



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



With the support of  
**Ford Foundation**



# Imo State

Eastern Heartland

*Ngwoma Waterfall*

# Imo State

Population: 6,986,775

50.3% Female 49.7% Male

Overall Grade 50.0%

## Respondents Demography (n = 1,109)



## Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development

### BUDGET ALLOCATION

**₦3.45bn**

(This accounts for 0.6% of the total state budget)

### BUDGET PERFORMANCE

**₦482.29m**

(This accounts for 14.0% of total allocation to the ministry)

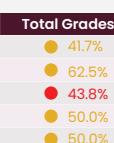


Capital ■ Personnel ■ Overhead ■ Others ■ (Actual Spend)



**Per Capita Spending**

**₦137.11**



### Indexes

Laws and Policies  
Access to Legal Justice  
Support Services  
Information and Awareness  
Budget and Spending

### Indicators

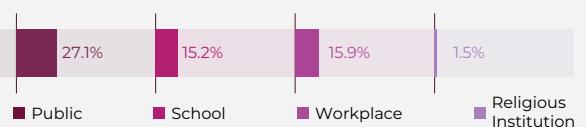
LP<sub>1</sub> LP<sub>2</sub> LP<sub>3</sub>  
ALJ<sub>1</sub> ALJ<sub>2</sub> ALJ<sub>3</sub>  
SS<sub>1</sub> SS<sub>2</sub> SS<sub>3</sub> SS<sub>4</sub>  
IA<sub>1</sub> IA<sub>2</sub> IA<sub>3</sub> IA<sub>4</sub>  
BS<sub>1</sub> BS<sub>2</sub> BS<sub>3</sub>

## GBV Context 2025

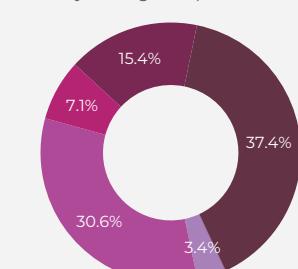
Have you or anyone you know experienced any form of gender-based violence in the last five years?



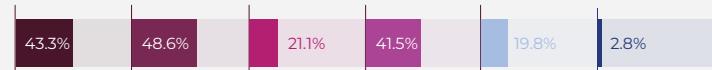
Where did you or the person experience the GBV?



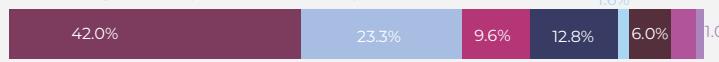
Why did you or the person choose where you sought help?



What form of GBV did you or the person experience?



Where did you or the person first seek help?



■ Domestic ■ Physical ■ Sexual ■ Mental ■ Economic ■ Cultural practices

■ Family/relatives

■ Police/law enforcement authority

■ Friends/neighbors

■ Traditional/community leader or group

■ Religious leader (Pastor, Ulama, Imam, Deity)

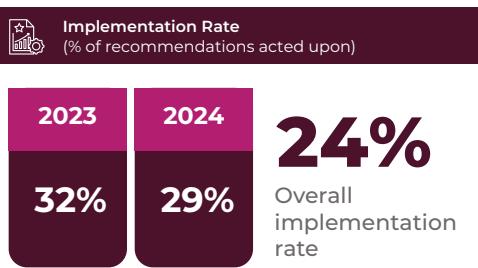
■ I did not seek help

■ Employer/Work colleague/Labour group

■ Lawyer

■ Financial constraint ■ Perception that they could help

■ Proximity or accessibility ■ Services ■ Trust



Index	2023	2024	2025
Laws and Policies	LP 90.0%	-2 ▼ LP 58.3%	LP 41.7%
Access to Legal Justice	ALJ 61.3%	ALJ 56.3%	ALJ 62.5%
Support Services	SS 25.0%	+1▲ SS 50.0%	-1▼ SS 43.8%
Information and Awareness	IA 61.3%	-1▼ IA 43.8%	+1▲ IA 50.0%
Budget and Spending	BS 25.0%	+1▲ BS 50.0%	BS 50.0%

#### What Has Changed

##### Positive Developments

- 76.2% of respondents found GBV materials either mostly or completely useful in 2025, indicating increased quality and relevance of information.
- 66.1% of residents preferred formal support services over informal ones, showing trust in formal institutional mechanisms.
- Awareness of the state's SARC increased from 4% in 2024 to 17.9% in 2025—a 13.9% improvement in outreach effectiveness.

##### Areas of Concern

- Public awareness of GBV laws dropped sharply from 63% (2024) to 44.1% (2025), while reliance on customary laws rose to 48.2%.
- Legal aid services remain concentrated in Owerri; rural LGAs lack functional access to justice and survivor representation.
- The state's only SARC remains under-equipped, and no shelters exist for temporary survivor protection.
- GBV awareness programs remain donor-driven with minimal state budget allocation, threatening program sustainability.



