

Joint Statement on
**REDUCING MATERNAL
MORBIDITY AND MORTALITY**



prevent the preventable
zero
maternal
DEATHS

JOINT STATEMENT ON REDUCING MATERNAL MORBIDITY AND MORTALITY

Washington, D.C., March 08, 2023



Over the past decade, the reduction of maternal mortality in Latin America and the Caribbean has shown signs of a marked slowdown and in some cases a reversal, jeopardizing commitments made at the global and regional levels and by Member States themselves, including those established for the Sustainable Development Goals.¹



On average, almost 8,000 women and other people who give birth died annually during pregnancy, childbirth and up to 42 days postpartum in Latin America and the Caribbean between 2015 and 2020. Since 2020, the situation has become even more dire due to the direct and indirect impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic that have posed a major setback in progress toward eradicating preventable maternal deaths. In 2020, the number of maternal deaths in the region soared to over 8,000 – a 9% increase from the estimated 7,742 maternal deaths recorded in 2019 before the pandemic began – while the maternal mortality rate increased from 77 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2019 to an estimated 88 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2020. Moreover, preliminary estimates indicate a maternal mortality rate of 113 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2021, showing an alarming upward trend in maternal deaths compared to pre-pandemic years.²



Although all women are at risk of experiencing pregnancy-related complications, there is a clear relationship between socioeconomic status and increased risk of maternal illness and death. Deep-seated structural inequalities related to gender, ethnicity, place of residence, and levels of formal education are among the many social and cultural factors that contribute to preventable maternal deaths in the region. There is also a higher maternal mortality rate among indigenous women, women of African descent, migrant women, women living in poverty, and women living in rural areas.² The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these inequalities due to overburdened health

1- World Health Organization (2019). Trends in maternal mortality 2000 to 2017: estimates by WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group and the United Nations Population Division. Geneva: World Health Organization. Available at <https://www.unfpa.org/featured-publication/trends-maternal-mortality-2000-2017>.

systems, isolation measures, and a decrease in the supply and demand of services, as well as in the quality of care.^{2,3}

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the vast majority of maternal deaths are the result of preventable causes: hemorrhage, pregnancy-induced hypertension, complications related to unsafe abortion, and sepsis, as well as indirect causes such as severe acute respiratory infections.⁴

Despite the preventable nature of these deaths, maternal mortality continues to increase throughout the region due to major systemic issues, including limited access to health facilities and respectful maternal care; a shortage of skilled personnel, including professional midwives; and lack of facilities capable of providing quality obstetric care, especially in rural and hard-to-reach areas.⁵

Maternal mortality is a serious public health problem rooted in social inequities that violates the right of every woman to health and life. Maternal death has enormous health and economic implications for families and communities, given the important role that women play in family life and in the social and economic development in the region.

Therefore, the organizations that make up the Regional Task Force for the Reduction of Maternal Mortality (Grupo de Trabajo Regional para la Reducción de la Mortalidad Materna [GTR]) call for action to accelerate the reduction of maternal mortality. As GTR, we commit to promote and support the implementation of the strategic guidelines agreed to in the Interagency Strategic Consensus for the Reduction of Maternal Morbidity and Mortality 2020-2030⁶ at the public policy, health systems, and information and surveillance systems levels.

2- Chapman E, Ramos S, Romero M, Sciarano G, Camacho-Hubner VC, & Ricca J. (2021). Rapid diagnosis of determinants and contributing factors to the increase in maternal and perinatal mortality during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Latin American and Caribbean Region: Establishing the basis for countries to be prepared and develop effective responses. Paper prepared for UNFPA and MOMENTUM. December 2021.

3- ECLAC (2022). The sociodemographic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in Latin America and the Caribbean. Available at <https://www.cepal.org/en/publications/47923-sociodemographic-impacts-covid-19-pandemic-latin-america-and-caribbean>

4- Say L, Chou D, Tuncalp O, Moller A-B, et al. (2016) Global causes of maternal death: a WHO systematic analysis. *The Lancet*; 2(6), 302-302. Available at: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X\(14\)70227-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X(14)70227-X/fulltext) DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X\(14\)70227-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(14)70227-X)

5- Chou D, Daelmans B, Jolivet R, Kinney M, Say L. (2015) Ending preventable maternal and newborn mortality and stillbirths. *BMJ*; 351:h4255. Available at: <https://www.bmj.com/content/351/bmj.h4255> DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.h4255>

6- Regional Working Group for the Reduction of Maternal Mortality (GTR). Consenso Estratégico Interagencial para la Reducción de la Morbi-mortalidad Materna: orientaciones estratégicas para el decenio 2020-2030. Panama: GTR; 2021. https://lac.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/geco-238_gtr_interagencystategicconsensus_2020_2030_english_final_0.pdf

We, GTR member organizations, commit to advocate with governments and other key stakeholders to make maternal health a policy priority. We also call on governments to commit politically and financially to end preventable maternal deaths; on donors to earmark financial resources to this cause; on technical agencies to provide the necessary assistance; and on media to highlight this critical issue to garner public support. Without these joint efforts, progress towards eradicating preventable maternal deaths will stall, and women's fundamental human rights to health and life will remain under threat.

To this end, let us prevent the preventable. Let us act urgently towards a region with zero preventable maternal deaths.

Regional Task Force for the Reduction of Maternal Mortality

Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization, United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Children's Fund, World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, United States Agency for International Development, International Confederation of Midwives, Latin American Federation of Obstetrics and Gynecology Societies, Management Sciences for Health, MOMENTUM Country Global and Leadership, and Fòs Feminista.



This campaign is also supported by Every Woman Every Child Latin America and the Caribbean (EWEC-LAC), the regional interagency mechanism for coordinating the adaptation and implementation of the Global Strategy for the Women's, Children's and Adolescent's Health (2016-2030) in Latin America and the Caribbean.



prevent the preventable
zero
maternal
DEATHS