



Evidence Gap Map
Summary Report



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The effects of human rights interventions on rights-related outcomes



Highlights



- This evidence gap map (EGM) includes **377 impact evaluations and 46 systematic reviews**. Of the 42 completed systematic reviews, we rated one as high confidence, 11 as medium confidence, and 30 as low confidence.
- The largest number of human rights studies included in the map took place in Sub-Saharan Africa (IE=147, SR=30), followed by South Asia (IE=94, SR=19), Latin America and Caribbean (IE=67, SR=19), and East Asia and Pacific (IE=31, SR=14).
- The **human rights** most commonly measured in this map, in order of frequency, are: (1) freedom from torture and degrading treatment, (2) the right to participate in public affairs, (3) the right to non-discrimination and equality, and (4) the right to life, liberty, and security.
- **Interventions**
 Evidence concentrations: Most included studies focus on interventions to reduce or prevent violence, promote voting, and address discrimination.
 Evidence gaps: There is a notable gap in rigorous evidence for programs that monitor human rights compliance, provide support for rights defenders, and remedy violations.
- **Outcomes**
 Evidence concentrations: The primary outcomes measured by systematic reviews and quantitative impact evaluations relate to incidence of non-institutional violence followed by attitudes, beliefs, and norms around human rights and/or populations historically at risk of discrimination. Qualitative evaluations fill important gaps by investigating rarely studied outcomes, such as those related to coordination and human rights support.
 Evidence gaps: There is a significant gap in evidence for outcomes related to (1) investigating and prosecuting perpetrators of human rights violations, (2) restrictions that prevent rights holders from free and equal enjoyment of their rights, (3) redress for victims of human rights violations, (4) access to information, (5) self-determination for indigenous or minority ethnic groups, and (6) the quality of the environment.
- High- and medium-confidence **systematic reviews** find that education to promote rights-affirming behaviors, and psychosocial support including community mobilization could be promising interventions to address violations of women's rights, such as gender-based domestic violence. However, most included studies had a high risk of bias and were deemed to be "low-quality," highlighting the need for high-quality human rights evidence.