#### Key Actions



##### Laws and Policies

- Domestication of the VAPP Law in December 2021, introduction of stronger penalties for GBV crimes, and establishment of the sex offenders register, pending operationalization, thereby strengthening penalties for GBV compared to the Criminal Code.

##### Access to Legal Justice

- Establishment of Gender Desk Units in all 38 police divisions and five specialized Family Courts in Owerri.

#### Support Services

- Survivors integrated into First Lady's empowerment schemes.
- Partial setup of a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) provides medical, psychosocial, and legal support but is under-resourced.

#### Information and Awareness

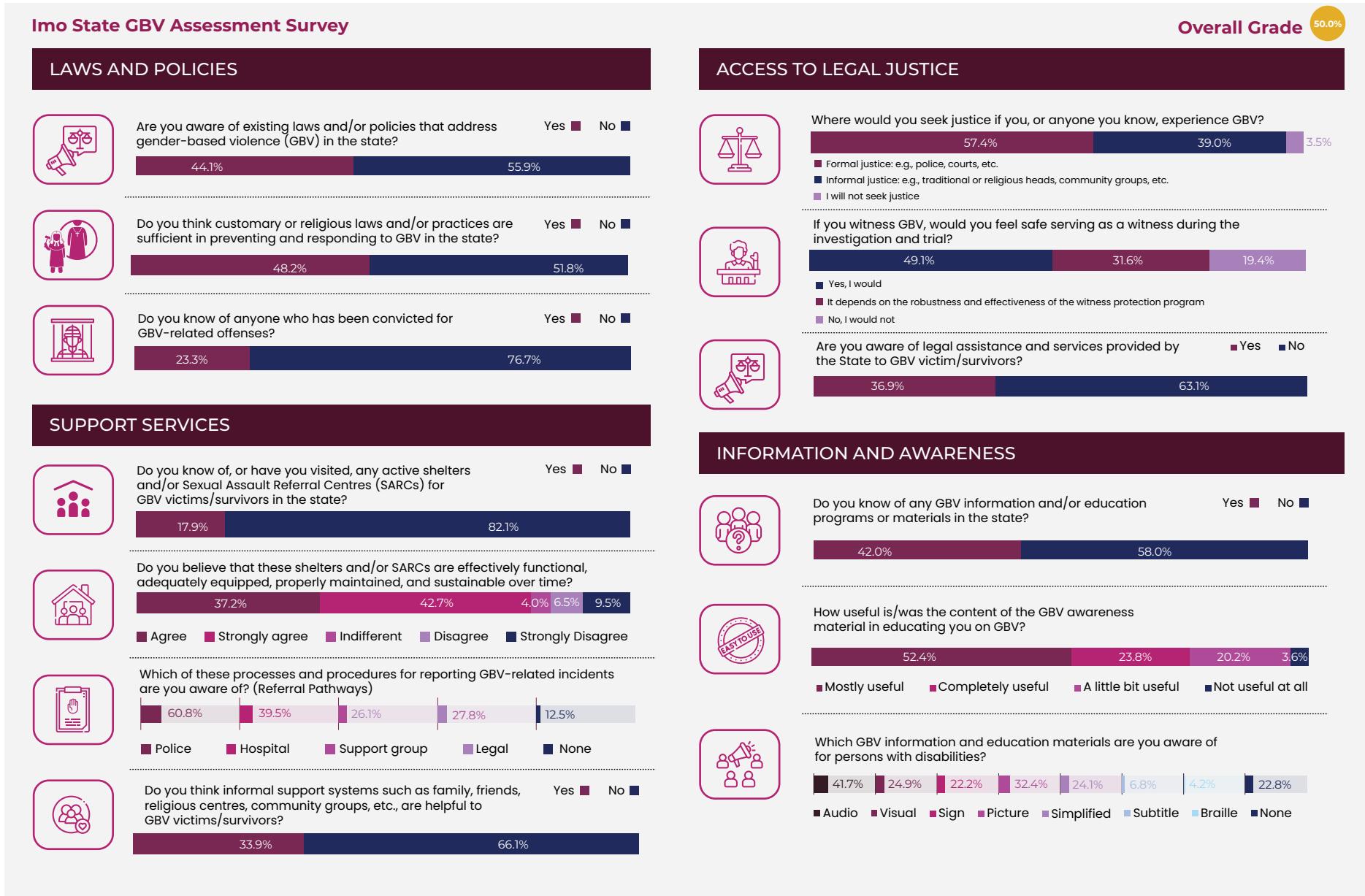
- Partnerships between IMSUBEB, UNICEF, and CSOs led to teacher training on GBV prevention and inclusion of GBV themes in school subjects.
- Distribution of IEC materials (VAPP law copies, flyers, posters, calendars) supported by NGOs and the Ministry of Women Affairs.

