

Avon Foundation



AVON
PONER FIN A LA VIOLENCIA
HACIA MUJERES Y NIÑAS

Principle 8



The violence we women experience is not because of what we do, but because of who we are, due to the social position we occupy, which has been constructed and reproduced throughout history. The violence we endure is the direct consequence of inequality – an inequality that, in its extreme form, kills. In this sense, given that it is such a deeply rooted cultural issue, our efforts must ensure no one is left behind. They must prioritise creating a culture – a new culture free of violence against women – that also significantly supports those experiencing this violence to help them escape it and generate a movement that transforms this reality through a network.

Ana Ines Alvarez

[Executive Director of the Avon Foundation](#)



About Avon Foundation

Since 1999, the Avon Foundation has been dedicated to defending women's rights, promoting their health, and safeguarding their physical, social and emotional integrity. The Avon Foundation leads collective efforts with various stakeholders to combat breast cancer and end violence against women and girls. The Foundation's initiatives focus on raising awareness, ensuring access to early detection, and providing support for victims of gender-based violence (GBV).

What was the challenge?

GBV is the most frequent, widespread human rights violation in the world. According to data from the [World Health Organization](#), [one in three women experienced or will experience an episode of physical or sexual violence throughout their lives](#). In Argentina, during 2023, there were 307 femicides, four trans/travesticides and 23 femicides linked to men, according to the report of the [Femicide Observatory 'Adriana Marisel Zambrano'](#) directed by the [Civil Association La Casa del Encuentro](#).

GBV was not recognised as a structural and urgent problem until 2015 when debates on GBV spread across Argentina as a result of the 'Ni una Menos' movement, motivated by the ferocious femicide of Chiara Paez – a 14-year-old pregnant teenager. More than 300,000 people participated in this movement, contributing to the prioritisation of GBV on the social agenda. This heightened social awareness and political debate on a subject that impacted the private sphere inspired Avon and the Avon Foundation to think about the role they could play in helping to address GBV as a universal problem rather than as one which exclusively affects women.

Raising awareness about GBV, the Avon Foundation's 'Promise to End Violence against Women and Girls' initiative ([Linktree](#), [Instagram](#), [Youtube](#)) helped underscore the need and urgency for different actors, such as the private sector, to address this issue. The private sector, for example, should commit to working on this issue since some of their employees may be directly impacted by violence in their homes, and employers can be important agents of support for those attempting to exit dangerous living conditions.

The challenge for Avon and the Foundation was to implement a project that recognised the role of the private sector as key actors in preventing and addressing situations of violence – not because of a legal obligation, but because of a moral imperative. The objective was to develop and implement a business policy, starting with the Avon employees, to support women in situations of violence, even though the problem was still seen as something that had to be solved within the private sphere. In an effort to internally practice what the Foundation was advocating for within society, Avon committed to develop this initiative in conjunction with the Avon Foundation. They jointly implemented a detailed programme to promote awareness of GBV among all employees, coupled with the development of specific support programmes that, with the commitment of departments such as human resources, legal and compliance, would focus on one of the priority audiences of the campaign – its employees.

In order to realise this objective, Avon and the Avon Foundation needed to align their priorities jointly to develop a process, policies and interventions for employees who faced GBV situations. This approach and intervention needed to be formalised and periodically updated through ongoing training on the subject, to ensure that the issue remained top of mind and drew the attention of other key actors who could support Avon's interventions.

What was the response?

GBV became more widely discussed in Argentina following the mobilisation of 'Ni una Menos' in 2015. With women-led and feminist movements broadening these conversations, the topic became mainstreamed as part of wider conversations on women's development.

Avon's global commitment – the 'Speak Out' programme was launched internationally in 2004 and was adopted in Argentina in 2008, one year before the enactment of the *Comprehensive protection law to prevent, punish and eradicate violence against women in the areas in which they develop their interpersonal relationships*, which inspired discussions with the company on how to address GBV. Avon's global commitment reinforced the urgency and importance of the issue, facilitating the implementation of effective strategies within the organisation.

