



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



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Cross River State

The People's Paradise

Agbokim Waterfall

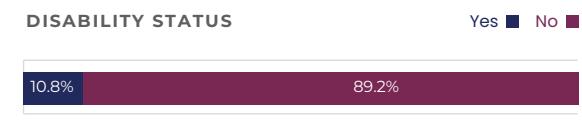
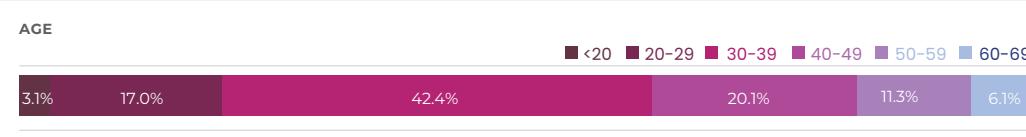
Cross River State

Population: 4,875,828

50.1% Female 49.9% Male

Overall Grade **68.8%**

Respondents Demography (n = 1,120)



Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development

BUDGET ALLOCATION

₦931.37m

(This accounts for 0.2% of the total state budget)

BUDGET PERFORMANCE

₦125.12m

(This accounts for 13.4% of total allocation to the ministry)

13.4%

Capital **Personnel** **Overhead**

22.8%	43.2%	33.8%
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Per Capita Spending

₦51.23

Total Grades
75.0%
81.3%
75.0%
62.5%
50.0%

Indexes

Laws and Policies

Access to Legal Justice

Support Services

Information and Awareness

Budget and Spending

Indicators

LP₁

LP₂

LP₃

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ALJ₁

ALJ₂

ALJ₃

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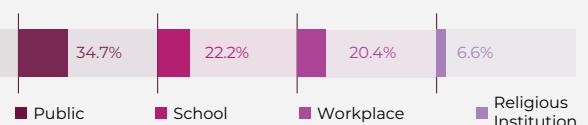
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GBV Context 2025

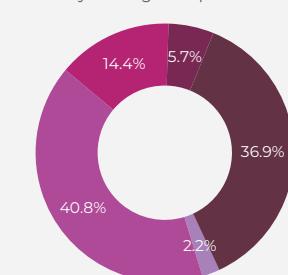
Have you or anyone you know experienced any form of gender-based violence in the last five years?



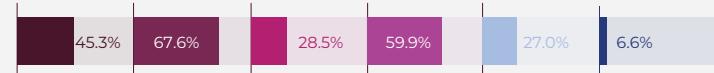
Where did you or the person experience the GBV?



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

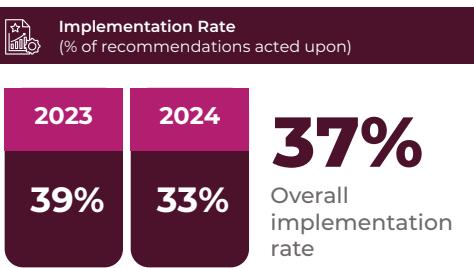
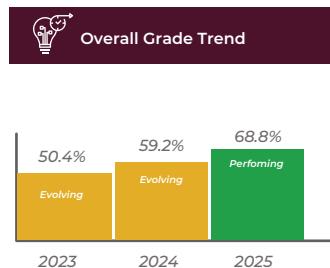
Traditional/community leader or group

Religious leader (Pastor, Ulama, Imam, Deity)

I did not seek help

Employer/Work colleague/Labour group

Lawyer



Index	2023	2024	2025
Laws and Policies	LP 75.0%	-1 ▼ LP 58.3%	+1 ▲ LP 75.0%
Access to Legal Justice	ALJ 25.0%	+2 ▲ ALJ 81.3%	ALJ 81.3%
Support Services	SS 61.3%	SS 56.3%	+1 ▲ SS 75.0%
Information and Awareness	IA 65.5%	IA 50.0%	IA 62.5%
Budget and Spending	BS 25.0%	+1 ▲ BS 50.0%	BS 50.0%



Key Actions



Laws and Policies

- Amended the Child Rights Law in 2023 to strengthen protections for children.
- Neighbourhood Care-Well Foundation simplified the VAPP Law for secondary schools and communities

Access to Legal Justice

- The Centre for Citizens' Rights was upgraded from a department within the Ministry of Justice to a standalone agency, expanding legal aid services to GBV survivors..
- Designated High Court 12 as an additional family court in 2024, bringing the total to three specialized courts.
- Expanded gender units to all 36 police stations and six area commands across the state, supported by UNICEF and NGOs with training on GBV case handling.