#### Change Spotlight

Imo State achieved a remarkable milestone in strengthening access to justice for survivors of gender-based violence through the establishment of five specialized Family Courts in Owerri and the deployment of Gender Desk Units across all 38 police divisions. This coordinated initiative led by the Ministry of Justice in collaboration with FIDA, the Legal Aid Council, and the Imo State Police Command has significantly reduced case-handling delays and improved survivor experience in the justice system.

Prior to 2023, GBV cases were handled as general criminal matters, often leading to delayed prosecutions and re-traumatization of survivors. By 2025, the new Family Courts had processed over 40 gender-based violence cases, including three convictions under the VAPP Law, a notable increase compared to just one documented conviction in 2022.

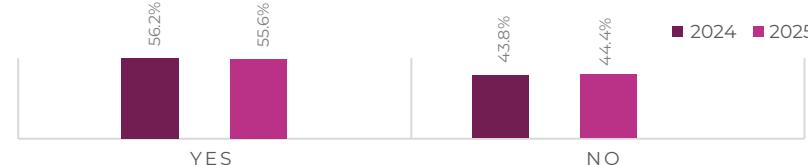




## Imo State GBV Context Trend (2024-2025)

Overall Grade 50.0%

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



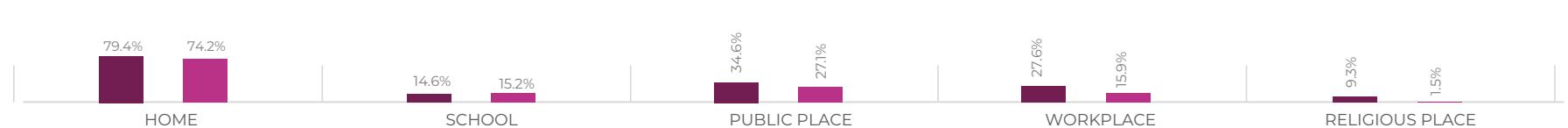
# 55.6%

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

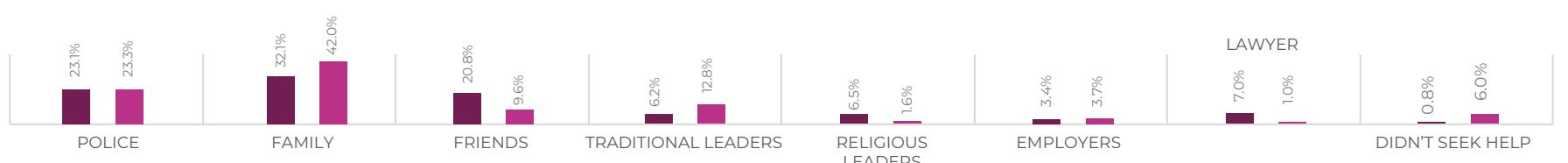
What form of GBV did you or the person experience?



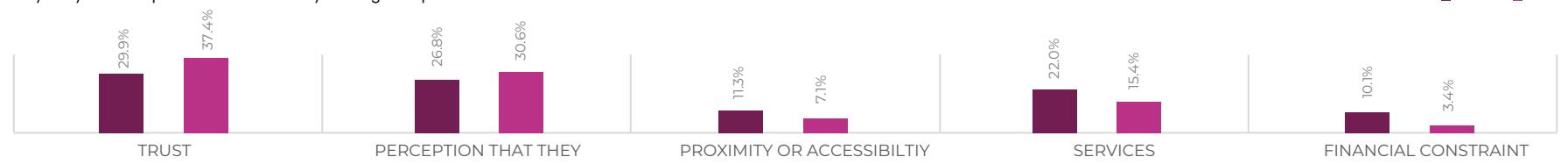
Where did you or the person experience the GBV?



Where did you or the person first seek help?

