

SUCCESS STORY

Guatemala and USAID's Peacebuilding Project sign MOU to reduce sexual violence, exploitation and human trafficking

By: Erin Treinen



First, Sara Barker, COP of Proyecto Tejiendo Paz, Vice President of Guatemala, Lic. Guillermo Castillo, SVET Executive Secretary Licda. Sandy Recinos, and Citizen Security Team Leader in DGO Karen James

(Photo By: Peacebuilding Project).

Guatemala City – The Guatemalan Government and Creative Associates International, through the USAID's Peacebuilding Project, signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to help reduce gender-based violence, and advise authorities on the detection and prevention of such crimes in the country's Western Highlands, where incidents of sexual violence increased by 40 percent during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Signed by the Executive Director of the Secretariat Against Sexual Violence, Exploitation and Human Trafficking (SVET, its Spanish acronym) and the Peacebuilding Project's Chief of Party, the MOU is a strategic effort to advise and guide state institutions on issues related to the detection, prevention and protection of crimes involving sexual violence, exploitation and trafficking in persons. Fostering inter-institutional collaboration is part of *Tejiendo Paz's* broader vision to build bridges between the communities and the government authorities and agencies tasked with addressing conflict. Working in the Western Highlands, *Tejiendo Paz* gives communities tools to identify, address and mediate social conflict through trainings, creating networks of mediators, and fostering civic engagement.



Sara Barker,
COP of Proyecto Tejiendo Paz, signing the MOU.
(Photo By: Peacebuilding Project).

Incidents of gender-based violence are a persistent problem in Guatemala, which ranks among the countries with the highest rate of violent deaths among women. Combating sexual, gender-based and domestic violence is also a key priority in stemming irregular migration from Guatemala. Without efforts to prevent, report, and respond to this type of violence, many women opt to migrate despite the risks.

“USAID is an institution that strategically partners with the Government of Guatemala, but more so, it’s an institution that partners with the people, specifically with groups of people that are most vulnerable,” said [Guatemalan Vice President, Guillermo Castillo Reyes](#) during his remarks at the event on June 13.

The Peacebuilding Project works in the departments of Huehuetenango, Quiché, San Marcos, Totonicapán and Quetzaltenango to address the root causes of conflict in four thematic areas: 1) youth, gender and families; 2) governance; 3) land rights; 4) and natural resources. As part of the first conflict category, the project carries out concrete actions aimed at preventing and reducing gender-based violence, as well as providing integral and culturally relevant care to survivors.

Sara Barker, who has led the Peacebuilding Project since its inception in 2018, told participants that the MOU is an important piece of the program’s efforts in the region: “We are committed to supporting the work of SVET, facilitating tools and spaces for interinstitutional coordination and interaction between actors at the community, municipal, and departmental levels in the government and nongovernment sectors, while also supporting the training of community leaders, women, and youth.”

During the next year and half, SVET and the Peacebuilding Project will be strengthening the Departmental Commissions for the Prevention of Sexual Violence, Exploitation, and Human Trafficking (CODEVET, its Spanish acronym) and organizing forums and dialogues at the municipal and departmental levels, aimed at raising awareness on the prevention and reporting of sexual violence, exploitation, and trafficking.