Support Services

- Expanded SARCs to include five run by Heartland Alliance (Calabar, Ugep, Ikom, Ogoja, Bakassi) and one One-Stop Centre at General Hospital Calabar supported by UNFPA.
- Created a GBV Technical Working Group led by the Ministry of Women Affairs, including state actors, NGOs, religious leaders, and traditional rulers

Information and Awareness

- Developed a curriculum on sexual violence in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, UNICEF, and Girls' Power Initiative.
- Established a Safe Schools Department within the Ministry of Education to ensure conducive school environments.
- Launched the "Orange Show" on HITfm as a weekly radio program to create GBV awareness.

Change Spotlight

Convictions for gender-based violence in Cross River State have risen significantly due to improved collaboration among justice actors and civil society. In 2025, the Family Court secured five to ten convictions, while the Legal Aid Council and Centre for Citizens' Rights also achieved notable results. The Police Gender Unit effectively tracked cases from initial reports to prosecution.

A major factor in this progress is the "escort referral system" led by civil society organizations, which assists survivors with transportation and case follow-up from hospitals to police and courts. This support has enabled survivors in remote areas, like Obanliku and Yala, to pursue justice effectively. A judiciary stakeholder emphasized that without NGO support, many cases would falter at the police station, but with their help, more cases are reaching conviction.



Cross River State GBV Assessment Survey

LAWS AND POLICIES



Are you aware of existing laws and/or policies that address gender-based violence (GBV) in the state?

Yes ■ No ■

33.3% 66.7%



Do you think customary or religious laws and/or practices are sufficient in preventing and responding to GBV in the state?

Yes ■ No ■

24.6% 75.4%



Do you know of anyone who has been convicted for GBV-related offenses?

Yes ■ No ■

13.3% 86.7%

SUPPORT SERVICES



Do you know of, or have you visited, any active shelters and/or Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) for GBV victims/survivors in the state?

Yes ■ No ■

11.2% 88.8%



Do you believe that these shelters and/or SARCs are effectively functional, adequately equipped, properly maintained, and sustainable over time?

Yes ■ No ■

61.1% 24.6% 7.9% 6.3% 0.0%

■ Agree ■ Strongly agree ■ Indifferent ■ Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree



Which of these processes and procedures for reporting GBV-related incidents are you aware of? (Referral Pathways)

Yes ■ No ■

54.9% 36.7% 10.8% 17.3% 36.3%

■ Police ■ Hospital ■ Support group ■ Legal ■ None



Do you think informal support systems such as family, friends, religious centres, community groups, etc., are helpful to GBV victims/survivors?

Yes ■ No ■

9.3% 90.7%

ACCESS TO LEGAL JUSTICE



Where would you seek justice if you, or anyone you know, experience GBV?

57.9% 39.2% 2.9%

■ Formal justice: e.g., police, courts, etc.
■ Informal justice: e.g., traditional or religious heads, community groups, etc.
■ I will not seek justice



If you witness GBV, would you feel safe serving as a witness during the investigation and trial?

42.8% 22.7% 34.6%

■ Yes, I would
■ It depends on the robustness and effectiveness of the witness protection program
■ No, I would not



Are you aware of legal assistance and services provided by the State to GBV victim/survivors?

■ Yes ■ No

17.1% 82.9%

INFORMATION AND AWARENESS



Do you know of any GBV information and/or education programs or materials in the state?

Yes ■ No ■

35.6% 64.4%



How useful is/was the content of the GBV awareness material in educating you on GBV?

Yes ■ No ■

30.3% 60.9% 8.8% 0.0%

■ Mostly useful ■ Completely useful ■ A little bit useful ■ Not useful at all



Which GBV information and education materials are you aware of for persons with disabilities?