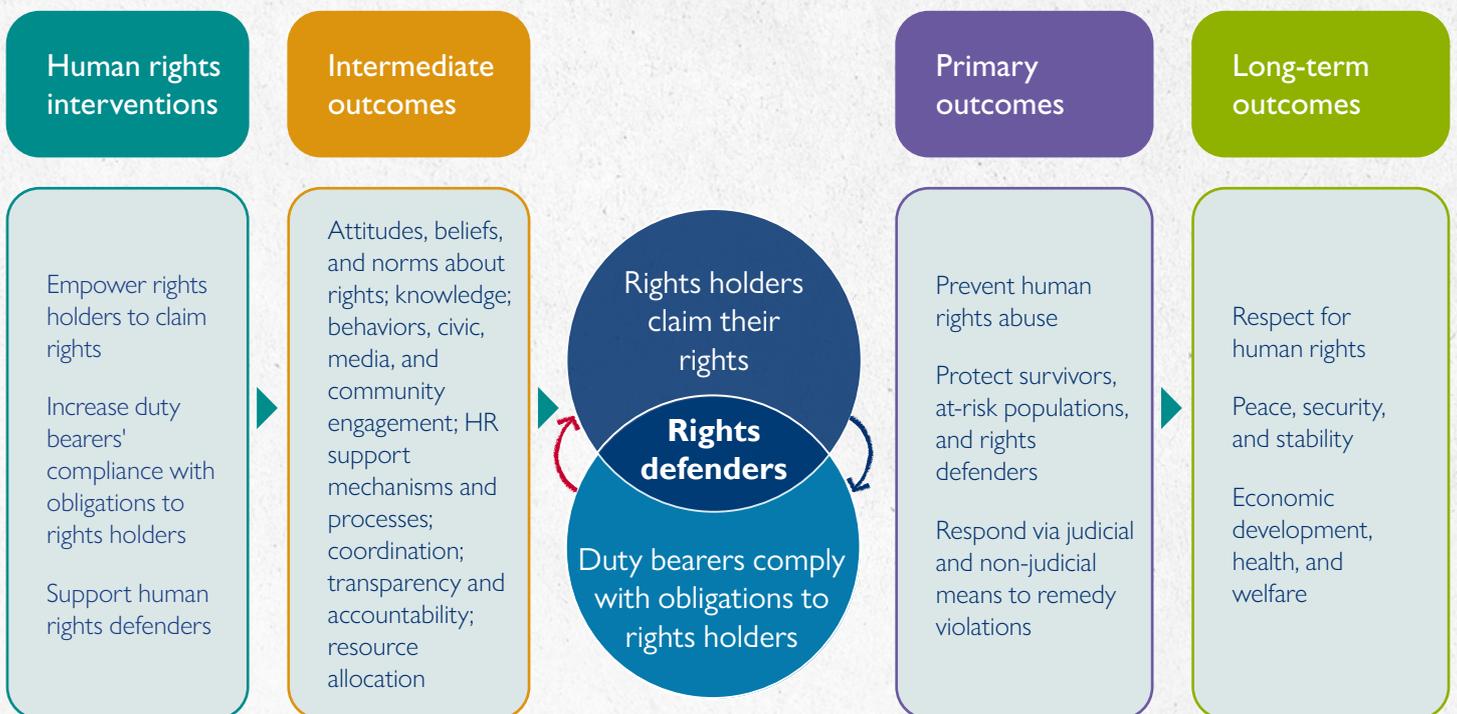


Conceptualizing human rights

According to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, human rights are entitlements inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status.^{1,2} Each right implies an obligation of the state, and there is a direct and corresponding correlation between rights and obligations. Human rights are enshrined in international, regional, and domestic norms, laws, and policies and require protection and promotion through systems, services, and society; yet the full and equitable

realization of human rights is a challenging task. The human rights-based approach and key United States Agency for International Development (USAID) democracy, human rights, and governance (DRG) documents used in this map propose that protecting human rights relies on actions from two types of actors: duty bearers and rights holders.^{3,4,5,6} Human rights defenders (HRDs) are included within both groups (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Conceptualizing systems that protect human rights



Source: 3ie, adapted from: USAID 2013; 2016; 2019 and UNFPA 2014.

In this conceptualization, **rights holders** are individuals or groups who should be able to enjoy certain fundamental entitlements, and participate in claiming their rights. **Duty bearers** are state (e.g. public institutions) or non-state (e.g. corporations, rebel groups) actors. They are obligated to protect the rights of rights-holders by creating laws, policies, institutions, and procedures to **prevent** human rights abuses, **protect** survivors, HRDs, and other at-risk and threatened populations, and **respond** to human rights violations when they occur.⁷ **HRDs** can be any person or group working to promote or protect human rights.⁸

Within this conceptualization, we developed a framework of human rights interventions and their expected outcomes in order to categorize and map the evidence base (Figure 2). Interventions from this research are broadly categorized as to whether they **improve duty bearer capacity, empower rights holders, and/or strengthen HRDs' capacity.**

The framework maps these interventions to their intended impacts, grouped as **intermediate, primary, and long-term outcomes.**

Conceptualizing human rights

Figure 2: Examples of human rights interventions and outcomes

Examples of interventions



Examples of outcomes



Source: 3ie. Note: This figure includes illustrative examples only. For the full list of interventions and outcomes studied, please see the full report, Kozakiewicz, T., van Busirk, H., Franich, A., Hammaker, J., Prasad, S., Adams, L., Glandon, D. 2022. The effects of human rights interventions on rights-related outcomes: an evidence gap map. New Delhi: International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie). The example interventions and outcomes listed above do not necessarily correspond to each other.



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Main findings

We conducted an extensive search of peer-reviewed and grey literature. The search returned a total of 72,562 records. After removing duplicates and screening 48,080 records, we included 423 studies in the EGM: 46 systematic reviews (SRs) and 377 impact evaluations (IEs).²⁰ All studies were published after the year 2000, with a large increase in studies published after 2008. Most included systematic reviews were published after 2012. Figure 3 identifies the number of included studies within each intervention category.

