engagement and community-level awareness suggests that outreach efforts, though promising, are not yet reaching a wide audience or translating into broad public understanding.

Despite low awareness, most residents (67%) believe that the laws are effective. However, very few have seen them in action: only 24.3% of residents knew of any GBV-related conviction. Officials could not provide specific conviction figures and attributed the poor performance to a six-month judiciary strike followed by vacation, resulting in conviction rates "quite lower than the previous year."

Customary and religious systems are very influential in Benue State, with many residents (68.4%) viewing them as helpful for resolving GBV. But these systems can undermine formal justice. According to the Legal Aid Council, harmful norms such as spousal battery and child marriage are still socially accepted in many communities, though awareness is slowly improving. The Ministry of Justice highlighted the harmful practice of saa akough, where survivors are forced to marry their abusers. Religious teachings also create barriers, as some leaders discourage legal action to protect marriages, with doctrines like "Till Death Do Us Part" making it harder to pursue prosecution.

Changes Over Time (2023–2025)

Over the years, there was a significant increase in public awareness of formal laws addressing GBV, from 26% in 2023 to 64% in 2024, and further to 45.6% in 2025. During the same period, more residents began to see customary and religious systems as effective in addressing GBV, with support for these approaches rising from 17% to 58.1% and 68.4%, respectively. This shift suggests growing trust in informal mechanisms but also signals a weakening connection between the public and the formal justice system.

Further deepening this disconnect is the declining visibility of formal enforcement. In 2024, over half of residents (47.5%) knew someone convicted for GBV-related offenses, but by 2025, this dropped to just 24%. Stakeholders noted that conviction rates have remained consistently low over the years, with delays continuing to hinder progress. When people no longer see justice being served, they may turn instead to familiar community systems. While such systems may provide some support, they often lack the structure needed for accountability and long-term protection.

These trends raise concern that weakened enforcement and low visibility of legal outcomes are driving the public away from formal mechanisms, making it harder to implement GBV policies effectively. Officials acknowledged these challenges but emphasized that ongoing review processes including recommendations to remove consent signature requirements and redefine rape ingredients, signal commitment to strengthening the legal environment.

Access to Legal Justice

Current State in 2025

The GBV reporting and prosecution process in Benue State involves multiple actors, including the Ministry of Justice, law enforcement, civil society, and the Legal Aid Council. While coordination has improved, ensuring more cases now reach prosecution rather than ending with the police, enforcement challenges persist. Family interference, funding gaps, limited public awareness, and systemic delays such as the judiciary strike in 2025 continue to obstruct justice.

These weaknesses in the system affect public trust. While 59.3% of residents said they would seek help through the police or courts, 55.9% still believe traditional or community systems are more effective. This overlap suggests that public confidence in the formal justice system remains fragile, and that informal mechanisms still play a major role in how people respond to GBV.

Over half (52.9%) of residents said they were willing to testify in GBV cases, but many (34.1%) added that they would only do so if there was reliable witness protection. This reflects continued concerns about safety and fear of retaliation, which weaken participation in the justice process.

Awareness of legal aid services remains low, with only 26% of residents aware of such support. Combined with strong reliance on informal systems, this lack of information limits access to formal justice and reduces public confidence in institutional responses. The Legal Aid Council was originally supposed to operate in three senatorial zones with a zonal office in Katsina-Ala. However, due to past crises and government instructions, operations were pulled back and now only function from

Makurdi. Current efforts rely on letters and phone calls, which officials described as ineffective. They noted that while FIDA Benue follows up on survivor cases, the overall coverage has not expanded in the past year.

On a positive note, every police station now has a Gender Unit, and all government agencies have Gender Desk Officers who ensure victims know where to go for help, including at IDP camps. The state has also attempted to establish a Family Court, though this is still in progress, and plans exist to establish a Sexual Violence Unit, though funding constraints have prevented actualization despite completed architectural designations.