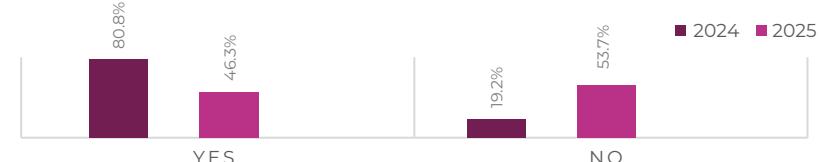
■ Audio ■ Visual ■ Sign ■ Picture ■ Simplified ■ Subtitle ■ Braille ■ None

35.3% 6.6% 32.9% 16.9% 4.6% 6.4% 4.9% 42.1%

Cross River State GBV Context Trend (2024-2025)

Overall Grade 68.8%

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



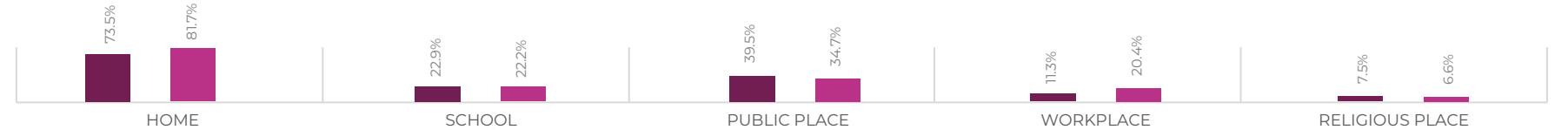
46.3%

of Cross River State population have either experienced GBV or knows someone who have experienced GBV

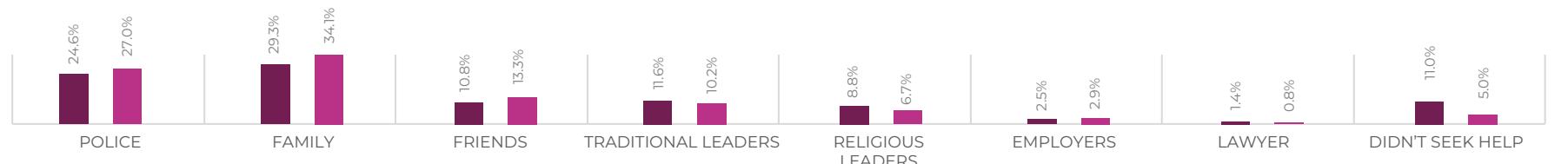
What form of GBV did you or the person experience?



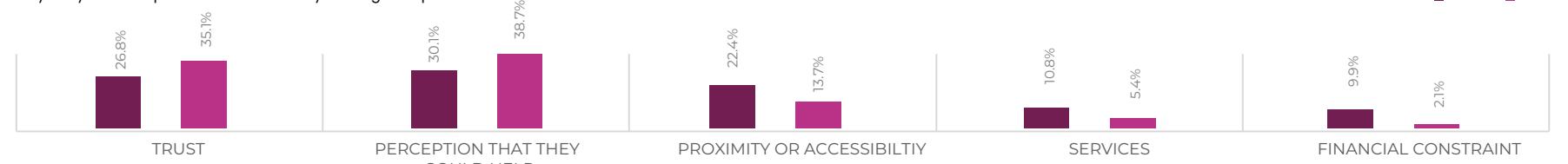
Where did you or the person experience the GBV?



Where did you or the person first seek help?