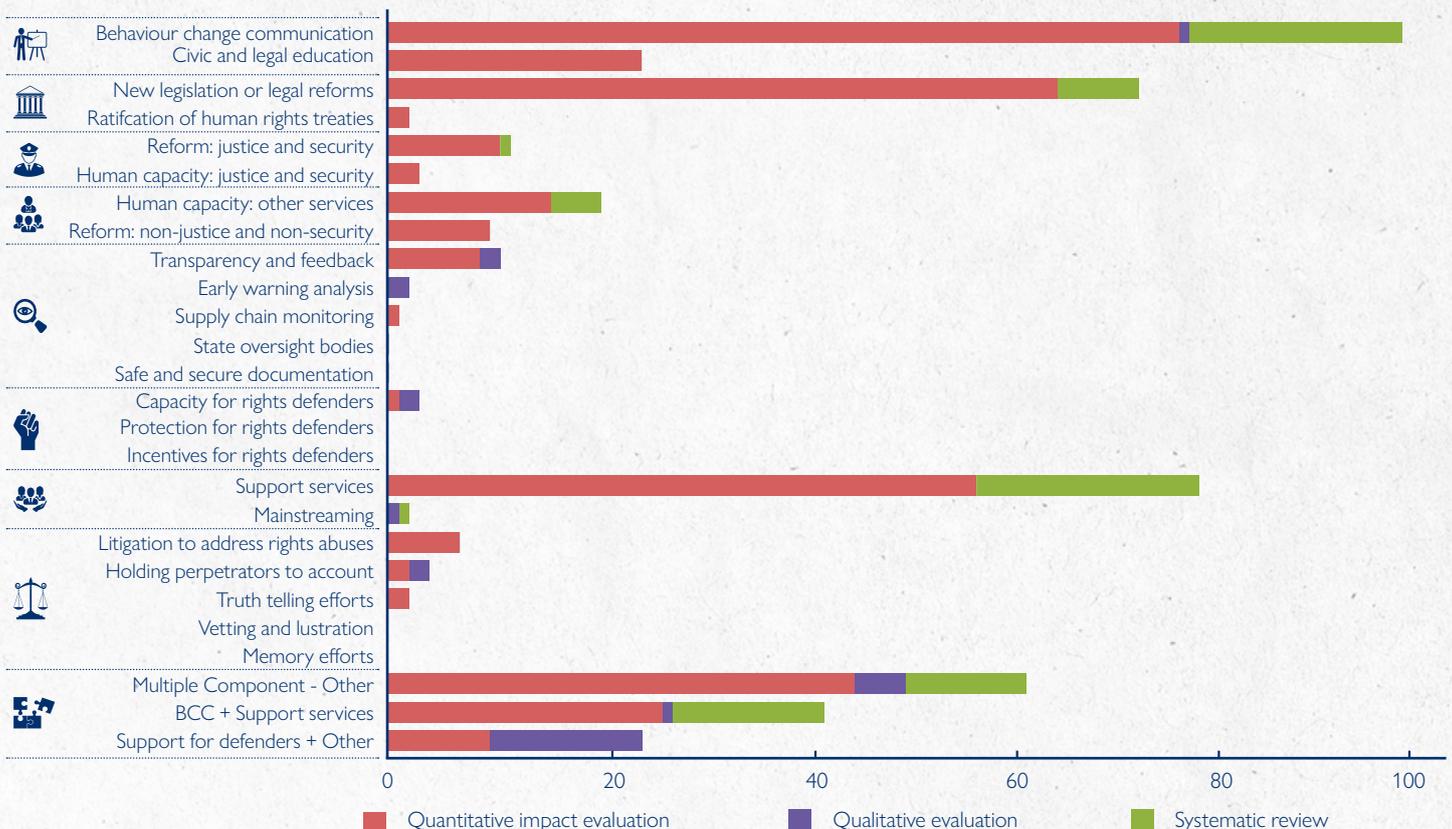
Of the 377 evaluations, 347 are quantitative, and 30 studies use qualitative methods to seek to establish causal inference. Of the quantitative approximately 55 percent were experimental, randomized controlled trials (RCTs) (n = 209). Among quasi-experimental methods, difference-in-difference approaches were the most common (n=58), followed by fixed effects estimation (n=28) and statistical matching, including propensity score matching (n=24). The most frequent qualitative design was process tracing (n=10), followed by contribution analysis (n=9) and outcome harvesting(n=7).

42 of the included SRs are completed and four were ongoing at the time of the map's publication. We appraised all completed SRs and we assessed only one as high confidence.²¹ We rated 11 as medium confidence with the majority, above 70 percent (n=30), rated as low confidence.

The majority of studies (n=249) were conducted in countries with partially free status according to the latest Freedom in the World Index, including India (n=78), Kenya (n=42), Tanzania (n=22).²² This was followed by studies from countries with not free status (n=128), such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iran, Uganda, Iran, Ethiopia, and Rwanda. Fifty-eight studies were conducted in countries with free status, most notably in South Africa (n=26) and Brazil (n=22).

Most included studies focused on interventions to uphold (1) freedom from torture and degrading treatment, (2) the right to participate in public affairs, (3) the right to non-discrimination and equality, and (4) the right to life, liberty, and security. Behavioral change campaigns and support services for victims or at-risk populations were the two largest intervention categories studied by quantitative IEs and SRs (Figure 3). These studies predominantly focused on reducing or preventing gender-based violence and/or campaigns to promote voter turnout. Other common topics were: new legislation to support equal protection before the law, measures to eliminate discriminatory treatment, and access to services for at-risk groups, such as political quotas for females and different minorities.

Figure 3: Studies identified by intervention and study design²³



Main findings

The following interventions were exclusively evaluated using **quantitative IEs** methods:

- Civic and legal education
- Ratification of treaties
- Reform of the non-justice/non-security sector
- Supply chain monitoring
- Litigation to address rights abuses
- Truth-telling efforts

While evidence for these interventions are entirely or almost entirely qualitative:

- Early warning analysis
- Capacity building for rights defenders
- Accountability for perpetrators