Changes Over Time (2023–2025)

Between 2023 and 2025, preference for formal justice systems declined from 70% in 2023 to 49% in 2024, before rising slightly to 59.3% in 2025, while preference for informal systems rose from 28% to 40% between 2023 and 2024, then dropped slightly to 36.4% in 2025. This shift points to declining trust in formal institutions and increased reliance on community-led mechanisms, especially where formal options seem less accessible or reliable. Confidence in participating as a witness also dropped, from 75.6% in 2023 to 50% in 2024 and 52.9% in 2025. An increasing number of residents now say their willingness depends on the availability of witness protection. This shows that strengthening protection measures could help rebuild trust and encourage more public cooperation.

Similarly, awareness of legal aid services fell from 47% in 2024 to 26% in 2025, suggesting weak institutional outreach. This decline coincides with the operational pullback of the Legal Aid Council from three senatorial zones to only Makurdi, significantly reducing physical presence and accessibility across local government areas. Without clear and consistent information, survivors may not know where to turn for help, making legal protections harder to access in practice.

Support Services

Current State in 2025

Benue State currently operates one SARC, located at the Benue State University Teaching Hospital. The centre only became operational in January 2025, and officials confirmed that the centre is not fully equipped and receives no direct funding from the state government, as there is no dedicated budget line for its operations. As a result, the facility relies entirely on support from international partners. The state government does not own any shelters. Instead, the Ministry of Women Affairs collaborates with two CSO-owned shelters in Makurdi: London Shelter and Second Voice Shelter at Nyiman. Plans exist to expand SARC services to all local government areas through Primary Healthcare Centres, but these have not materialized. All local government areas remain underserved.

Uneven service coverage, the absence of state-funded shelters, and low public awareness of available services further limit access to survivors. In 2025, only 9.8% of residents reported knowing about or visiting a SARC or shelter. Awareness of broader services such as medical, psychosocial, and legal support is slightly better at 31.6%. However, these services are mostly delivered by NGOs, not by the government.

Stakeholders reported a strengthened referral pathway following the launch of a formal directory

to improve coordination among service providers. While this structure supports referrals from police, NGOs, and IDP camps to SARCs, many survivors still struggle to navigate the system due to limited awareness. Knowledge of referral options beyond the police (65.8%) remains low: only 21.9% for hospitals, 19.8% for legal aid, and 16.8% for support groups. Community-based alternatives like suggestion boxes and lending groups provide informal entry points but cannot replace a clear, accessible formal system.

In the absence of accessible formal services, these gaps are currently being filled by informal support mechanisms such as family, friends, religious institutions, and community groups. Over one-third of residents (34.2%) believe these informal options are more effective than formal services, reinforcing the need to strengthen and publicize formal support options across the state.

Changes Over Time (2023–2025)

Public engagement with formal GBV support services such as shelters and SARCs remained low throughout the three-year period, with awareness and visitation falling from 14.3% in 2023 and 34% in 2024 to just 9.8% in 2025. This suggests declining visibility and possibly limited access to these services. During the same period, the perception that informal support systems are more effective than formal ones rose from 29% in 2023 to 57% in 2024, followed by a drop to 34.2% in 2025. This shift raises concerns about public confidence in formal care and highlights the urgent need to strengthen and promote professional support services.

Awareness of referral pathways showed some improvement overall, particularly for police reporting, which increased from 44.8% in 2023 to 52.1% in 2024 and further to 65.8% in 2025. This improvement aligns with officials' reports that every police station now has a Gender Unit, and that awareness campaigns have emphasized police as the primary reporting channel. However, knowledge of healthcare (21.9%) and legal (19.8%) referral options remained inconsistent and relatively low. These gaps suggest weak coordination in public education efforts and the need for more targeted communication across sectors.