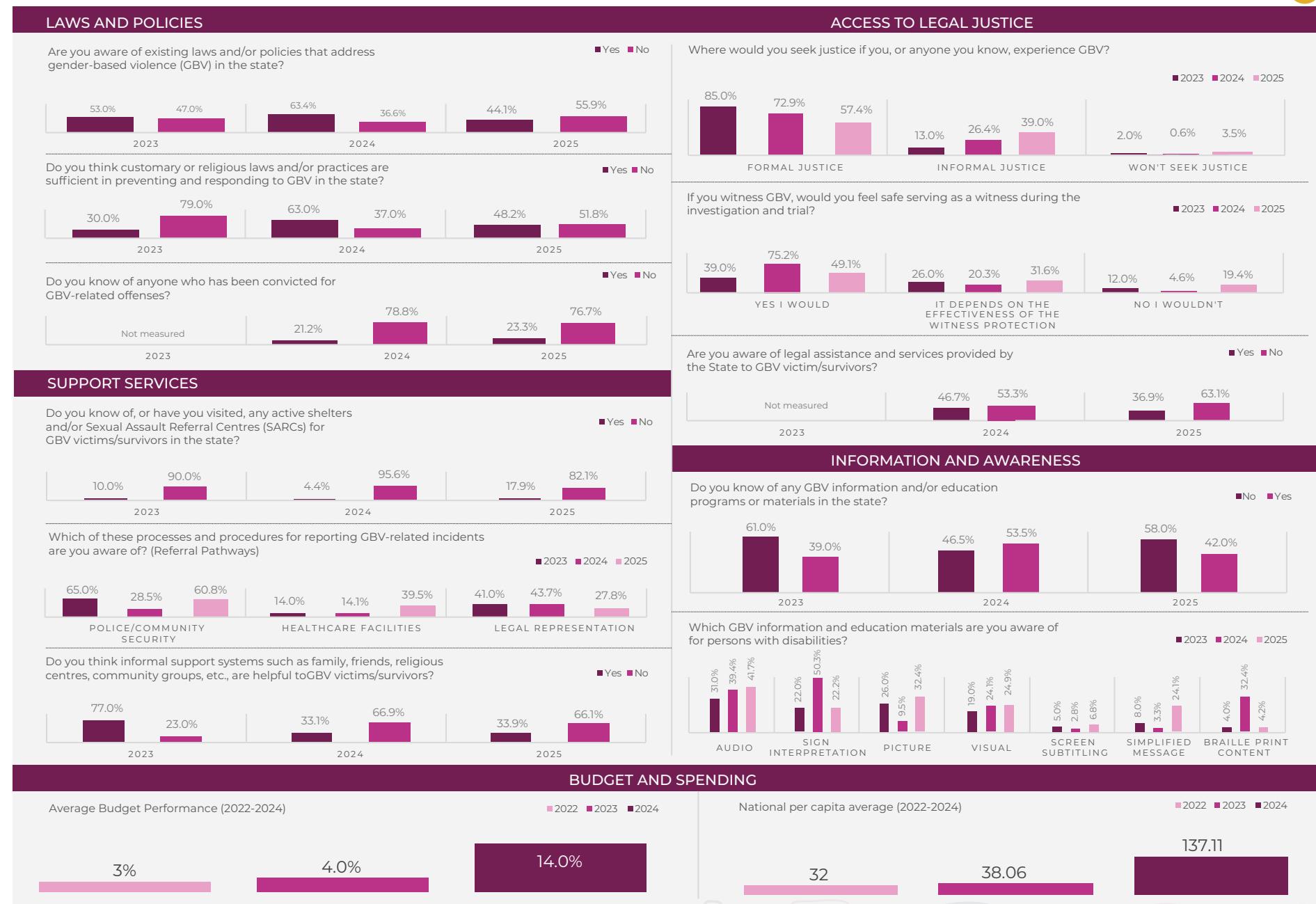


Why did you or the person choose where you sought help?



## State Data Trend (2023-2025)

Overall Grade 50.0%





## KEY INSIGHTS

### Laws and Policies

#### Current State in 2025

Imo State has made notable progress in establishing a strong legal foundation to address gender-based violence (GBV) through the domestication of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Law in December 2021, aligning fully with the Federal VAPP Act of 2015. The law broadens the definition of sexual offenses to include emotional, psychological, and socio-economic abuse, criminalizes defilement and domestic violence, and introduces protection orders and a Sex Offenders Register. It complements earlier instruments such as the Female Genital Mutilation (Prohibition) Law (2017) and the Child Rights Law (2004), demonstrating a comprehensive legal approach to GBV prevention and accountability. According to the Ministry of Justice, this expansion represents a major advancement in addressing the complexities of GBV and closing previous legal gaps that hindered convictions.

Despite these policy strides, awareness and public engagement with GBV laws remain modest, with just 44.1% of residents aware of existing frameworks and most information flowing through NGOs, civil society, and media platforms. While more than half of respondents (53.3%) perceive the laws as effective, only 23.3% report knowledge of any convictions, suggesting gaps in enforcement visibility and inter-agency coordination. This is echoed by the Ministry of Justice, who noted that the state currently lacks a centralized system for tracking GBV convictions, making it difficult to assess overall progress. However, an official reported securing three convictions personally in 2025, two for defilement and one for rape. This underscores the need for institutional mechanisms to capture and communicate justice outcomes.