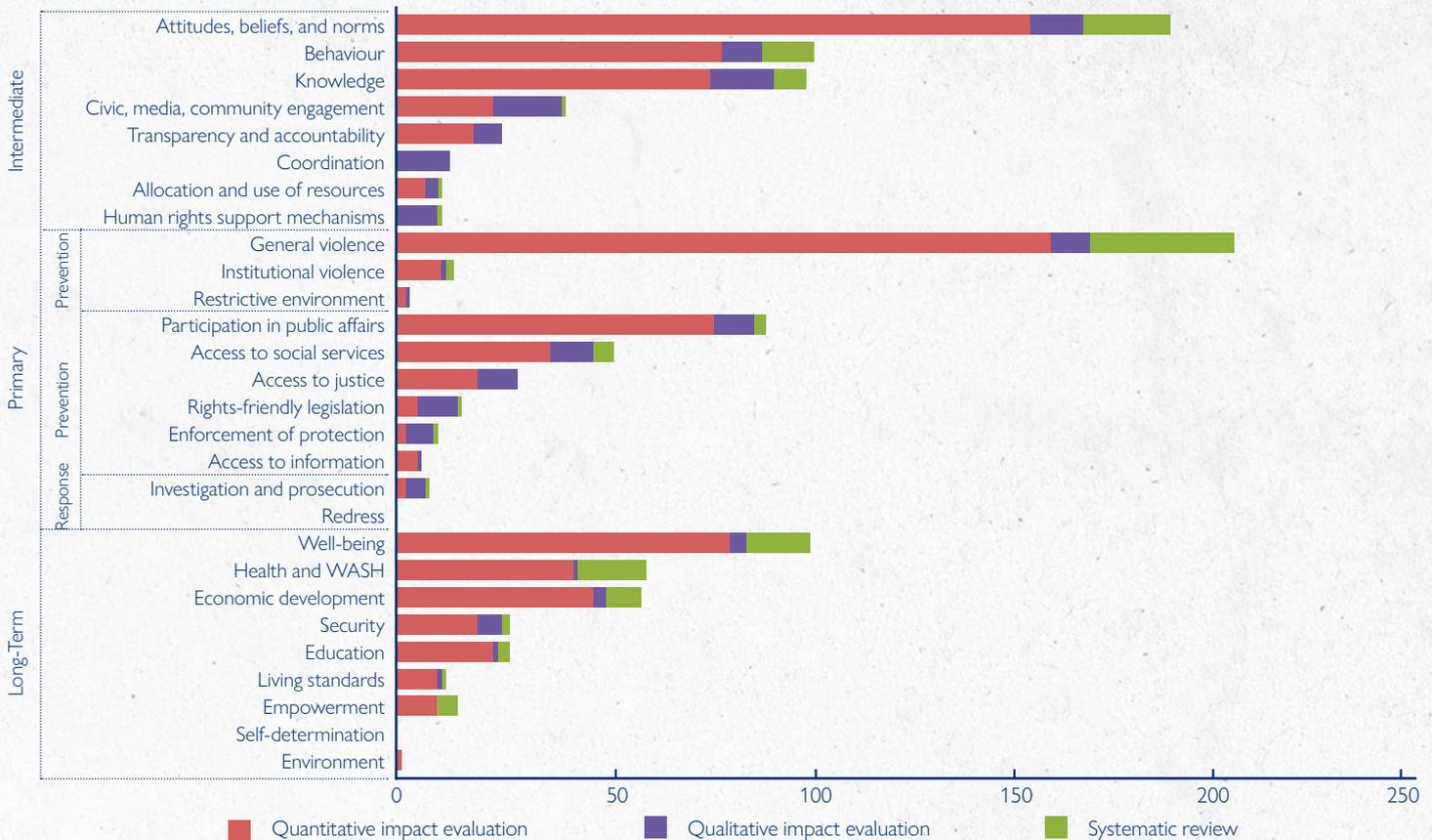
Among multi-component interventions, 16% used qualitative evaluation methods, relative to the 7% qualitative share of the overall evidence base.

Taking a closer look at the studies evaluating multi-component **interventions that support HRDs**, 60 per cent of these used qualitative methods. We identified 25 interventions spread across 20 different multi-component intervention combinations. Of these, two qualitative studies and one quantitative study contained only components

from the support for HRDs category. Improving 'capacity and security protocols for rights defenders' is the most frequent HRD intervention component and was targeted by all of these studies. Eleven studies evaluated interventions that aim to strengthen protection mechanisms for rights defenders. We did not identify any studies of interventions that create incentives for rights defenders.