This change required the creation of a new organisational culture throughout Avon that promoted the understanding that the eradication of GBV is the responsibility of all people, regardless of their role in society. This new organisational culture focused on the prevention of violence through the initiation of early conversations with those who were experiencing violence and by facilitating open dialogues regarding the ways in which employees experiencing GBV could engage in their day-to-day work to prevent such situations. Avon also decided to develop and adopt an internal protocol that would help them to identify the most urgent cases of GBV and get involved appropriately, avoiding re-victimisation and providing accompaniment for those who needed it. To ensure commitment from the company in the development and implementation of this protocol, Avon Foundation's management prioritised developing strategic and ongoing dialogue channels with the company's board. This dialogue emphasised the significance of addressing GBV as a critical issue affecting women's lives, thereby justifying the need for commitment, decision-making and interventions backed by the executive management.

Avon and the Avon Foundation worked together to create an alignment between the narrative and actions with regard to company policies and interventions on GBV. They prioritised fostering an understanding of the topic, developing internal policies to address GBV, and bringing on board all of the departments for the development and formalisation of the accompaniment process. They started engaging in conversations with departments such as human resources, legal and compliance, as well as the management board whose involvement was fundamental because they were the enablers of this new organisational culture.

Avon Foundation collaborated with other organisations that have GBV expertise, such as [La Casa del Encuentro Civil Association](#), [the Gender Directorate of the Municipality of Moreno in the Province of Buenos Aires](#), and the [National Women's Institute](#) to organise conversations and training for the relevant Avon teams on the subject. These organisations played an instrumental role in starting conversations with different departments within the company, which was later followed by the Foundation's team. To address specific concerns and risks, particularly those raised by the legal team, the Avon Foundation relied on the support of these social organisations and allied stakeholders with legal teams that specialised in handling GBV cases. The involvement of these experts facilitated discussions by allowing Avon to address the nuances of the issue with greater precision and effectiveness. Their involvement also ensured that the discussions focused on the specificities of the topic, leading to a more effective resolution of the issues at hand. As a result of this process, the Avon team not only built their capacities internally but also gained the autonomy and ownership needed to take action and ensure the sustainability of this intervention.

The conversations that the Foundation carried out with Avon, together with the aforementioned allies, led to the development of the first GBV protocol for female employees within the private sector in Argentina in 2017. This unprecedented protocol required an initial analysis of experiences in the country, including the reading of the protocols established in the education union and in a municipality of the Province of Buenos Aires. In collaboration with the Advocacy in Public Policies department of the Civil Association La Casa del Encuentro and the Gender Area of Moreno (Province of Buenos Aires), the Avon Foundation proposed to start thinking about what a company protocol would entail. With the guidance of these expert organisations, the Avon Foundation in collaboration with the company's legal and human resources departments, began to work on a first document where a consensus was reached on how to accompany employees experiencing violence and play a fundamental support role in their critical path to getting out of violence.

Despite this important accomplishment, the Avon team recognised that trust was key for the efficacy of the accompaniment protocol for Avon employees experiencing GBV. It is important for victims to trust that they will be listened to and receive guidance and accompaniment without prejudice or risk. According to statistical data from a [study on the prevalence of GBV in Argentina](#), 25 percent of women who went through situations of GBV spoke to someone, and only 11 per cent managed to ask for help. Even more alarming is that only five per cent made a legal charge.

This led the Foundation and company to initiate an awareness campaign at the company level to increase employees' understanding of GBV and invited them to become part of support networks to help women employees facing GBV. These networks were made up of people that the victims could trust, such as friends, family members, or co-workers, and aimed to support victims in asking for help. To help employees engage in these networks, Avon organised mandatory training for all employees and launched internal communication campaigns, especially during November, which is the month of action to raise awareness on GBV. Audiovisual material and informative guides were made available in common spaces, such as bathrooms or cafeterias, where Avon employees could access support tools, action protocols and information on relevant actors. The Avon Foundation continues to develop awareness campaigns that target the whole society to make the issue visible, highlight its importance and urgency, and the need to continue talking about and taking action towards its eradication.

What have they learned?