The persistence of customary and religious norms, which 48.4% of respondents acknowledged and over half viewed as unhelpful in preventing GBV, highlights ongoing tension between statutory and traditional systems. Overall, while Imo State's legislative framework is robust, implementation challenges, low public awareness, and cultural resistance continue to limit its full impact, underscoring the need for sustained sensitization, institutional capacity building, and harmonization of formal and customary justice mechanisms.

#### Changes Over Time (2023–2025)

Between 2023 and 2025, there have been significant shifts in the implementation of legal frameworks, policies, and laws addressing gender-based violence (GBV). The state's legal and policy

environment is gradually transitioning from reliance on outdated provisions of the Criminal Code to a more inclusive and rights-based GBV framework that emphasizes protection, prosecution, and prevention.

However, despite these progressive legal reforms, public awareness and perception trends show concerning fluctuations. Awareness of GBV-related laws and policies increased from 53% in 2023 to 63% in 2024, but declined to 44.1% in 2025, indicating a substantial drop in awareness. Similarly, the perception of the adequacy of customary and religious laws in addressing GBV has shifted unfavorably. In 2023, 30% of respondents believed these laws were sufficient; in 2024, this fell to 21%, but in 2025 it rose again to 48.2%, suggesting a growing reliance on traditional systems over statutory mechanisms, though 51.8% believes that formal laws and statutory mechanisms are better. In 2024, 63% of respondents reported knowing someone convicted of a GBV offense; however, by 2025, this dropped dramatically to 23.3%, reflecting potential weaknesses in prosecution and conviction rates despite improved legislation.

### Access to Legal Justice

#### Current State in 2025

Access to legal justice for GBV survivors in Imo State reflects steady institutional progress but persistent accessibility gaps. Most residents (57.4%) prefer formal channels such as the police and courts, indicating growing trust in statutory justice mechanisms. However, nearly 40% still rely on informal systems such as chiefs, religious heads, or community leaders, largely due to perceptions of corruption, cost, and procedural delays in formal institutions. Although the state has established Gender Desk Units in all 38 police divisions and expanded family courts to five specialized courts in Owerri to handle GBV-related cases, these facilities remain heavily concentrated in the capital. The Ministry of Justice, Legal Aid Council, FIDA, and NBA Human Rights Committee provide free legal representation, but rural LGAs continue to face insecurity, poor logistics, and low awareness, leaving survivors in remote areas underserved.

Despite the existence of these structures, confidence in enforcement remains weak. Only 36.9% of respondents are aware of state-provided legal assistance, and just under half (49.1%) feel safe testifying in GBV cases. The absence of formal witness protection mechanisms contributes to fear of retaliation and reluctance to pursue justice. Informal settlements by families and traditional leaders continue to undermine formal prosecution, reflecting enduring social resistance to public litigation. Limited training for legal aid officers and judicial staff further constrains the system's effectiveness. Overall, while Imo State has laid important foundations for survivor-centered justice, geographic

inequality, poor enforcement follow-through, and social interference continue to limit equal and timely access to justice.

### Changes Over Time (2023–2025)

Access to legal justice for GBV survivors presents a concerning trend. In 2023, 85% of respondents preferred seeking help through formal justice systems, but this declined to 73% in 2024 and further declined to 57.4% in 2025. Conversely, preference for informal justice systems increased from 13% in 2023 to 26% in 2024 to 39% in 2025. Additionally, respondents who would not seek help reduced from 2% in 2023 to 1% in 2024 and increased to 3.5% in 2025. Regarding willingness to serve as witnesses in court, there was a notable decline in confidence. In 2024, 75% of respondents felt safe to testify, an increase from 39% in 2023, but this dropped to 49.1% in 2025.

Furthermore, the number of respondents who believed their testimony would depend on witness protection programs dropped from 26% in 2023 to 20% in 2024 and increased to 31.6% in 2025. Awareness of legal assistance and services provided by the state also showed a decline. In 2024, 47% of respondents were aware, but this dropped to 36.9% in 2025.

### Support Services

#### Current State in 2025

Support services for GBV survivors in Imo State remain limited in reach and functionality despite ongoing institutional efforts. The Ministry of Women Affairs manages the state's SARC, which provides medical, psychosocial, and legal support, but operates below optimal capacity due to inadequate infrastructure, staffing, and funding. Stakeholders acknowledged its existence but emphasized that the centre is not fully functional and that the state lacks transit shelters for temporary survivor protection. Formal support services are primarily delivered through FIDA, the Legal Aid Council, and the NBA Human Rights Committee for legal aid; hospitals and NGOs for medical and psychosocial care; and the First Lady's empowerment initiative for limited economic assistance. However, these interventions are largely concentrated in urban areas, leaving rural LGAs underserved.

