

Open data, gender and violence in Latin America

Silvana Fumega,
PhD. Research and
Policy Director, Latin
American Open
Data Initiative (ILDA)
(Uruguay)



Abstract

This article focuses on the project entitled Estandarización de datos de femicidios (Standardisation of Data on Femicide). Firstly, we contextualise the current status of open data in Latin America. We then explain our hypothesis of how standardising data could help us improve data quality and, lastly, we reflect on our study. Standardisation (and the eventual release of data) is not some kind of magic wand; rather, it is a process that enables us to see the problem more clearly and reflect on the criteria used by government agencies to produce data.



1 Open data in Latin America¹

The year 2012 saw the open data agenda start to gain momentum in Latin America. Since then, we have continued to see how numerous national, regional and local data portals (over 200 according to the Open Data Inception project) have sprung up at a growing pace, and how the private sector and civil society have been putting data to use in promising ways. Latin America has now developed its own open data agenda, forging particularly strong links between countries and within the open data community (Mora and Scrollini, 2017).

In this way, Latin America countries have demonstrated their enthusiasm to advance this agenda in different ways: from events such as AbreLatam and ConDatos, the adopting of the International Open Data Charter by national and regional governments (most of the signatories to the Charter are from Latin America), to the development of open data policies and regulations in some countries. To date, seven countries from the region (Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Peru, Costa Rica, Colombia and Mexico) have put in place sound open

1. A more extensive, Spanish-language version of some of the ideas contained in this article can be found in Fumega, Silvana; Scrollini, Fabrizio and Rodríguez, Gabriela (2018). In addition, developments in the Open Data in Latin America movement can be found in the relevant section of the State of Open Data <https://www.stateofopendata.od4d.net>.

The Open Data Barometer has verified that Latin America is leading the way since five countries are among the top 20 in the global ranking

ILDA is a diverse and inclusive Latin American organisation that contributes to generating and using evidence to solve the biggest problems facing Latin America

data policies, and many of them have done so with the aid of civil society experts and organisations (Mora and Scrollini, 2017). In addition, in terms of measuring open data publication, the Open Data Barometer has verified that the region is leading the way since Mexico, Uruguay, Brazil, Argentina and Colombia are among the top 20 countries in the global ranking (Web Foundation and ILDA, 2017).

As a result of this growing open data movement, the Latin American Open Data Initiative (ILDA)² was created. ILDA was founded after the first Regional Open Data Conference (ConDatos) in Montevideo in 2013.³ It is a diverse and inclusive Latin American organisation that contributes to generating and using evidence to solve the biggest problems facing Latin America and is based on an ethical use of data. One of the main problems in the region is gender violence and, by extension, the most tragic of outcomes – femicide.

Discussion of femicide at regional level has drawn attention to the issue, to the extent that it is now recognised as a problem that needs to be tackled by societies and governments. However, attempts to make the issue more visible have not been matched by improvements to official systems for recording these incidents. Such improvements are essential if societies and governments are to take

2. <https://idatosabiertos.org>

3. Although the initiative began as an international research project supported by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and Fundación Avina, it has since become an international civil association and continues to enjoy the support of the IDRC, together with the Luminare Group.



better decisions and develop public policies that are based on the reality of the situation to combat femicide.

Largely due to the pressing nature of the situation, at ILDA we have decided to study the issue from an empirical perspective within our *Standardisation of Data on Femicide* project.⁴

In this context, it is important to understand how these data are constructed, the variables considered, the methodology employed and, lastly, the levels of access to the data collected in each country. Without understanding the specifics of the methodology employed, it will be hard to gather data that accurately reflects this serious issue, and it will be very difficult to devise adequate solutions and initiatives to mitigate the situation unless an accurate diagnosis is performed.

4. This work is supported by the IDRC, Fundación Avina and the Development Bank of Latin America (CAF) through their shared Platform for Innovation with Purpose initiative.



In 2017, owing to the magnitude of the problem, ILDA launched an exploratory study to understand how data production and use can contribute to potentially combatting femicide in Latin America

2 Is standardisation the right way to go?

At the start of 2017, owing to the magnitude of the problem of femicide in the region, ILDA, at the petition of the member countries of the Open Data group of the Network of e-Government Leaders of Latin America and the Caribbean (Red GEALC), coordinated by the Organization of American States (OAS), launched an exploratory study to understand how data production and use can contribute to understanding and potentially combatting femicide in Latin America.

