

**Forum:** Social, Humanitarian & Cultural Committee (GA3)

**Issue:** Combating gender-based violence perpetrated by paramilitary groups in the Caribbean



**Student Officer:** Dominiki Koutroumpousi

**Position:** Co-Chair

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## Personal Introduction

Dear delegates,

My name is Dominiki Koutroumpousi and I have the utmost honour of serving as a Co-Chair in this year's ACGMUN conference in the GA3 committee.

My journey in Model United Nations began two years ago when I had the chance to watch how some of my classmates participated in conferences and I was intrigued. The procedure, the excitement, the fact that I could get to know more people, made me want to try and be involved in something like that. After two years, I have to say that it is one of the best experiences I have had in my life. I aspire that my participation in this conference inspires you to also continue in this amazing journey of MUN.

I hope this study guide helps you understand the topic so we can have a productive debate, however, it should not be your only source of information and I strongly condemn you do your own personal research. If you have any questions concerning the topic or the study guide do not hesitate to contact me at [domikout@gmail.com](mailto:domikout@gmail.com).

I am looking forward to seeing you all!

Best,

Dominiki

## Topic Introduction

Violence is an act that we are all familiar with, as such events happen around the world every day. However, it is important to justify what gender-based violence exactly is. Gender-based violence means the aimed harm that someone wishes to do to a specific someone, whether that is a group of people or a single individual.

This specific targeting has to do with someone's beliefs or characteristics like religion, preferences, and gender and it mostly affects women. Gender-based violence can appear in many different forms, like psychological, physical and sexual. It is clear that they all nullify the value of human rights, and are considered to cause harm of equal importance<sup>1</sup>.

Gender-based violence is a common situation in the Caribbean, with significant percentages, (46%)<sup>2</sup>, of women claiming that they have experienced such violence at least once in their lifetime. Furthermore, if a woman decides to speak up and fight for her rights, she ends up being accused of what happened, otherwise, the assault never gets reported, and even though she may seek help, there isn't any to be found. That is slowly changing as civil society organizations (CSOs), are trying to improve the way those women who have suffered get treated, by creating shelters that they can feel safe in and by constantly trying to urge other organizations and governments to cooperate in order for this to stop<sup>3</sup>. It is important to address this issue to make sure all people get treated equally, their rights are not being violated and every human being has infinite opportunities. Furthermore, paramilitary groups take advantage of gender-based violence so that they can have control over groups of people by threatening that they might harm them. In order to reassure citizens that their voices are being heard and that their rights are respected and, in order to weaken the power that these paramilitary groups hold on citizens, it is important to tackle this issue.

Since this year's theme is Balancing Infinite Opportunities, our topic is deeply aligned with it as by stopping gender-based violence, equality is going to be ensured between all people. If that is achieved then everyone will have access to opportunities equitably.

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission. "What Is Gender-Based Violence?" *European Commission*, [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-based-violence/what-gender-based-violence\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-based-violence/what-gender-based-violence_en).

<sup>2</sup> Dixon, Kadene. "Gender-Based Violence in the Caribbean: The Cases of Jamaica and Guyana." *Atlantic Council*, 14 Nov. 2022, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/gender-based-violence-caribbean-jamaica-guyana/>.

<sup>3</sup> Dixon, Kadene. "Gender-Based Violence in the Caribbean: The Cases of Jamaica and Guyana." *Atlantic Council*, 14 Nov. 2022, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/gender-based-violence-caribbean-jamaica-guyana/>.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence is the targeted violence that a person or a group, in our situation, exercises on other people based on their characteristics and beliefs but mostly their gender. There are many types of this violence as it can be both physical and psychological.<sup>4</sup>

### Paramilitary groups

A paramilitary group is an illegal army that often is known for seizing control over communities by spreading fear and for being involved in lawless activities<sup>5</sup>.

### Patriarchy

A situation where men mainly have more power than women leading to gender inequality and violence against women<sup>6</sup>.

### Femicide

Femicide is a term used in situations like gender based violence because it refers to the attack against women and girls due to their gender.<sup>7</sup>

## Background Information

### Historical Context of Paramilitary Activities in the Caribbean

The Caribbean, located southeast of the Gulf of Mexico, east of Central America, and north of South America, consists of 700 islands, sovereign nations and territories that some of them are under the control of other nations like France, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Some countries that are part of it are the Dominican Republic, as well as Jamaica and Haiti which both have issues with gender-based violence. The reason why these countries are more vulnerable to gender-based violence is mainly because of the high poverty rates and unemployment. Under these

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<sup>4</sup> European Commission. "What Is Gender-Based Violence?" *European Commission*, [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-based-violence/what-gender-based-violence\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-based-violence/what-gender-based-violence_en).

