



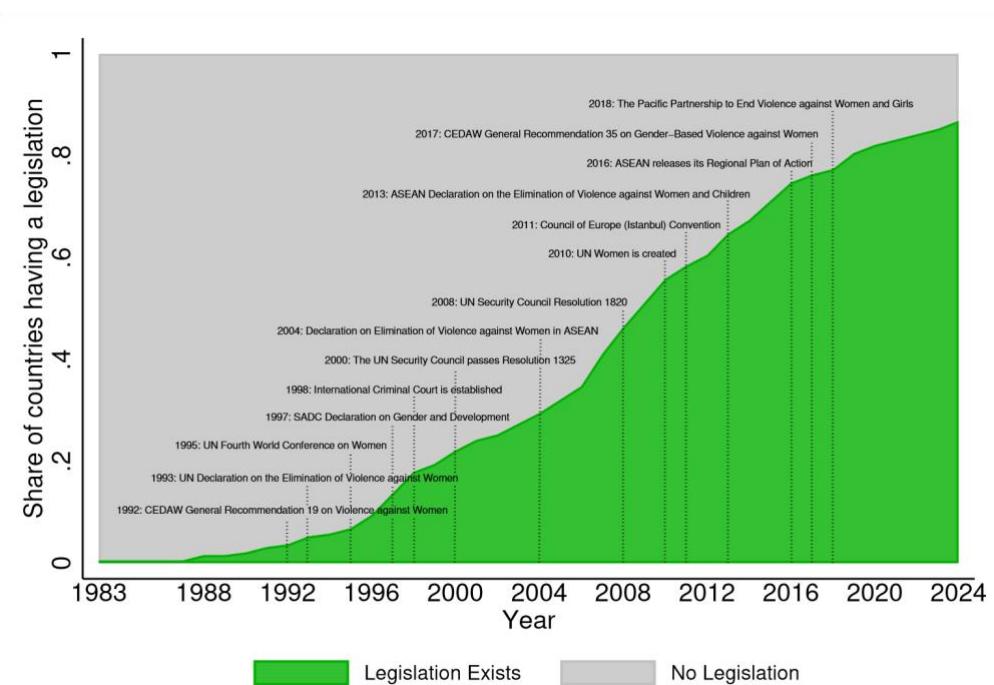
Legal Responses to Domestic Violence: Global Insights for Policy and Practice

Countries with domestic violence laws report significantly lower rates of intimate partner violence – *but the type of law matters*.

Problem Statement

Domestic violence (DV) remains one of the most widespread human rights violations, affecting nearly one in three women globally.¹ While most countries have now adopted DV laws, progress in implementation and enforcement remains uneven. This study examines how the presence, type, and comprehensiveness of DV laws relate to intimate partner violence (IPV) prevalence worldwide.

Figure 1: Share of countries adopting DV laws and key international events on violence against women, 1983–2024. Most countries adopted DV laws after 1995, following key international commitments.



¹ World Health Organization (WHO) Report: Violence Against Women Prevalence Estimates, 2018.

Key Findings

- **DV laws correlate with lower violence rates**

Countries with DV laws report about 22% lower rates of IPV.

- **Dedicated DV laws are more effective than general provisions**

Laws focused specifically on DV, such as those adopted in Australia, are more closely linked with better protection outcomes than broader family or gender-based violence laws.

- **Multiple complementary laws provide stronger protection**

Countries with several legal instruments addressing DV, such as dedicated DV laws alongside criminal code provisions, as seen in Vietnam, show more comprehensive and consistent protection frameworks.

- **High-income countries adopted laws decades earlier than lower-income regions**

High-income and Latin American countries have widespread laws; in contrast, many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa still lack comparable legal measures.

- **Strong governance and women's rights amplify law effectiveness**

Lower levels of IPV are observed not only in countries with strong DV laws, but also where governance is stronger, income levels are higher, and women enjoy greater economic and political rights, as demonstrated by Ireland.

Figure 2: Diffusion of legal norms by region and income group, 1983–2024. High-income regions adopted comprehensive DV laws decades earlier than low-income regions.