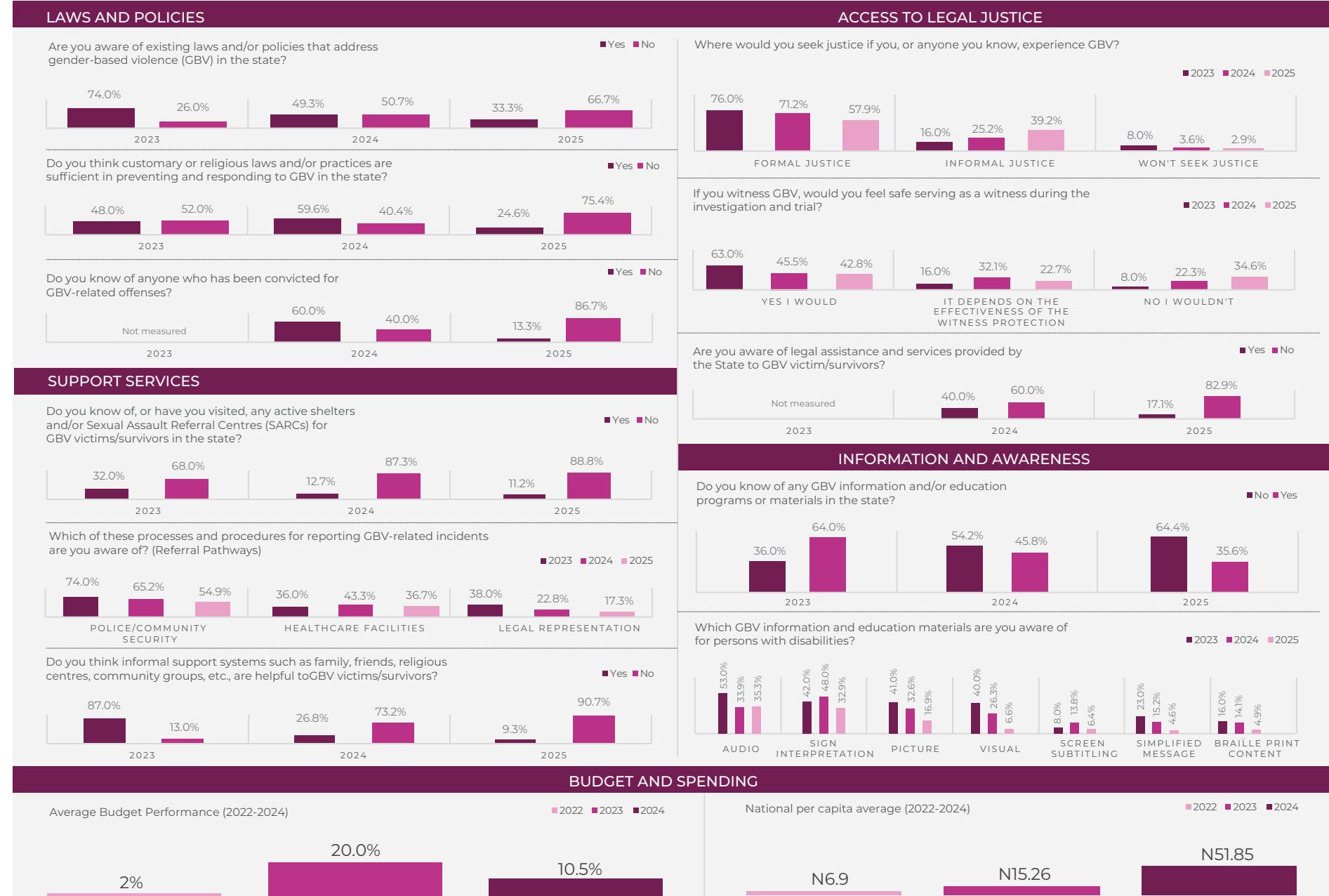


Why did you or the person choose where you sought help?



State Data Trend (2023-2025)

Overall Grade 68.8%





KEY INSIGHTS

Laws and Policies

Current State in 2025

Cross River State has adopted several laws to address GBV, including the VAPP Law, the Child Rights Law, and statutes on inheritance, widowhood practices, female genital mutilation, and child marriage. Together, these laws provide a strong legal foundation for GBV prevention and response. Recent updates, such as the provision for co-ownership of property in marriages contracted under native law and customs, and provisions against forceful eviction, reflect progress. However, important gaps remain, including weak penalties for rape and the lack of legal recognition for spousal rape.

Stakeholders note that while simplified versions of the laws exist, they are not easily accessible to most people. Only 33.3% of residents are familiar with GBV-related laws. This is especially true in rural areas, where language differences and cultural diversity make dissemination difficult.

In 2025, stakeholders from the judiciary reported between five and ten GBV convictions at the time of assessment, while civil society organizations documented eight convictions and 39 ongoing legal cases. Penalties ranged from life imprisonment to fines and, notably, for the first time, included compensation for victims. According to the Ministry of Justice, this marks a shift from previous years, signaling growing attention to survivor-centered justice. However, these enforcement outcomes are not well communicated to the public. Despite the progress, only 13.3% of residents were aware of any GBV-related convictions in the state. This gap in public awareness may weaken trust in the justice system and highlights the need for better visibility of legal outcomes to reinforce deterrence and accountability.

Customary and religious laws related to GBV are widely seen as ineffective. A significant majority of residents (75.4%) believe that these traditional systems do not adequately prevent or respond to GBV in the state. This perception persists despite ongoing sensitization efforts targeting traditional and religious leaders, including paralegal training and the formation of an interfaith coalition forum.