<sup>5</sup> "Paramilitary." *Cambridge Dictionary*, Cambridge University Press, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/paramilitary>.

<sup>6</sup> "Patriarchy." *Cambridge Dictionary*, Cambridge University Press, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/patriarchy>.

<sup>7</sup> "Femicide." *Cambridge Dictionary*, Cambridge University Press, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/femicide>.

circumstances, paramilitary groups get the chance to attack and claim power over the government. In addition, their culture has a major impact in the situation as their patriarchal norms normalize violence, leading to the silence of the victims. In the 20th century, while populations in the Caribbean sought and fought for their independence, paramilitary groups found the chance to instill fear through threats so that they could seize control of the government. Gender-based violence was a way of controlling the rebelling citizens as the situation that was created had an impact on both their psychology and mental health. This technique made women who were victims silent. Some examples where gender-based violence was a major issue are countries like Haiti, Columbia and Cuba. More specifically, in Haiti during the Duvalier regimes in 1957-1986, the Tonton Macoute, a paramilitary group of the time, committed multiple human rights abuses, including gender-based violence so that they could gain political power. Women's abuse was a way of blackmailing the government that did not agree to give them any political power. Furthermore, even though Columbia is not in the Caribbean, significant numbers of human rights violations have been observed, including gender-based violence. More specifically, paramilitary groups in Columbia are known for drug trafficking and researchers have found a connection behind those acts with political figures, something that shows the intentions of paramilitary groups that wish to receive political control. Lastly, during the 1950s, Cuba faced significant paramilitary activities during the revolution against Fulgencio Batista's regime. Groups of people that wished to retaliate, such as Fidel Castro's 26th of July Movement, did so, something that had a horrible outcome as women were exposed to various form of violence. In conclusion, even though it may not be easy to tackle a situation like this, global cooperation will be needed so we can ensure that every single person has their rights.

## **Factors Preserving Gender-Based Violence**

### **Social Factors**

Every individual experiencing an environment where paramilitary groups use unethical ways to gain power, such as the targeting of groups in order for fear to be spread, gets affected as violence becomes pervasive. As time passes, communities get destabilized and people hesitate to fight for their rights as they acknowledge that whatever the outcome is, nothing will change the way that they are being treated. That happens due to blackmailing by paramilitary groups or husbands, as in most countries that are currently facing gender-based violence, patriarchal norms are part of their culture, something that reinforces the situation. Additionally, the government's judicial system which may fail to operate fairly or in the case where a paramilitary group takes over it, may not be factional, victims cannot fight for their rights or

justice. Thus, victims of gender-based violence refrain from reporting such assaults, leading to a situation where nobody dares to express their decision on a matter concerning gender-based violence as it is considered something that cannot be tackled.

## Financial Factors

Women facing gender-based violence, not only have to face abuse and trauma, but this situation obstructs their access to fundamental rights, including the right to education and the right to employment.

As a result, poverty and unemployment rise<sup>8</sup>. Specifically in 2021, the unemployment rate in Latin America was around 9.3%, reflecting the economic disruption that the region had to face<sup>9</sup>, leaving women unprotected and exposed to various threats like starvation and abuse, as they do not receive a stable income that they can rely on. When a woman is in an abusive relationship, she may find it difficult to be productive or work the wanted hours<sup>10</sup>. For a woman in this situation to survive, she may be forced to rely on an individual for financial support. However, this person may not be her preferred choice as she may be exposed to abuse in the family. Statistics prove that approximately 40% of women across the Caribbean are exposed to violence by their partner.<sup>11</sup>