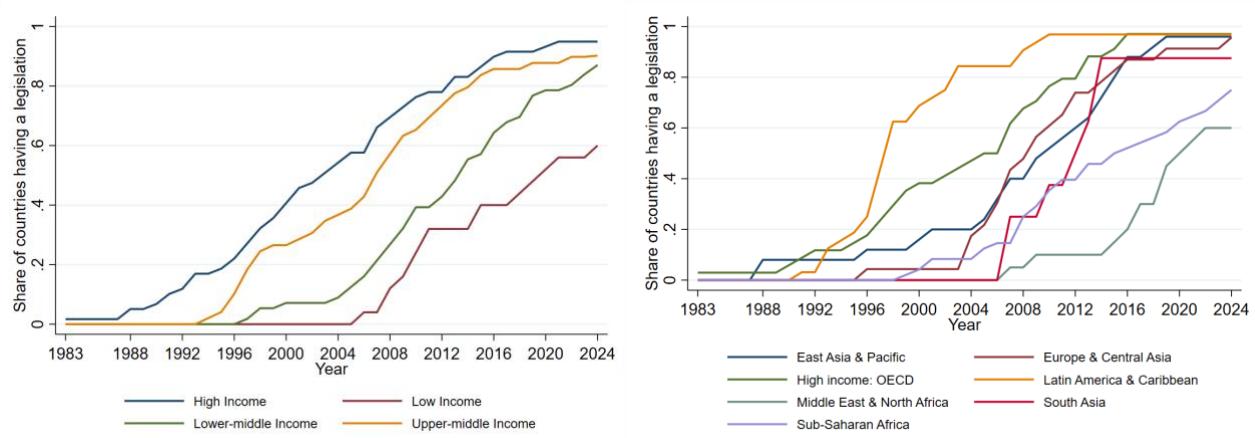
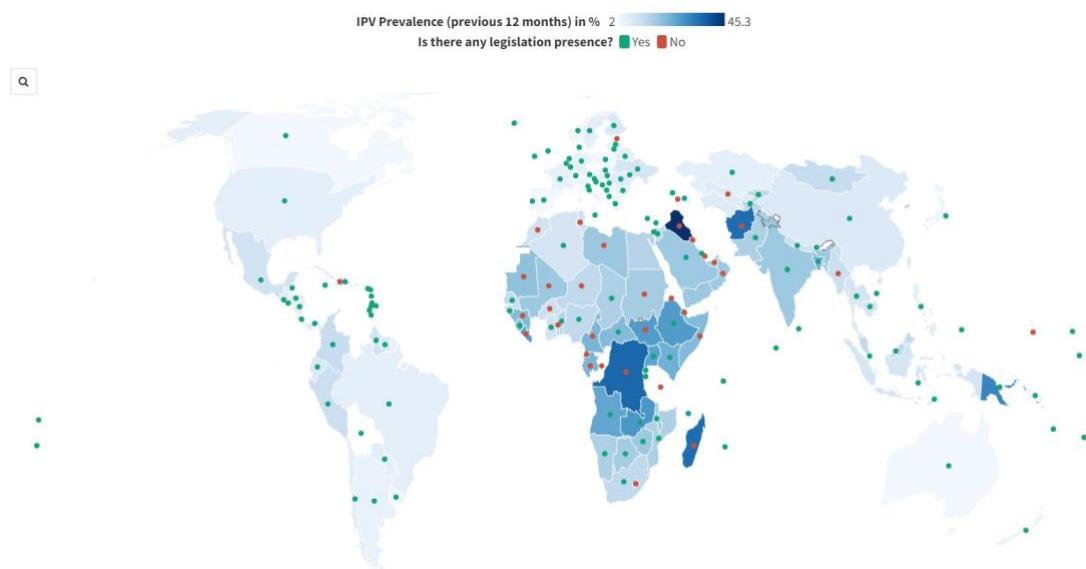


Figure 3: Presence of DV laws and IPV prevalence in the previous 12 months, 2018. Countries with DV laws show lower IPV prevalence.



Implications for Policy and Practice

DV legislation is an essential foundation for national responses to violence against women, but laws alone are not enough. Their impact depends on how they are designed, enforced, and supported within broader gender equality systems.

Countries that combine strong DV laws with robust institutional frameworks, including law enforcement, accessible support services, and adequate funding, tend to achieve better protection outcomes. Ultimately, progress in addressing IPV requires coordinated efforts that link legislation with practical implementation.

Recommendations

1. Adopt and strengthen stand-alone DV legislation

Ensure coverage of all forms of violence: physical, sexual, psychological, and economic.

2. Invest in implementation systems

Train police and judicial officers, expand access to shelters and legal aid, and fund monitoring mechanisms.

3. Enhance data and accountability

Improve collection of IPV and DV data and publish enforcement outcomes regularly to track progress as highlighted in the annual report by Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence (DFSV) Commissioner.²

² "The commissioner called for greater powers to compel all government agencies to provide data and information so the DFSV Commission can better assess progress on the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children." – Micaela Cronin, DFSV Commissioner, as reported by ABC News, October 30, 2025.

Read the Full Study

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The Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (CEVAW) aims to transform our understanding of gender-based violence by examining the structural drivers that cause and compound violence, while pioneering evidence-based approaches to improve policy and practice across Australia and the Indo-Pacific. The Centre mobilises survivor-centric and Indigenous methodologies, interdisciplinary collaborations, and Indo-Pacific partnerships to deliver scalable solutions across legal, security, economic, health, and political systems.

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The Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for the Elimination of Violence Against Women acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which our various nodes stand and whose cultures and customs have nurtured and continue to nurture these lands. We pay our respects to Elders past and present. We extend our respects to all Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, and other Indigenous peoples around the world.