Information and Awareness

Current State in 2025

The state educates the public through periodic stakeholder engagements, school sensitizations, and organized activities. IEC materials, billboards, and placards are shared during engagements and distributed to local government areas. Officials also use translations of GBV themes into local languages, sensitization in communities with cultural barriers, and interpersonal communication. However, no new GBV IEC materials were developed or distributed within the past year, limiting the robustness and currency of available information.

In 2025, only 29.3% of respondents reported knowing of any GBV information and awareness programs. Stakeholders confirmed the limited reach of existing efforts, noting that "More trainings, engagements, and continuous sensitization are needed until awareness reaches a broader audience and effectively closes knowledge gaps."

Public support for school-based GBV education is strong, with 95.4% of residents agreeing that

GBV and child sexual-abuse education should be taught at all levels. However, findings show a lack of standardized curriculum. GBV and child sexual abuse topics are introduced informally, mainly through school clubs rather than as part of the formal education system. Most school-based awareness efforts are led by NGOs, while the Ministry of Education provides access and limited oversight. Although these initiatives are effective in the short term, their sustainability is weak due to inconsistent funding and poor follow-up. Once NGO support ends, many school programs and clubs struggle to continue, reducing their long-term impact on students and school communities.

Stakeholders confirmed efforts to include persons with disabilities (PWDs) in GBV awareness activities through verbal communication, collaboration with disability groups, and the use of accessible formats such as audio, audio-visual, and pictorial materials. However, these efforts remain basic and lack consistent follow-up. While nearly half (48.8%) of residents were aware of audio or spoken content and 36% knew of sign language interpretation, fewer were aware of picture-based materials (30.3%). Awareness was lowest for screen-subtitled content (10.9%) and braille (4.7%), highlighting the need for more inclusive and diverse communication strategies. The recent passage of the Disability Bill by the State House of Assembly presents an opportunity to improve inclusion, but sustained engagement and clearer implementation strategies are needed to ensure PWDs can fully understand and benefit from awareness programs.

Changes Over Time (2023–2025)

Public awareness of GBV information and education programs in Benue State increased from 18.5% in 2023 to 53% in 2024 but then dropped to 29.3% in 2025. The decline in 2025 coincided with the end of several NGO-funded campaigns. Officials acknowledged this over-reliance on external support, noting that while such programs are effective in delivering messages, sustainability and follow-up remain major challenges. Without consistent funding, the impact of these initiatives tends to fade quickly.

To address this, stakeholders reported ongoing efforts to institutionalize awareness beyond donor project cycles. The establishment of the Side-by-Side Movement, which engages religious and traditional leaders, has created a more sustainable platform for continued sensitization. In addition, increased use of radio talk shows has improved community awareness, especially around harmful practices. However, without state budgetary commitment, the overall trend remains concerning, with public awareness heavily dependent on unpredictable external funding.

Budget and Spending

Budget Analysis 2024

Benue State did not have a specific GBV budget line in 2024, but ₦4.09 billion was allocated to the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Welfare, representing 1.26% of its total state budget. Of the allocated amount, only ₦586.28 million was actually spent, achieving an 8.2% performance rate. This means 91.8% of the budgeted resources remained unutilized by the end of the fiscal year. On a per capita basis, the ministry spent approximately ₦158.86 on GBV-related issues.

Changes Over Time (2022–2024)

Across the last three years of the Womanity Index, Benue State has consistently recorded no GBV-specific line items in its approved budgets for 2022, 2023, and 2024. Funding for the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Welfare has experienced significant fluctuation and decline. In 2022, the ministry received an allocation of ₦1.05 billion, with an actual budget performance of 28% (₦294.36 million). The allocation decreased to ₦600.19 million in 2023, with a performance of 43.1% (₦258.60 million). Although the allocation rose substantially to ₦4.09 billion in 2024, actual performance fell to a concerning 8.2% (₦586.27 million). Per capita spending on GBV-related issues was ₦158.86 in 2024, ₦72.20 in 2023, and ₦84.70 in 2022, with 2024 marking the highest figure in the three-year period. Although 2024 shows notable improvement, the fluctuations across the years indicate inconsistent prioritization.