With this aim, ILDA has designed research-action methodology to assess the scale of the problem, understand how working with data – especially open data – can contribute to finding a solution, and devise recommendations for the countries involved.

This initiative has built upon the work carried out on aspects linked to the production and compilation of data about femicide, such as those provided by the Gender Equality Observatory of the Economic Commission for Latin America



**Iniciativa Latinoamericana
por los Datos Abiertos**

and the Caribbean (ECLAC)⁵ as well as upon the progress made in standardising concepts as a result of the Bogota Protocol.⁶

2.1 Data and social process standards

ILDA has experience in standardising data in the areas of health, employment and air quality. These standardisation procedures involve working actively with those who produce, store, use and eventually release data. The process involved in this standardisation is therefore key. Data standardisation procedures force organisations to think about the kind of data they require, how to collect and store it, and ultimately the processes for using the data (Goëta and Davies, 2016). In other words, the standards are not only shaping how open data are produced but are also bringing about silent, localised changes in bureaucracies (Fumega, Scrollini and Rodríguez, 2017).

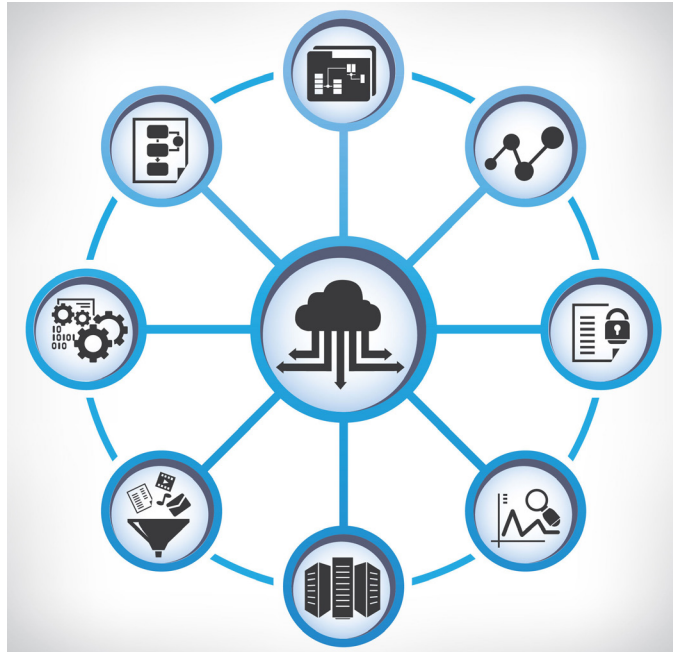
In this way, ILDA explores how uniform and standardised production of data can help the authorities understand different phenomena, develop informed public policies and use these data in a way that allows the public to build on them, thereby improving the quality.

The standards are not only shaping how open data are produced but are also bringing about silent, localised changes in bureaucracies

5. <https://oig.cepal.org/en/indicators/femicide-or-feminicide>

6. http://conferenciahomicidiosbogota2015.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Calidad-de-datos-entregable-ESPA%E2%80%A220L_SOLO_TXT.pdf





Based on its prior experience, ILDA decided to develop a research strategy that was divided into four stages:

- a) Identify and compare the current status across the board by reviewing the available literature;
- b) Test out different approaches to standardisation with a group of previously identified players in the fields of security, gender and open data;
- c) Test out the possible steps to standardise these data and move the process forward; and
- d) Identify promising uses of data by the government and society.

Through this process, ILDA aimed to collect relevant information to understand how modifying or adapting the infrastructure of data on security and gender could affect the issue of femicide.

2.2 Testing out our suppositions: our first workshop

The first workshop took place in San José, Costa Rica on 21 and 22 August 2017, prior to the 5th edition of AbreLatam/ConDatos.⁷ The aim of the meeting was to reflect and work on these issues, which are an important part of the regional agenda. Gender equality activists, public servants working in justice and security, and academics and technology experts from Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Bolivia, Costa Rica and Mexico took part in the workshop.

The participants confirmed that one of the tools needed to help draft public policy and civic technology projects is access to all the data necessary for accurately assessing the situation. Achieving this requires not only better data production tools but also protocols for data collection, publication and use as well as a constant updating of these protocols.