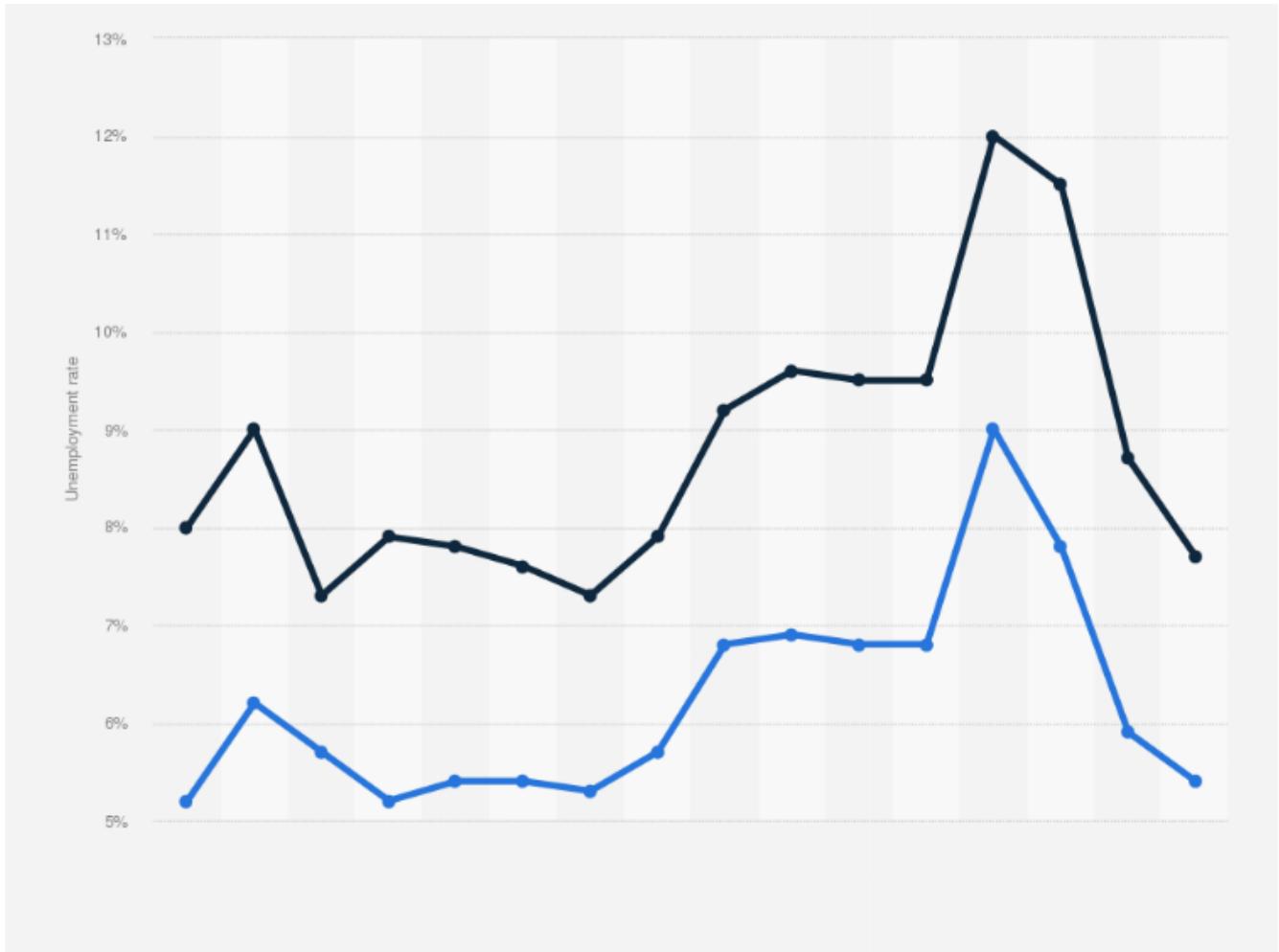
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<sup>8</sup> Statista. "Unemployment Rate in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2021, by Gender." *Statista*, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1341829/unemployment-rate-by-gender-latin-america-caribbean/>.

<sup>9</sup> Statista. "Unemployment Rate in Latin America and the Caribbean from 2010 to 2021." *Statista*, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1341770/unemployment-rate-latin-america-caribbean/>.