Human Angle Stories

A young woman in Benue reported a case of abuse to the SARC but withdrew it two weeks later. Community leaders told her that if she exposed the matter, nobody would marry her. The official handling the case explained that this is common, as survivors are discouraged with remarks like "Who will marry you?" These pressures reflect how stigma and fear of social rejection override courage. Survivors who initially seek justice are pushed back into silence, leaving perpetrators unpunished and the cycle of abuse unbroken.

KEY GAPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

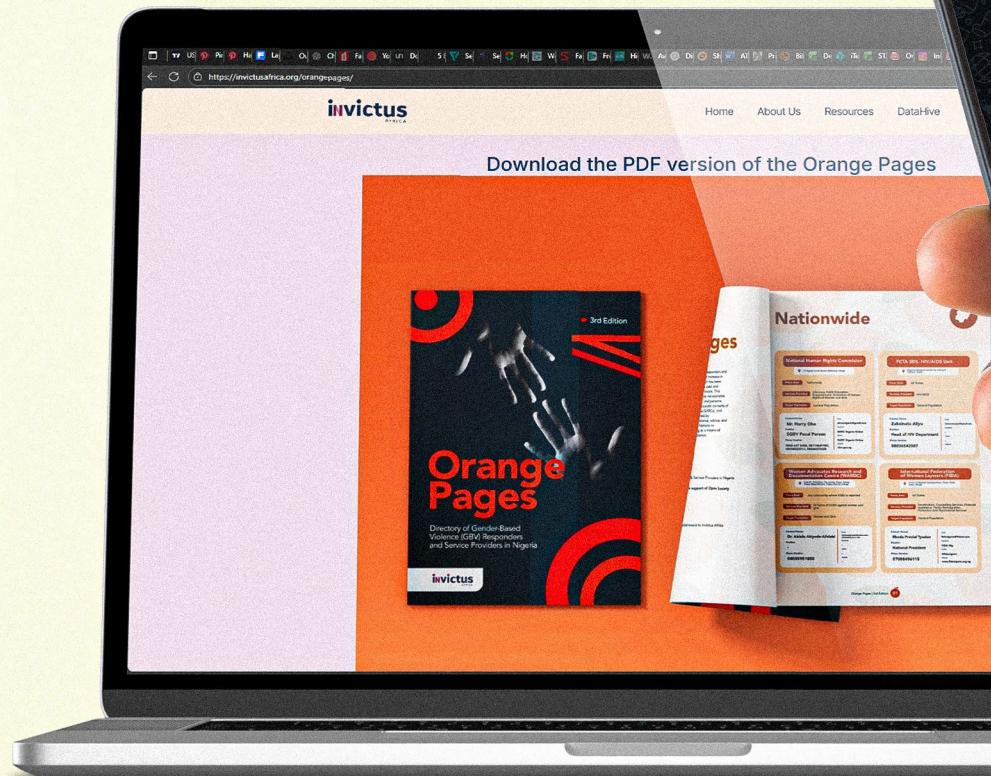
Index	Key Gaps	Recommendations
Laws and Policies	Public awareness of GBV laws increased from 26% in 2023 to 45.6% in 2025, while trust in customary and religious systems rose from 17% to 68.4%, indicating a weakening connection between the public and formal justice systems.	Launch a state-funded public awareness campaign that clarifies what the VAPP Act covers, how it protects survivors, and where to report cases. Use radio, community dialogues, social media, and local languages to reach a wide audience.
	Only 24.3% of residents know of any GBV-related conviction in 2025, down from 47.5% in 2024. Officials could not provide specific conviction figures, citing a six-month judiciary strike.	Establish a case tracking system to monitor GBV cases from reporting through conviction. Publish anonymized quarterly reports showing prosecution outcomes to increase public visibility of enforcement.
	Harmful customary practices such as <i>saa akough</i> (forcing survivors to marry perpetrators), child marriages and spousal battery persist despite increased sensitization.	Strengthen the Side-by-Side Movement by expanding training to more traditional and religious leaders across all local government areas. Develop clear community-level sanctions for harmful practices that contradict the VAPP Act.
Access to Legal Justice	Preference for formal justice systems declined from 70% in 2023 to 59.3% in 2025, while willingness to testify dropped from 75.6% to 53%, with many residents citing lack of witness protection as the primary concern.	Establish a formal witness protection program with clear protocols, safe houses, and legal guarantees. Publicize the program through radio, community meetings, and Gender Desk Officers to rebuild public confidence in testifying as witnesses.
	Awareness of legal aid services fell from 47% in 2024 to 26% in 2025. The Legal Aid Council pulled back operations from three senatorial zones to only Makurdi due to past crises, relying on ineffective letters and phone calls.	Restore Legal Aid Council operations to all three senatorial zones. Provide mobile legal aid clinics that visit local government areas on scheduled days. Partner with FIDA, Gender Desk Officers, and community leaders to identify and reach survivors.