In many communities, traditional institutions continue to handle GBV cases informally, imposing customary fines such as goats, palm wine, or money, instead of referring cases to formal justice systems. While advocacy has led to notable progress, including a sharp decline in female genital mutilation, low-level practices such as child marriage and discreet FGM still occur in some areas.

These challenges indicate that enforcement remains a work in progress.

Changes Over Time (2023–2025)

Between 2023 and 2025, Cross River State experienced a steady decline across key indicators related to laws and policies. Public awareness of GBV-related laws dropped significantly from 74% in 2023 to just 33.3% in 2025. Similarly, awareness of GBV-related convictions fell from 60% in 2024 to 13.3% in 2025. This decline could be partly attributed to the conclusion of the Spotlight Initiative project, which lasted five years and significantly increased reporting and awareness. Following the project's end and the withdrawal of funding from ActionAid and Global Affairs Canada in June 2024, many organizations have scaled back their community engagement activities.

Confidence in customary and religious laws as tools for preventing and responding to GBV also declined. While opinions were nearly split in 2023, by 2025, three-quarters (75%) of residents expressed doubt about the usefulness of these traditional systems. This shift indicates growing public recognition that informal mechanisms may not provide adequate protection or justice for survivors.

Access to Legal Justice

Current State in 2025

Although more than half of residents (57.9%) say they would seek justice through formal systems for GBV cases, a considerable portion (39.2%) still prefer informal channels. This reflects modest confidence in formal mechanisms and shows that informal systems remain influential, even though public trust in them is relatively low (26.7%). Stakeholders have raised concerns that these informal systems sometimes protect perpetrators, especially when they are related to community leaders. Economic hardship further undermines accountability, as some families choose informal settlements over formal legal action.

Legal aid services have expanded to 12 out of 18 local government areas, provided primarily through the Centre for Citizens' Rights and Office of the Public Defender (recently upgraded from a department within the Ministry of Justice to a standalone agency) alongside the Legal Aid Council of Nigeria, FIDA, and private lawyers offering pro bono services. The judiciary now has three designated family courts: two at the high court level (High Court 3 and High Court 12, with the latter designated in 2024) and one magistrate family court. This has helped improve the speed of case handling.

All 36 police stations in the state now have gender units, previously known as Family Support Units.

Additionally, the state's Criminal Investigation Department (CID) has doubled its gender unit officers from five to ten. However, the frequent redeployment of trained personnel continues to undermine progress, as newly posted officers often lack the specialized knowledge to handle GBV cases effectively.

Despite these improvements, several challenges continue to hinder survivors' access to justice. Investigations are hampered by poor funding, with some police officers using personal funds to conduct arrests. Public awareness of available legal aid remains low, only 17.1% of residents are aware of these services. Witness participation is also limited; only 42.8% of residents said they would testify in court. Others would only participate if protective measures were in place (22.7%), while 34.6% would not participate at all. Survivor withdrawals are common and are often influenced by family pressure, fear of stigma, or direct intimidation.

Changes Over Time (2023–2025)

Public confidence in formal justice systems for GBV cases declined steadily, from 76% in 2023 to 57.9% in 2025. This shift suggests growing skepticism toward formal institutions and continued reliance on community-based mechanisms, despite concerns about their effectiveness. The decline in willingness to serve as a witness, from 63% to 42.8% further reinforces this skepticism. The rise in those unwilling to participate points to persistent fears around stigma, retaliation, and weak protection measures. These trends highlight the need for stronger safeguards and improved public trust in the justice process.

During the same period, awareness of legal aid services provided by the state dropped from 40% to just 17.1%. Without clear knowledge of available support, survivors may struggle to navigate the justice system or avoid reporting altogether. Strengthening public awareness and improving service visibility will be essential to helping survivors access the support they need, and may help rebuild confidence in formal justice mechanisms.

Support Services

Current State in 2025

There is strong public recognition that informal support services such as help from family, friends, religious centers, and community groups are limited in scope and effectiveness. Only 9.3% of residents expressed a preference for these informal options, while the vast majority (90.7%) favored formal support services. However, this preference for professional and structured care is not yet matched by adequate service availability, accessibility, or awareness.