<sup>10</sup> NGO CSW. "Feminization of Poverty." *NGO Committee on the Status of Women*, New York, <https://ngocsw.org/feminization-of-poverty/#:~:text=The%20multi%2Ddimensional%20effect%20of%20violence%20can%20minimize%20the%20workforce.>

<sup>11</sup> NSVRC. "The Role of Culture in Domestic Violence in the Caribbean." *National Sexual Violence Resource Center*, <https://www.nsvrc.org/blogs/saam/role-culture-domestic-violence-caribbean.>



**Figure 1:** “Unemployment rate by gender in Latin America and the Caribbean 2008-2023”<sup>12</sup>

## Humanitarian Factors

The humanitarian factors refer to both physical and psychological casualties that people in countries that deal with gender-based violence are exposed to. That is because when a country has to endure with paramilitary groups, people’s access to healthcare is disrupted, either because of lack of resources, or the exploitation of the means from the groups. People are exposed to severe illnesses that may occur to them due to the physical harm they might have and, of course, mental health issues as every victim of assault needs to be able to receive specific treatment and guidance, which is something that does not exist in countries currently dealing with the issue. Physical harm can be divided into both short term and long-term recovery,

<sup>12</sup>Statista. “Unemployment Rate in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2021, by Gender.” *Statista*, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1341829/unemployment-rate-by-gender-latin-america-caribbean/>.

depending on each situation. However, whatever the situation is, the victim's mental health is affected at the same time, which is something that can lead to chronic recovery.

### **Lack of Resources as an Obstacle in Facing Gender-Based Violence**

There are many challenges in facing gender-based violence in Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs). A main reason that this problem is not easy to address, is the fact that with no funding, LEDCs dealing with gender-based violence are not able to provide shelters and rehabilitation services. Thus, the victim remains exposed to the danger of abuse. Moreover, survivors have limited access to services such as healthcare systems or mental support institutions, particularly in rural areas. Lastly, without the support of organizations, occurs the issue of inadequate professionals in LEDCs, such as social workers, psychologists or healthcare providers.

### **Psychological and Physical Gender-Based Violence**

There are multiple types of gender-based violence. It can be either physiological or physical. Psychological harassment has to do with the impact that someone's actions have on another person's mental health. Specifically, it refers to the way that someone perceives an action and depending on each person, that can differ. Whatever the level of the harm is though, it remains an unacceptable act which aims to influence the psychology of the person to the point that they are unable to react to possible injustices and situations that violate human rights. Physical harassment refers to the actions that affect the physical wellbeing of a human. Acts of physical harm like, sexual harassment, not only undermine the victim's rights, but at the same time they damage them mentally, as victims that receive violence, whether that comes from a paramilitary group or a close family member like a partner, are all forced to face long-term trauma.

### **Effects of Gender-Based Violence**

#### **Effects on the Victim**

Gender based violence can seriously affect both the physical and mental wellbeing of a victim due to the long-term traumas that are created. Physical injuries range between a minor level of harm to life threatening situations like long term pain, infections and health issues. The psychological harm caused to victims on the other hand, is not something that can be cured through medicine, or in a specific period of time. The conditions and the situations that the victims go through are memories that affect their everyday life, in terms of their participation and the impairment of the quality of their lives. Mental health impacts can include a variety of conditions like anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder

(PTSD) and in extreme cases, suicidal thoughts. That is why it is important for victims to receive the necessary help and guidance they need in order to feel that they are not alone and that they can be powerful again.

## Effects on Community Development

Gender based violence not only affects people individually but has an impact on communities as a whole. More specifically, gender-based violence enhances social differences between the genders. Thus, barriers are set on gender equality and as a result, there is no development in order to ensure that such differences will be equalized. Furthermore, bigger gaps are created between genders in areas such as education, work, and politics.

## Major Countries and Organizations Involved

### Canada

Canada being a constitutional monarchy in North America, located just above the United States of America, through programs like its Feminist International Assistance Policy has contributed to the address of gender-based violence in the Caribbean. Moreover, Canada wishes to ensure the safety of affected women in the Caribbean by creating shelters where they can feel safe, providing them with treatments and help that can guide them and empower them to move on<sup>13</sup>.

### Colombia

Colombia, bordered by both the Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea, has dealt with gender-based violence in the past leading to the enhancement of its local systems. Specifically, paramilitary groups have used sexual violence during wars and continuous situations like those led to the creation of frameworks and mechanisms that helped the victims of gender-based violence feel safe again.

### Jamaica

Jamaica has a parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy in the Caribbean. Even though Jamaica does not have a record of gender-based violence, it is one of the most involved countries in addressing the topic as it wishes to cooperate with both organizations like UN Women, and countries so that gender-based violence can stop. Through other campaigns and collaboration with the

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<sup>13</sup> UN Women Caribbean. "Government of Canada Supports Efforts to Tackle Gender-Based Violence and COVID-19 in Suriname." *UN Women*, 27 July 2020, <https://caribbean.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2020/7/government-of-canada-supports-efforts-to-tackle-gender-based-violence-and-covid-19-in-suriname>.