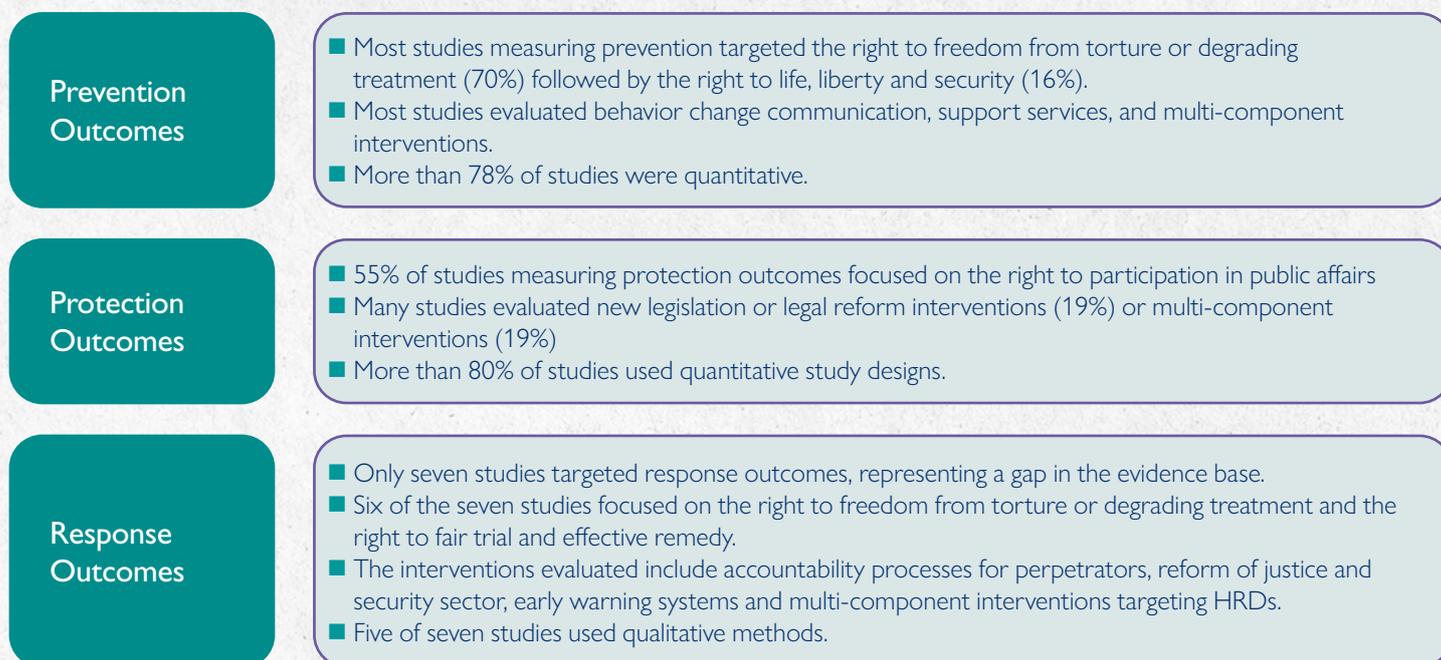
The majority of studies focused on outcomes related to non-institutional violence or attitudes, beliefs, and norms. In Figure 4, we present the frequencies of outcomes by study design. SRs and quantitative IEs most frequently measure general violence by non-state actors, followed by attitudes, beliefs, and norms, well-being and public participation outcomes. Here, qualitative evaluations fill an important gap, providing all the data on coordination outcomes, as well as the majority of data on human rights support, rights-friendly legislation, protection enforcement, investigation, and prosecution. Civic engagement and transparency and accountability outcomes also feature strongly in the qualitative studies, in line with the large subset of these evaluations that focus on civil society programs. In Figure 5 we describe studies that targeted prevention, protection and response outcomes.

Figure 4: Frequency of outcomes reported by study design



Main findings

Figure 5: Studies measuring Prevention, Protection, and Response Outcomes



Methodological gaps exist in the evidence base.

Less than 8 per cent of included evaluations were qualitative and less than a third used both quantitative and qualitative methods. Using mixed-methods approaches or applying qualitative methods on their own can help shed light on causal mechanisms, subjective experience, and key contextual factors (e.g., by exploring complex socio-political contexts). This is particularly valuable for interventions that aim to support rights defenders and groups historically at risk of discrimination and violence, because understanding subjective experience and key factors can help to contextualize the study findings. Less than 10 per cent of included studies incorporated cost analyses (e.g., program costs, cost-benefit). Future research should prioritize including cost data in the evaluation design to help policymakers and practitioners make informed decisions on efficient resource allocation.

High- and medium-confidence systematic reviews suggest that education to promote rights-affirming behaviors within psychosocial interventions and community mobilization show promise in preventing violence against women and girls. Information, education and communication

approaches within psychosocial interventions, such as psychological and/or counselling-based interventions, discussion groups, sexual health education, and mobilization of community members, demonstrated some limited desirable effects on rights affirming norms,²⁴ behaviors,^{25,26} and preventing IPV.^{27,28,29,30}

In two reviews that we assessed as high-risk for methodological bias, education of the public, outreach, advocacy and multimedia communication may have positively affected attitudes and knowledge of female genital mutilation/cutting,³¹ as well as fewer women recommending it to their daughters and reducing its incidence.³² In general, the authors of the reviews found that the quantity of research in the human rights sector is limited, preventing the authors from drawing conclusions regarding the interventions' effectiveness. There is a need for more high-confidence systematic reviews as we assessed only one review with high-confidence.³³ For future work in the field, review authors recommended: (1) increasing the production of high-quality evaluation research, (2) offering practical suggestions for refining measurement, and (3) developing, articulating, and testing theories of change.

Implications for future research

In addition to helping stakeholders identify relevant literature, this EGM serves as a starting point in discussing how to build the evidence base. There is a significant opportunity for future IEs and SRs based on the gaps identified here. Drawing on these evidence gaps, we suggest several key areas where future work could be useful and encourage stakeholders to consider their own priorities and interests when reviewing the EGM (Table 1).