Cross River State currently operates six functional SARCs: one state-run facility (the UNFPA-supported One-Stop Centre at General Hospital Calabar, managed by the Ministry of Women Affairs) and five facilities run by Heartland Alliance in Calabar, Ugep, Ikom, Ogoja, and Bakassi. While this marks progress, 13 out of 18 local government areas remain underserved. Awareness of these facilities is still low (11.2%), and broader awareness of support services including medical, psychosocial, and economic assistance is also limited (18.7%). The state currently has no operational shelters, a gap stakeholders identify as one of the most critical challenges in survivor support. Survivors rely heavily on NGO-run facilities, which are often overstretched. Even at the One-Stop Centre, services are

limited, and survivors are required to pay for medical treatment, rather than receiving fully free services. This highlights an urgent need to expand and strengthen formal services across the state.

Stakeholders report improved coordination among service providers, with the Ministry of Women Affairs leading a GBV Technical Working Group that includes state actors, NGOs, religious leaders, and traditional rulers. This platform ensures smooth referrals playing central roles in linking survivors to psychosocial, medical, legal, and livelihood support. While over half of residents (54.9%) are aware of police reporting and referral pathways, fewer know about hospital-based reporting (36.7%), legal referral options (17.3%), or support groups (10.8%).

Changes Over Time (2023–2025)

In 2023, most residents (87%) believed that help from family, friends, religious centers, and community groups was useful. By 2025, only 9.3% held that view. This change signals growing awareness of the limitations of informal care and increased trust in structured, professional support. Despite this shift in perception, the number of residents who knew of or had visited formal support facilities such as shelters and SARCs declined during the same period, from 32% to 11.2%. This trend suggests that while confidence in formal systems is rising, outreach and visibility of these services have not kept pace.

Knowledge of police and healthcare reporting options increased over the three years, while awareness of legal pathways remained consistently low, pointing to a need for sustained public education and stronger communication strategies to ensure survivors know where and how to seek help. Without consistent visibility and access, the growing trust in formal support systems may not translate into actual service use.

Information and Awareness

Current State in 2025

Multiple channels have been used to share GBV-related information, including IEC materials, radio jingles, social media, and public campaigns. Recent efforts such as the orange band initiative during the carnival and the 16 Days of Activism significantly improved public visibility. However, these efforts have mostly reached urban audiences, with rural communities remaining underserved. As of 2025, only 35.6% of respondents reported being aware of any GBV information materials. Among those who were aware, nearly all found the content useful. This suggests that when people have access to information, it is effective in raising awareness and empowering communities.

Stakeholders note that the state primarily develops IEC materials during annual campaigns (16 Days of Activism and International Day of the Girl Child), with distribution concentrated in the capital city, Calabar. NGOs such as Neighbourhood Care-Well Foundation, Girls' Power Initiative, and Basic Rights Council Initiative have filled gaps by developing materials specific to their intervention areas.

Sensitization efforts have reached schools in Ogoja, Ikom, and Calabar, with teachers at both primary and secondary levels trained on GBV, and student debates and quizzes organized to enhance understanding. The state has also developed a curriculum on sexual violence in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, UNICEF, and Girls' Power Initiative. However, implementation faces

challenges: trained teachers are often transferred to other schools or duties without replacement, and the regular academic curriculum leaves limited time for GBV education. Despite these challenges, there is strong public support for integrating GBV and child sexual abuse education into the school system. An overwhelming majority of residents (97.1%) expressed support for this initiative, highlighting a clear opportunity for policymakers to scale up and formalize GBV education within schools.

The Ministry of Education has demonstrated a commitment to inclusion through workshops for persons with disabilities and recommendations to improve accessibility, including the provision of sign language teachers and accessible facilities. Civil society organizations have also taken steps to integrate persons with disabilities into their mentoring platforms and workforce. However, communication formats remain limited, with a predominant reliance on sign language and audio materials, while Braille, subtitled content, and simplified messaging receive less attention. Complementing these efforts, the Ministry of Women Affairs conducts annual workshops during International Day of Persons with Disabilities to raise awareness on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). This year, the Ministry has planned a one-day symposium with the disability community to further promote awareness and prevention of SGBV and SRHR issues..

Changes Over Time (2023–2025)

Exposure to GBV information and awareness programs or materials in the Cross River State steadily decreased over three years, from 64% in 2023 to 35.6%. This decline coincides with the conclusion of major donor-funded projects, particularly the Spotlight Initiative (which ran for five years) and ActionAid/Global Affairs Canada funding (which ended in June 2024). These projects have significantly increased awareness creation, sensitization, and case follow-up through dedicated personnel and resources. Following their conclusion, many civil society organizations have reduced their outreach activities due to funding constraints, leaving the state government to carry forward efforts with limited resources and capacity. Stakeholders note that while training workshops continue, the frequency and reach of public sensitization campaigns have diminished.