Awareness and utilization of survivor services remain low, reflecting weak outreach and uneven information flow. Only a minority of residents are aware of SARCs, shelters, or referral mechanisms, with NGOs and social media serving as the main information channels. Despite this, most respondents believe formal support systems such as medical, legal, and psychosocial, are more effective than community-based options, indicating public confidence in structured care when available. Reporting pathways are better established through police and healthcare facilities, yet access to legal and psychosocial referrals remains inconsistent. Overall, while Imo State has laid foundational structures for survivor support, limited coverage, resource constraints, and absence of more SARCs and shelters continue to hinder equal access to holistic, survivor-centred services across the state.

### Information and Awareness

#### Current State in 2025

Awareness of the SARC dropped from 10% in 2023 to 4% in 2024, and increased to 17.9% in 2025, while perception of its effectiveness grew from 22% in 2024 to 42.7% in 2025. In 2024, respondents' views on SARC's effectiveness were: 32% Agree, 13% Disagree, 3% Strongly Disagree, and 30% Indifferent. In 2025, these shifted to: 37.2% Agree, 6.5% Disagree, 9.5% Strongly Disagree, and 4% Indifferent, indicating a 5% increase in Agree, 6.5% decline in Disagree, 6.5% increase in Strongly Disagree, and 24% decline in Indifferent. Referral pathways saw significant changes: Police/Community Security declined from 65% in 2023 to 28.5% in 2024 and rose to 60.8% in 2025, Hospital/Healthcare Pathway grew from 14.1% in 2023 and 2024 to 39.5% in 2025, Legal Representation increased from 41% to 43.7% and reduced to 27.8% in 2025, and Support Groups increased from 15% in 2023 to 33.2% in 2024, but declined in 2025 to 26.1%.

#### Changes Over Time (2023–2025)

Public education and awareness on gender-based violence (GBV) in Imo State have grown considerably, driven by partnerships between government institutions and civil society. About 42% of residents reported exposure to GBV awareness programs, with CSOs and NGOs (41.6%) identified as the main sources of information, followed by media platforms such as radio and television. Most respondents found the information useful – 52.4% rated it mostly useful and 23.8% completely useful – reflecting the growing impact of awareness efforts. The Ministry of Women Affairs, FIDA, and NGOs such as Alliance for Africa (AfA) and CLEEN Foundation have conducted community sensitization, outreach during August Meetings, and advocacy on the VAPP Law, harmful traditional practices, and women's rights.

The Imo State Universal Basic Education Board (IMSUBEB), in collaboration with UNICEF and CSOs, has also trained teachers on GBV prevention and integrated related themes into school subjects, although no formal GBV or sexual abuse curriculum currently exists. While workshops and trainings for police and judicial officers have been introduced, they remain limited in scale and frequency.

Accessibility and inclusivity of GBV information remain major challenges. Although 80% of respondents support teaching GBV and sexual abuse education across all school levels, awareness materials are still not fully adapted for persons with disabilities. Data show that 41.7% use audio or spoken content, 32.4% rely on picture-based messages, 24.9% access visual content, and 22.2% use sign interpretation, while only 6.8% engage with subtitled content and 4.2% have access to Braille materials. This indicates that GBV communication is heavily skewed toward non-inclusive media formats, limiting access for people with hearing or visual impairments.

### Budget and Spending

#### Budget Analysis 2024

Awareness of GBV information and education programs in Imo State has fluctuated over the three-year period. Awareness of GBV programs improved from 39% in 2023 to 53% in 2024, a 14% increase, but subsequently declined to 42% in 2025, suggesting that early gains in sensitization were not sustained, likely due to reduced outreach and limited funding or program continuity.

Perceptions of the usefulness of GBV information materials have steadily improved overall. In 2023, 34% of respondents found materials "mostly useful," 16% "completely useful," and 24% "not useful at all." By 2024, the proportion describing materials as "mostly useful" had risen to 48%, and in 2025 it reached 52.4%. Similarly, the share of respondents who found GBV information "completely useful" rose from 16% in 2023 to 23.8% in 2025, showing growing confidence in the quality and relevance of available content.

The inclusion of persons with disabilities in GBV information and education has evolved unevenly over the years. In 2023, the use of disability-accessible formats was limited—only 31% of respondents reported using audio or spoken content, 26% used picture-based messages, and 22% relied on sign interpretation, while just 4% used braille materials. By 2024, the use of inclusive formats expanded significantly, with 50.3% using sign interpretation, 39.4% using audio or spoken content, and 32.1% using braille materials, indicating strong progress driven by advocacy and inclusive programming. However, by 2025, usage declined again, as 41.7% reported using audio or spoken content, 22.2% used sign interpretation, and only 4.2% used braille, reflecting reduced consistency and sustainability in providing disability-friendly GBV information channels.