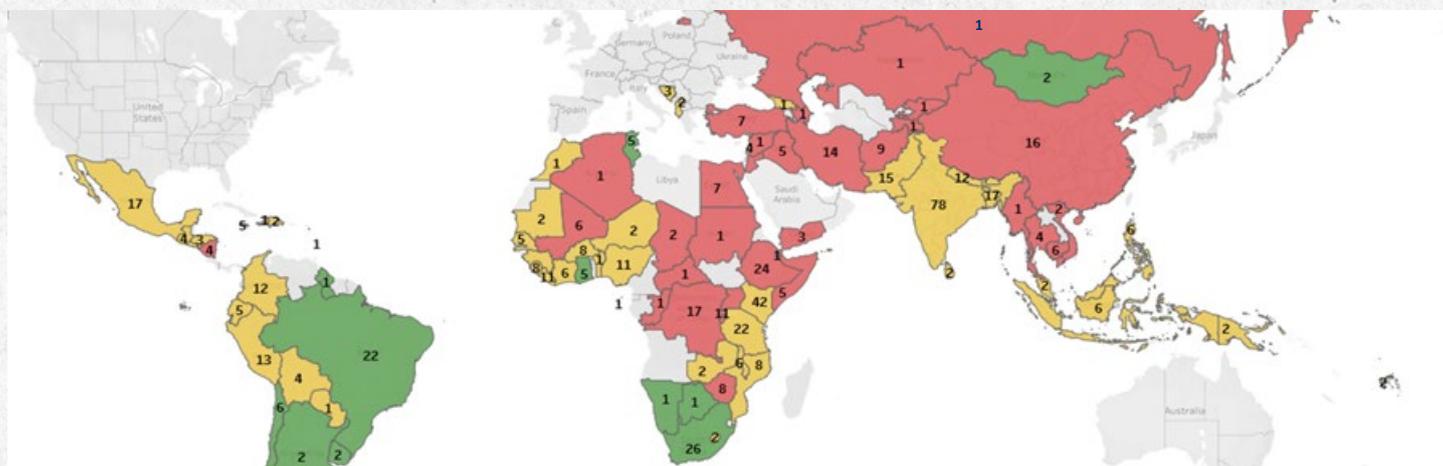
As researchers work to fill the evidence gaps noted above, they should also seek to improve the quality of the human rights evidence base; first, by conducting rigorous IEs using methods that allow for causal attribution. While randomized controlled trials are not always feasible, there are many quasi-experimental IE methods well-suited to assess the effectiveness of human rights programming. Gathering baseline data and participant characteristics in addition to outcome monitoring is often key to establishing a counterfactual comparison group through methods such as difference-in-difference, and statistical matching. Alternatively, the specific qualitative evaluation methods included in the map that aim to establish causality can be used³⁵. Second, researchers should seek to improve the quality of IEs by providing thorough descriptions of evaluation methods and processes, and addressing assumptions, limitations, and risk of bias. This detailed level of analysis enhances transparency and replicability and increases confidence in the validity of results. This is an important area for improvement, as although approximately half of the studies included in this map examine violence outcomes (representing an evidence concentration), high- and medium-confidence SR authors examining gender-based violence were unable to come to firm conclusions on the effects of interventions due to methodological risks of bias in research methods used in included studies. Improving the quality of primary research will facilitate the production of future synthesis work and fill gaps in this arena.



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Table 1: Gaps in the human rights evidence base

Type of gap	Suggested area of research
Intervention gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early warning analysis State oversight bodies Safe and secure documentation Transparency and feedback Supply chain monitoring <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for rights defenders: Capacity, protection, or incentives Litigation to address rights abuses Truth-telling efforts Holding perpetrators to account Vetting and lustration Memory efforts
Outcome gaps	<p>Prevention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presence of restrictive environment preventing full enjoyment of rights <p>Response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased investigation and prosecution of rights violations Provision of redress for victims <p>Long-term</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased territorial or cultural self-determination Improved quality of environment
Population group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trafficking survivors Dissidents LGBTQI+³⁴ populations Incarcerated people and those re-entering society Religious minorities People with substance use issues
Geography gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regions: East Asia and the Pacific Countries: refer to Figure 6
Synthesis gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interventions with at least on support for rights defenders component Legislation reforms on rights-related outcomes Studies that measure protection-related outcomes Studies that measure security-related outcomes
Methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Qualitative Evaluations Mixed-method Impact Evaluations

Figure 6: Geographical spread of the evidence base and Freedom House Human Rights Index ratings in 2021

Note: The figure does not include: studies that report findings from a region without making clear of the exact countries; those conducted in more than 15 countries with no disaggregated effects provided for each country; systematic reviews that found no studies.

Using the evidence patterns in the EGM

1. Inform research agenda-setting processes. The EGM findings can help identify priority areas for future research investment, particularly where combined with expertise from diverse stakeholders to effectively interpret the different gaps.