Budget and Spending

Budget Analysis 2024

Cross River State allocated ₦1.2 billion to GBV programs in 2024, representing 0.27% of its total state budget. The state spent only ₦126.6 million of the allocated amount, achieving a 10.5% implementation rate, which means nearly 90% of budgeted resources remained unutilized. The actual GBV expenditure constituted just 0.06% of the state's total spending. On a per capita basis, Cross River State spent approximately ₦51.85 per female population on GBV-related programs, one of the lowest among Nigerian states. While the state has established specific GBV budget lines within the Ministry of Women Affairs and relevant ministries, the substantial gap between allocation and expenditure indicates serious implementation challenges, which directly undermines the state's ability to effectively prevent and respond to GBV.

Changes Over Time (2022–2024)

Over the last three years, budget allocations for GBV-related issues in Cross River State was ₦1.05 billion in 2022, ₦178.26 million in 2023, and ₦931.37 million in 2024. Actual spending amounted to ₦125.12 million, ₦36.20 million, and ₦15.89 million in 2022, 2023, and 2024 respectively. These figures translate to budget performance rates of 2%, 20%, and 10.5%. Two recurring line items appeared in both 2023 and 2024: "Training of Women Development Officers (WDOs) on Child Protection Issues" and "Gender-Based Violence Centre for Women and Children Advocacy, Monitoring and Sensitization Programme." Neither project recorded any implementation in either year. While the 2024 budget included more GBV-specific line items than previous years, significant implementation gaps persist. Per capita spending remained critically low, with ₦51.85 in 2024, ₦15.26 in 2023, and ₦6.90 in 2022, despite modest improvements over time. The gradual increases suggest some progress, though investment levels remain limited relative to population needs.

Human Angle Stories

In the Ediba community, a 15-year-old girl was abused by her father. Instead of going to the police, community elders tried to handle it "traditionally." They planned to fine the father with palm wine and meat and then marry the girl off to another man to "restore her dignity."

But a local chief, recently trained as a paralegal through a VAPP awareness program, refused to accept this settlement. He referred the case to the authorities, and it eventually reached Family Court. The father was convicted and sentenced to life in prison. This story shows how legal awareness and community education can protect victims and ensure justice is served.