- ✓ **Leverage all your resources to create change:** Collaboration between Avon and the Avon Foundation has been key to the success of this intervention. From the outset, Avon and the Foundation both understood that the business model could serve women – providing information and tools to those who might be experiencing GBV. As a direct sales company, Avon's network, campaigning power and resources contributed to creating a high-impact intervention for the prevention of GBV. This collaboration has positioned the Avon Foundation as a key player in matters of diversity, equity and inclusion, achieving the status of sponsor for the company's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee. This role enabled the Foundation to more effectively influence corporate policies and practices on the issue. Furthermore, this experience facilitated the permanent inclusion of the Avon Foundation's management into the company's board, strengthening strategic alignment and integrating the Foundation's objectives with those of the company.
- ✓ **Be an enabler to bring other partners and stakeholders on board:** The 'Ni una Menos' movement in Argentina since 2015 has helped underscore GBV as a social, chronic and structural problem affecting all people's lives, but mainly women and girls. Understanding that GBV is not only a women's issue or solely a state responsibility but also a problem that must be addressed by organisations, institutions and companies, is essential to build new and better societies. Avon's willingness to be the first company in the country to publicly assume this responsibility is a great enabler for many other companies to commit to this cause.
- ✓ **Seek guidance and collaborate with others who have expertise on the issue:** The Avon Foundation collaborated with several public and civil society organisations to develop and adopt internal policies and protocols that eventually aimed to change its organisational culture. Identifying organisations with expertise on the topic and collaborating with them to raise awareness, build capacity, and advocate for change has facilitated Avon's mobilisation and training of employees on the topic, as well as enabled them to make more informed decisions and develop practices that can help support victims of GBV.
- ✓ **Have difficult conversations to address doubts, fears or resistance from the team:** Going through new challenges can cause discomfort, which can manifest as resistance to dialogue. Team members have varied degrees of understanding and experiences of GBV, which may result in varying reactions. Acknowledge these differences, make time to talk about colleagues' doubts or fears and bring in different experts who can respond to their questions so you can address and, if possible, overcome them together.

What have they learned?

- ✔ **Build consensus and ensure ownership of the board:** Ownership of the executive management and board is crucial to creating any change in the organisational culture. The Avon Foundation needed to develop a shared understanding of GBV, which was essential for ensuring that all parties involved were aligned on the definition and implications of the issue. Establishing this common ground was fundamental in creating protocols and policies for the whole company. The board's commitment to taking responsibility for addressing GBV played a pivotal role in integrating the topic into the company's agenda. Their active support and leadership ensured the issue was prioritised and the necessary resources and attention were allocated to develop and implement effective policies. This high-level endorsement was instrumental in aligning the company's efforts and fostering a cohesive approach to tackling GBV.
- ✔ **Raise awareness through an empathetic language that humanises the issue and engages people:** GBV is a complex problem that requires awareness and commitment for its eradication. This is not an easy task since the root causes of this violence are social and cultural and complicated to deconstruct. It is, however, possible through the use of empathetic and simple language that invites people to commit themselves and leave aside the blaming discourses that exclude many people. In addition, it is essential to sustain the sensitisation processes, even if they cause discomfort or resistance. There may be people who feel unaffected by GBV or indifferent about the issue, but it is patience and sincere conversations that allow dialogues to be established. Raising awareness must focus on opening channels of dialogue that allow genuine reflection.

Key outcomes and impact indicators

Development of the Institutes of Justice programme in five provinces of the Argentine Republic. An initiative that aimed to improve coordinated responses between public services and social organisations that work to accompany women who are experiencing GBV.

Launch of the 'Igual es Mejor' programme with the United Nations Population Fund, to seek commitment of companies to train their employees to help eradicate GBV.

Launch of more than 12 anti-GBV communication campaigns through Avon's 'Promise to End Violence against Women and Girls' initiative – some with a national reach of more than 100 million views, as is the case with 'Cambia el trato'.

The Avon Foundation provided more than \$600,000 in grants to civil society organisations for programmes that address the first line of accompaniment of women in situations of violence.

Three thousand people trained in GBV and 'first listening'. The measurement developed by the Avon Foundation in relation to training on GBV, which is carried out through an anonymous knowledge measurement survey of the participants, showed that, before the awareness meetings, more than 80 per cent of participants were unaware of the reality of those who experience GBV; the cycle of violence and isolation in which they are usually immersed and that allows it to be reproduced; and how to accompany those who experience GBV with an empathetic, patient and unprejudiced perspective.

Recognition of the Avon Foundation in Argentina as a social organisation of reference for training on GBV and acknowledgement of Avon as the pioneer company in making this commitment. In 2018, the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires legislature declared the 'Care and Support Protocol' developed by Avon and the Foundation to be of social interest.