1. Investments in new impact evaluations may be particularly beneficial when they target interventions for which limited evidence exists or where there is limited evidence for the effects of the intervention on a population or context of interest. For example, the map shows gaps in the evidence relating to monitoring of human rights compliance and support for human rights defenders. Although many of these interventions receive substantial funding for implementation, there is a lack of evidence on their effects. Improving the availability of evidence could help facilitate evidence informed action.

2. Where large concentrations of primary evidence already exist, investments in additional IEs may not provide as much value as investments in evaluations of interventions and outcomes for which little or no impact evaluation evidence exists. For example, this map found a significant evidence base of violence prevention IEs and SRs focusing on violence, particularly gender-based violence, outcomes, but the quality of much of this work needs improvement.

3. Where there are concentrations of IE evidence and existing SRs are out of date, have methodological limitations or do not cover populations of interest, new SRs may help ensure policymaking and programming is informed by the best available evidence. For example, 26 IEs with civic and legal interventions were included, but there are no available SRs. Furthermore, only one high-quality SR was found.

2. Support policy and program design. Where stakeholders are interested in targeting a particular outcome, they can use the EGM to identify which interventions may be

likely to affect the outcome of interest. The hyperlinks within the online EGM enable easy access to rigorous evidence that can be consulted when designing new policies and programs to identify which intervention approaches may be more or less effective at affecting the outcome of interest. Where multiple interventions have been undertaken to influence a particular outcome, stakeholders can use the filters in the EGM to identify which interventions may have been undertaken for geographies or population groups of interest. Similarly, the EGM can enable stakeholders to identify which interventions have targeted a particular population group of interest, such as women and girls or people with disabilities. For example, a limited number of studies targeted the protection of rights of LGBTQI+ populations, so users interested in this group may wish to filter the map by this population to readily locate these studies.

3. Identify the range of outcomes that have been theorized to be impacted by a particular intervention.

This can support stakeholders in understanding all outcomes that may be influenced through their intervention. This is particularly important when considering potential adverse effects, which may be captured in outcomes related to well-being.

4. Identifying examples of impact evaluations undertaken in a particular context or using a particular method. This can be useful for identifying potential challenges and strategies applied to address obstacles that may strengthen the quality of future research. For example, stakeholders interested in undertaking IEs in fragile contexts may use the FCV (Fragility, conflict and violence) filter to identify evidence from particularly fragile contexts to understand the methods, challenges, and approaches used when undertaking IEs in such complex environments. Similarly, the methods filter can be used to identify intervention areas where qualitative research is more used, such as support for rights defenders.

Accessing and engaging with the evidence gap map

We present the results of the EGM graphically on an interactive online platform.³⁶ The main framework is a matrix of interventions and outcomes, with different colored circles representing the types of studies. Quantitative IEs are represented by grey circles, while qualitative evaluations are represented by light blue circles. Ongoing IEs are represented by pink circles. The SRs follow a traffic-light system to indicate confidence in their findings: green for high, orange for medium, red for low. The dark blue color indicates that a

review is ongoing. The size of the bubble indicates the relative size of the evidence base for that intersection of intervention and outcome. The interactive aspect of the EGM allows users to filter the results based on key variables, thereby facilitating efficient, user-friendly identification of relevant evidence. The evidence can be filtered by region, country, population, country income level, electoral democracy, fragility and conflict status, availability of cost evidence, study design, theme (DRG program area) and the targeted human right.

Human rights evidence gap map

Figure 7: Snapshot from online EGM



What is an EGM?

The evidence gap maps are collections of evidence from IEs and SRs for a given sector or policy issue, organized according to the types of program evaluated and the outcomes measured. They include an interactive online visualization of the evidence base, displayed in a framework of relevant interventions and outcomes.

They highlight where there are sufficient IEs to support SRs and where more studies are needed. These maps help decision makers target their resources to fill these important evidence gaps and avoid duplication. They also facilitate evidence-informed decision-making by making existing research more accessible.

About the summary report

The studies this report is based on were identified through the Human Rights EGM by Tomasz Kozakiewicz and colleagues (2022). The authors systematically searched for published and unpublished IEs and SRs through May 2021, then identified, mapped, and described the evidence base of interventions that aim to strengthen human rights. The map contains 46 SRs and 377 IEs. The evidence's characteristics are described and mapped according to a framework of 23 interventions (supplemented by several of the most common multiple-component combinations) and 28 outcomes. The EGM can be viewed at <https://developmentevidence.3ieimpact.org/egm/human-rights>.

This summary report was authored by Tomasz Kozakiewicz, Heather van Buskirk, Amber Franich, Sridevi Prasad, Jane Hammaker, and Douglas Glandon. They are solely responsible for all content, errors, and omissions. It was designed and produced by Akarsh Gupta, and Tanvi Lal.