KEY GAPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

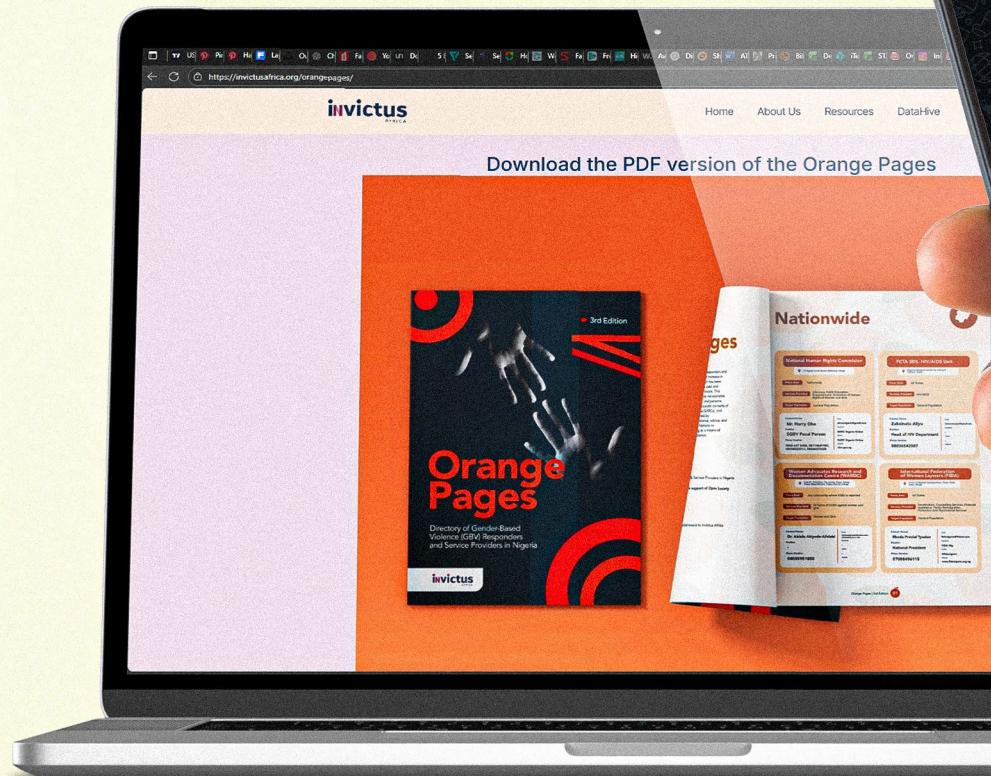
Index	Key Gaps	Recommendations
 Laws and Policies	Only 33.3% of residents are familiar with GBV-related laws, down from 75% in 2023.	Strengthen and sustain public education and awareness campaigns through radio, community dialogues, and social media to improve understanding and reach underserved populations.
	Despite the state securing five to 10 convictions in 2025, just 13.3% of residents are aware of these GBV-related convictions.	Communicate GBV conviction outcomes and penalties through media and community platforms to reinforce accountability and strengthen public trust in the justice system.
	Traditional institutions continue to impose customary fines (goats, palm wine, money) instead of referring cases to formal justice systems.	Establish and enforce clear penalties for traditional rulers who obstruct formal justice processes or handle criminal GBV cases informally.
 Access to Legal Justice	Legal aid services expanded to 12 out of the 18 LGAs, however, only 17.1% of residents know about these legal aid services.	Launch targeted awareness campaigns highlighting free legal services through radio, posters, and community outreach. Distribute contact information through police stations, health facilities, and community leaders.
	Only 42.8% of residents would testify in court (down from 63% in 2023), and 34.6% would not participate at all. Families often withdraw cases due to pressure, stigma, or economic settlements.	Establish formal witness protection mechanisms including safe transportation, anonymity options, and psychosocial support throughout the trial process.
	GBV investigations face funding constraints, with state actors often relying on personal resources or NGO support due to limited government funding.	Establish a dedicated budget line for GBV-related law enforcement activities across the state to ensure consistent funding and reduce reliance on NGO support.
 Support Services	Only six SARCs serve the state's 18 LGAs, and there are no operational shelters. Public awareness of these facilities dropped from 32% in 2023 to just 11.2% in 2025.	Build at least one functional shelter in each senatorial district. Expand SARCs to underserve LGAs and launch awareness campaigns to inform residents about available facilities and services.
	Despite being designated as a support facility, survivors are required to pay for medical treatment at General Hospital Calabar, creating a financial barrier to accessing care.	Allocate budget to ensure all medical services at the One-Stop Centre and other SARCs are provided free of charge. This should include medical examinations, and forensic evidence collection.
 Information and Awareness	Awareness of GBV information materials dropped from 64% in 2023 to 35.6% in 2025. This decline coincides with the end of Spotlight Initiative and ActionAid/Global Affairs Canada funding in June 2024.	Ensure sustainable, government-led funding and coordination of GBV awareness campaigns to prevent gaps caused by the end of donor support, and scale up the production and distribution of standardized IEC materials across all LGAs.
	The state has developed a curriculum with UNICEF and Girls' Power Initiative, but implementation is hindered by teacher transfers and limited curriculum time.	Train school administrators to ensure continuity when teachers are transferred. Expand the Safe Schools Department's mandate to include regular GBV sensitization in all schools across the 18 LGAs.
	While sign language (32.9%) and audio formats (35.3%) are used, other critical formats have low visibility: Braille, subtitled videos, and simplified messages are underutilized.	Develop GBV information in multiple formats including Braille, subtitled videos, and simplified picture-based messages. Train sign language interpreters specifically on GBV terminology and ensure their availability at all public sensitization events.
 Budget and Spending	Cross River State achieved only 10.5% budget performance, leaving nearly 90% of funds unused. Despite having GBV-specific line items, key projects recorded zero implementation, resulting in one of the lowest per capita GBV expenditures nationally.	Strengthen budget execution by improving fund release processes, ensuring active implementation of GBV-specific projects, and establishing monitoring mechanisms to track progress and prevent persistent underutilization of allocated funds.



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