### Changes Over Time (2022–2024)

The "Establishment of a SARC Centre in Owerri" (sic) has been a recurring line item in Imo State's budget. It first appeared with an allocation of ₦200 million in 2022, followed by ₦150 million in 2023, and ₦200 million in 2024. Despite these repeated allocations, no implementation was recorded in any of the three years. Similarly, the "Construction of Three VAPP Buildings in Each of the Zones of the State" appeared in both the 2023 and 2024 budgets, with allocations of ₦100.58 million in each year, yet also recorded no execution.

Budget implementation in the state has been notably inadequate. Although allocations increased from ₦3.10 billion in 2023 to ₦3.45 billion in 2024, actual spending amounted to only ₦129.66 million and ₦482.28 million respectively. The state's budget performance remained very low at 13.99%, although an improvement from 4% in 2023 and 3% in 2023. Per capita spending stood at ₦137.11 in 2024, ₦38.06 in 2023, and ₦32.00 in 2022. The substantial increase in 2024 follows two years of low investment, indicating a marked but irregular rise in fiscal attention to GBV-related interventions.

### Human Angle Stories

Shortly after losing her husband, her sister-in-law broke into her house and made away with all her belongings. According to her in-laws, being legally married to her late husband did not count, as she didn't have a child for him before he died. Desperate for justice, she turned to the police, but it yielded no justice. The widow's case was settled after FIDA stepped in. "Before now, I didn't know it was a crime to throw a woman out of her husband's house. Now I know."

Her story reveals the gaps between law and culture; protection and reality. In her community, widowhood without children still invites stigma and dispossession. "There is not enough education about gender-based violence here," she says. "People need to be told what they are doing is wrong."