In this highly complex universe, all the participants agreed that it was vital to standardise a minimum dataset that would enable interoperability, cooperation and/or comparison between different jurisdictions.

One of the tools needed to help draft public policy and civic technology projects is access to all the data necessary for accurately assessing the situation

It is vital to standardise a minimum dataset that would enable interoperability, cooperation and/or comparison between different jurisdictions

7. <http://2017.abrelatam.org>



3 Making continual progress

Our process to construct a standard for femicide is still underway, with our pilot project being carried out in collaboration with Argentina's Ministry of Justice and Human Rights. For this reason, final conclusions cannot yet be drawn. However, we can offer a series of lessons learned that relate to the standardisation processes, drawing attention to femicide and the need to devise iterative methodology for standardising public sector data, in particular, in relation to gender:

The same database can be interpreted differently by the government and society

1. When standardising data, it is important to consider the concepts involved and that different ways of interpreting data exist, which give rise to different "truths". In other words, the same database can be interpreted differently by the government and society. Although initially this could be seen as a problem, it is actually a strength as it contributes to dialogue about femicide and policy.

Costa Rica and its observatory provide an example of good practice to be followed in terms of regulating access and sharing data about femicide

2. It is important to establish institutional mechanisms that enable data to be made available with different access levels. In our experience, Costa Rica and its observatory provide an example of good practice to be followed in terms of regulating access and sharing data about femicide. It is particularly important to know what entity has a voice when communicating data.

3. Most standardisation processes involve dealing with systems that have been passed down, and many of them experience the problem of having to input data manually. Different methods exist to automate and improve processes. In our case, we have decided to take these systems as given (part of the reality) and consider that data collection methods need to be modified. In the meantime, it is vital to have clear rules about how to process the data that is obtained from these systems and the validation chains that follow.
4. A general problem is the lack of gender perspective of the players working on this issue. The reasons for this are manifold, but it is indicative of the need to train players within the judicial and security systems on how to collect a series of important data to determine whether a particular incident is a case of femicide or not.
5. A complex situation to resolve is that the death of a woman is not automatically recorded as a femicide. During the investigation of a case or even after the case has been closed, information may emerge that indicates that it is a case of femicide when it had not originally been classified as such. This means that in some cases the official data needs to be reviewed, and protocols must be in place for this.

A complex situation to resolve is that the death of a woman is not automatically recorded as a femicide



The standardisation enables countries to improve the way in which they exchange data reciprocally in a more reasonable timeframe than via an annual report

This process involves back-and-forth dialogue between the standardisation processes, society and decision-makers within organisations

6. The standardisation work at this level reveals the limits that regional comparison instruments have, but it also enables countries to improve the way in which they exchange data reciprocally and in a more reasonable timeframe than via an annual report.
7. An aspect that has yet to be studied is whether applied technologies for automated learning and data analysis can help in the creation and implementation of specific government policies to tackle femicide.

In summary, standardisation experience in the case of femicide shows that rather than being a technical process, it is an exercise which allows data production and use, as well as the problems with gender bias when constructing these data, to be reconsidered. Standardisation takes part within legal and institutional contexts, which may then be modified by such standardisation, although this process involves back-and-forth dialogue between the standardisation processes, society and decision-makers within organisations. ■

References

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) (2016). *Femicide or feminicide*. Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Fumega, Silvana; Scrollini, Fabrizio and Rodríguez, Gabriela (2017). *Datos, género y seguridad*. Report from the workshop in San José, Costa Rica. ILDA.

Fumega, Silvana; Scrollini, Fabrizio and Rodríguez, Gabriela (2018). **Nuevos estándares para la publicación de datos de justicia y violencia de género**. In: *Justicia Abierta: aportes para una agenda en construcción* (p. 283-308). Biblioteca Digital.

Goëta, Samuel and Davies, Tim (2016). **The Daily Shaping of State Transparency: Standards, Machine-Readability and the Configuration of Open Government Data Policies**. *Science & Technology Studies*, 29(4).

Mora, Mike and Scrollini, Fabrizio (2017). *Precisamos políticas de datos abiertos*. ILDA.

Web Foundation and ILDA (2017). *Open Data Barometer. Latin America Regional Snapshot*.