	Every police station now has a Gender Unit, but funding for capacity building remains a core challenge. Family Courts are in progress but not yet operational, and the planned Sexual Violence Unit lacks funding despite completed architectural plans.	Allocate dedicated budget lines for capacity building of Gender Units and Gender Desk Officers. Fast-track the establishment of Family Courts and the Sexual Violence Unit by securing state or donor funding to operationalize existing infrastructure.
Support Services	Benue operates one SARC with no state funding and no state-owned shelters. All 23 local government areas remain underserved.	Create a dedicated state budget line for the SARC to cover operational costs and expand SARC services to at least three additional local government areas within the next year.
	Perception that informal support systems are more effective than formal services rose from 29% in 2023 to 34.2% in 2025. Over one-third of residents prefer informal options due to limited access to formal services.	Strengthen formal support services by establishing at least one state-owned shelter with trained staff. Deploy mobile support units that provide medical, psycho-social, and legal services in underserved local government areas on a rotating schedule.
	Knowledge of referral pathways beyond police is low: only 21.9% for hospitals, 19.8% for legal aid, and 16.8% for support groups. The IOM Directory was launched in 2024 to improve coordination, but awareness remains limited.	Distribute the IOM Directory widely through police stations, CSOs/NGOs, health facilities, schools, churches, mosques, and community centres. Train all frontline service providers (police, health workers, teachers) on referral pathways and ensure they can guide survivors effectively.
Information and Awareness	Public awareness of GBV information programs rose from 18.5% in 2023 to 53% in 2024 but dropped to 29.3% in 2025 after NGO-funded campaigns ended.	Allocate a dedicated annual budget for GBV awareness programs within the Ministry of Women Affairs. Develop a sustainable three-year awareness strategy that continues beyond donor project cycles, including consistent radio programming and community outreach.
	While 95.4% of residents support school-based GBV education, there is no state-developed curriculum. GBV topics are taught informally through NGO-led school clubs. Inadequate teacher capacity poses risks as some teachers may themselves be perpetrators.	Work with the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council to integrate comprehensive GBV and child sexual abuse education into the state curriculum. Train teachers specifically on GBV topics and establish safeguarding protocols to ensure educator accountability.
Budget and Spending	Benue State lacks a specific GBV budget line and demonstrates critically poor budget implementation, with only 8.2% of allocated GBV funds actually spent in 2024, despite the state's documented GBV challenges.	Establish a dedicated GBV budget line within the state budget and strengthen the financial management capacity of the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Welfare to improve fund absorption. This should include quarterly budget performance reviews and accountability mechanisms to ensure at least 70% implementation rate by the next budget cycle.



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