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Endnotes

- ¹ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948
- ² In this research, we include studies of interventions that target civil, political, economic, social, environmental and cultural rights, the latter four through their intersection with discrimination (Kozakiewicz et al., 2022).
- ³ Duty bearers are expected to respect rights, which means that they do not interfere with their enjoyment. They are obligated to protect rights by preventing others from interfering with the enjoyment of those rights. Finally, they are expected to fulfil rights by creating laws, policies, institutions, and procedures that allow people to enjoy their rights
Rights holders are individuals or groups who should be able to enjoy certain fundamental entitlements regardless of their status, such as race or citizenship. The idea of participation is central to the provision of rights to the right-holders. Through participation, individuals and communities shape their own progress and development instead of simply being passive recipients of benefits (UNFPA 2014).
- ⁴ USAID 2013. USAID Strategy on Democracy Human Rights and Governance. United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Available at: https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/USAID-DRG_fina_6-24-31.pdf
- ⁵ USAID 2016. Human Rights Landscape Analysis Tool: Guidance on Identifying Key Issues and Entry Points for Human Rights Programming. United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Available at: https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PBAAE633.pdf
- ⁶ USAID 2019. User's Guide to Democracy, Human Rights and Governance Programming. United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Available at: <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/DRG-Users-Guide-3.15.2019.pdf>
- ⁷ The DRG's 2013 strategy that details this "prevention, protection, response" framework can be found at the following link: <https://www.usaid.gov/democracy/democracy-human-rights-and-governance-strategy>.
- ⁸ HRDs are identified by their actions; they may be paid for their work or volunteer, and work at the local, national, or international level (OHCHR 2021).
- ⁹ Berlin 2015. Why (Not) Arrest? Third-Party State Compliance and Noncompliance with International Criminal Tribunals. *Journal of Human Rights* 15(4), 509–532. [Online] Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14754835.2015.1103160>
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- ²⁰ An impact evaluation looks at questions related to effects, i.e. it measures how an intervention affects target outcomes. Systematic reviews use systematic and reproducible analytical methods to collect and analyze secondary sources on a certain topic; to be included in the map, they would need to address an effectiveness question.
- ²¹ We use an adapted version of the Supporting the Use of Research Evidence (SURE) Collaboration checklist to determine the level of confidence that should be placed in a systematic review of effects. We rate systematic reviews either as high, medium or low confidence. The checklist we use to assess reviews can be found at <https://www.3ieimpact.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/quality-appraisal-checklist-sr-database.pdf>
- ²² Ratings are derived from a point-based scoring system encompassing 10 political rights indicators and 15 civil liberties indicators. Freedom House notes that countries within any one category can have "quite different human rights situations" and that "a designation of free does not mean that a country or territory enjoys perfect freedom or lacks serious problems, only that it enjoys comparatively more freedom than those rated partly free or not free" (Freedom House 2021).
- ²³ The symbols represent overarching intervention categories: 🏛️ = Human rights education and promotion of rights for the public; 📜 = Reform of legislation; 🏢 = Institutional strengthening of justice and security sectors; 🛡️ = Institutional strengthening of non-justice and non-security service providers; 🕒 = Monitoring of human rights compliance; 🛡️ = Support for human rights defenders; 🛡️ = Protection of groups historically at risk of discrimination or violence; 🛡️ = Remedies for human rights violations; 🛡️ = Multi-component interventions.
- ²⁴ Bourey et al., 2015, (p.14). Systematic review of structural interventions for intimate partner violence in low- and middle-income countries: organizing evidence for prevention. *BMC Public Health*, 15(1), p. 1165. doi:10.1186/s12889-015-2460-4.
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- ³⁰ Semahegn, et al. 2019, (p. 28). Are interventions focused on gender-norms effective in preventing domestic violence against women in low and lower-middle income countries? A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Reproductive Health*, 16(1), p. 93. doi:10.1186/s12978-019-0726-5
- ³¹ Berg and Denison 2013, (p. 42). Interventions To Reduce The Prevalence Of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting In African Countries. Available at: <https://www.3ieimpact.org/evidence-hub/publications/systematic-reviews/interventions-reduce-prevalence-female-genital>
- ³² Esu et al., 2017, (p.72). Providing Information to Improve Body Image and Care-Seeking Behavior of Women and Girls Living with Female Genital Mutilation: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics* 136(S1), 72–78. [Online] Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/ijgo.12058>
- ³³ A review classified as high confidence means that we determined that the methods undertaken in the review were in line with best practices. Figure 6 of the full report provides links to summaries for each of the high and medium confidence reviews.
- ³⁴ LGBTQI+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (persons) or other sexual and gender identities affected by the issues faced by the LGBTQI community
- ³⁵ These include realist evaluation, process tracing, contribution analysis, contribution tracing, the qualitative impact assessment protocol, general elimination methodology, qualitative comparative analysis, and outcome harvesting.
- ³⁶ The map can be found here: <https://developmentevidence.3ieimpact.org/egm/human-rights>

The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) promotes evidence-informed, equitable, inclusive and sustainable development. We support the generation and effective use of high-quality evidence to inform decision-making and improve the lives of people living in poverty in low- and middle-income countries. We provide guidance and support to produce, synthesise and quality-assure evidence of what works, for whom, how, why and at what cost.

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