## KEY GAPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

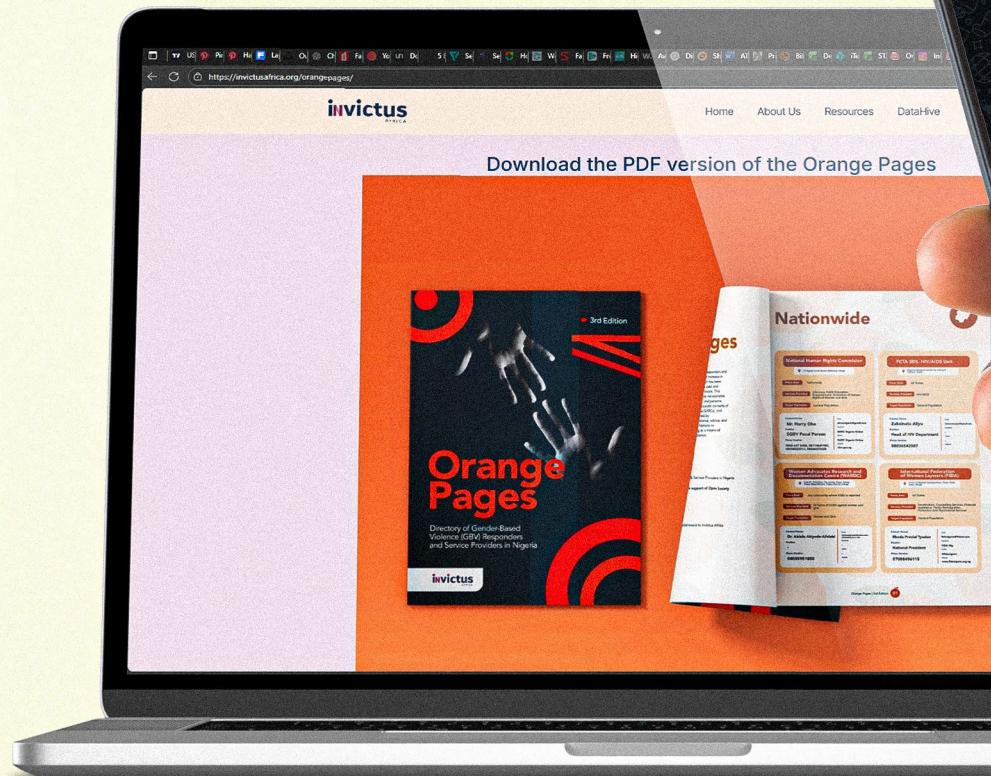
Index	Key Gaps	Recommendations
Laws and Policies	Only 3-4 GBV convictions recorded in the past 12 months, attributed to weak referral pathways and limited inter-agency coordination	Establish a centralized GBV case tracking and documentation system across the Ministry of Justice, police, and courts to monitor conviction rates, identify prosecution bottlenecks, and improve enforcement visibility.
	Despite legal prohibitions, harmful practices like female genital mutilation persist in rural communities, with 48.4% of respondents acknowledging customary practices and over half viewing them as unhelpful in GBV prevention	Strengthen community-level enforcement of the VAPP and FGM laws through collaboration with traditional and religious leaders and integrate anti-GBV messaging into existing cultural structures.
	Public awareness of GBV laws declined from 63% in 2024 to 44.1% in 2025, while reliance on customary and religious laws increased from 21% to 48.2%, indicating erosion of formal legal authority	Develop and implement a coordinated state-wide public awareness campaign targeting all 27 LGAs, utilizing mass media, community town halls, and partnerships with traditional and religious institutions to increase knowledge of GBV laws and consequences of harmful practices.
Access to Legal Justice	Legal aid services are concentrated only in Owerri metropolis, with limited or no presence in the remaining 26 LGAs, leaving rural GBV survivors without access to free legal representation	Decentralize legal aid services by establishing functional offices in at least three additional zones (Orlu, Okigwe, and one rural LGA) to expand coverage to at least 50% of LGAs.
	Willingness to testify as witnesses dropped from 75% in 2024 to 49.1% in 2025 due to absence of formal witness protection mechanisms	Develop and operationalize a state witness protection policy that includes safe houses, identity protection measures, and financial support for witnesses in GBV cases to rebuild public confidence in testifying.
	Nearly 40% of residents prefer informal justice systems (chiefs, religious leaders) over formal channels, with informal settlements and family pressure undermining prosecution—"most times the parents don't have that zeal to pursue the matters."	Conduct sustained community sensitization on the dangers of informal settlements, strengthen the authority of Gender Desk Units and Family Courts, and engage traditional leaders as advocates for formal justice processes.
Support Services	The state's only SARC is non-functional and no shelters exist anywhere in the state for temporary survivor protection.	Rehabilitate and fully operationalize the SARC with adequate medical equipment, trained personnel, and dedicated funding, then establish at least two additional SARCs in Orlu and Okigwe zones to improve geographic coverage to 50% of LGAs.
	No structured or streamlined GBV referral pathway exists resulting in survivors navigating services without clear guidance.	Develop and disseminate a standardized GBV reporting and referral pathway document (physical and digital formats) across all relevant MDAs, with clear protocols for each stage from initial report to survivor recovery.
	Support services are concentrated in urban areas with rural LGAs severely underserved; only 17.9% of residents are aware of the SARC despite a 13.9% increase from 2024.	Expand outreach through mobile SARC outreach teams, community health workers, and local radio awareness to improve access to survivor services in rural LGAs.
Information and Awareness	Informal support systems (family, religious institutions) are "not very effective" and often undermine survivor protection through forced reconciliation and settlement.	Train and integrate informal support actors, such as religious leaders, community elders, and women's groups, into the formal referral network to enhance survivor protection and discourage harmful settlement practices.
	GBV awareness programs declined from 53% in 2024 to 42% in 2025, primarily due to over-reliance on NGO funding - "the fund being used for this training... is not from the state government. It's from NGOs."	Allocate dedicated state funding for GBV sensitization programs to ensure sustainability beyond NGO support, targeting coverage of all 27 LGAs through quarterly community outreach, radio jingles in local dialects, and partnerships with traditional institutions.
	No standardized GBV or child sexual abuse curriculum exists; content is fragmented across subjects with inconsistent teacher capacity.	Develop and approve a standardized, age-appropriate GBV and child sexual abuse prevention curriculum for primary and secondary schools, provide mandatory training for all teachers across the state, and integrate comprehensive sexuality education as a standalone subject.
Budget and Spending	Accessibility for persons with disabilities is severely limited: only 22.2% use sign interpretation (down from 50.3% in 2024), 4.2% access braille materials (down from 32.1% in 2024), and 6.8% use subtitled content.	Produce and distribute disability-inclusive GBV information materials in multiple formats (braille, sign language videos, audio recordings, pictorial guides, and subtitled content) in partnership with disability rights organizations.
	Despite repeated allocations over the past three years, ₦150 to ₦200 million for a SARC centre in Owerri and ₦100.58 million for VAPP buildings in 2023 and 2024, none of these projects were implemented, with zero execution recorded across all three years.	Establish an inter-ministerial task force including the Ministries of Women Affairs, Works, and the Budget Office, to review reasons for non-implementation. The task force should identify specific bottlenecks and submit actionable recommendations ahead of the next budget cycle.



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