Caribbean community and other countries regionally and internationally, Jamaica wishes to raise awareness on the matter and create frameworks so that women can feel safe<sup>14</sup>.

## Haiti

Haiti, located on the western part of Hispaniola, is one of the countries that have a significant number of assaults against women. More specifically, these incidents are mainly from paramilitary groups that use gender-based violence as a technique to spread fear among citizens and ensure their territorial dominance. Additionally, Haiti does not have the appropriate law enforcement that is needed, which as a result, leaves victims of such assaults unprotected. Even though organizations like UNICEF<sup>15</sup> and UNFPA have provided victims with both psychological and physical treatments and therapies that is still not enough as the numbers of the assaults continue to rise<sup>16</sup>.

## Caribbean Community (CARICOM)

While most countries in the Caribbean Community have laws that prohibit any sexual assault, there are no curriculums that actually ensure this, resulting in the uncontrollable assaults against women by paramilitary groups with no sequences. If the government and its laws get empowered, the Caribbean Community will get much safer and those acts will be able to stop from happening. Since the Caribbean Community is open to cooperation with other countries, a coordinated attempt could ensure women's safety<sup>17</sup>.

## UN Women

UN Women has contributed to all frameworks created for the address of events in which women are assaulted. In the situation of gender-based violence UN Women works with other countries providing them with means that less economically developed countries lack, such as technical support and of course offers guidance so that every victim can receive the needed help<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> World Bank. *Haiti: Toward a New Narrative – Systematic Country Diagnostic*. World Bank Group, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/d3da123a-a4ee-4bb3-89c8-fd2ea210795f/content>.

<sup>15</sup> UNICEF. *Haiti Annual Report 2023*. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), <https://www.unicef.org/media/152411/file/Haiti-2023-COAR.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> UNFPA. *The Situation of Gender-Based Violence in Haiti*. United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), <https://haiti.unfpa.org/en/video/situation-gender-based-violence-haiti>.

<sup>17</sup> UNFPA Caribbean. *Gender-Based Violence*. United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), <https://caribbean.unfpa.org/en/topics/gender-based-violence-16>.

<sup>18</sup> UNICEF. *Haiti Annual Report 2023*. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), <https://www.unicef.org/media/152411/file/Haiti-2023-COAR.pdf>.

## Blocs Expected

### Alliance 1

Countries that are dealing with gender-based violence. Such countries could be countries that belong to the Caribbean, like Jamaica, and Haiti, countries that belong to South Asia, like India and Afghanistan, and more southern countries like South Africa.

### Alliance 2

Countries that do not face major issues regarding gender-based violence. Such countries could be countries with stronger gender equality laws like Canada, Switzerland, Iceland, Norway, New Zealand and Japan.

## Timeline of Events

Date	Description of Event
18 December 1979	The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, CEDAW was a collaboration between countries so that gender equality could be achieved.
15 September 1995	The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was one of the most significant steps in achieving gender equality as it emphasized the rights of women.
31 October 2000	The UNSC Resolution 1325 emphasized GBV and it mainly urged governments to act so that these assaults could be prevented.
15 August 2013	The Montevideo Consensus promoted regional cooperation in order for governments to change their policies so that any crimes including gender-based violence would not be tolerated.

## Relevant UN Resolutions, Treaties & Events

### Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, New York, 18 December 1979, CEDAW

This convention was created in 1979 by 189 countries, applying to global laws, with its goal being gender equality, as well as the limit of discrimination against women and in general people having access to their rights like education, religion, healthcare, political rights and employment.<sup>19</sup>

### UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000)

It calls upon the cooperation of governments and organizations so that violence and war against women can come to an end. Additionally, it urges governments to prevent such assaults by protecting women and for those who have already suffered, it suggests ways that they can get over their trauma and feel safe again.

### The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)

The Beijing Declaration was one of the most important actions taken as it changed women's position in our community, adopted in 1995 in the Fourth World Conference on Women. It raised the issue of women and poverty, their education and training, their right in healthcare, violence against women, how women should be protected in armed conflict, women and the economy, the ability of women in power and decision-making, their human rights, their participation in the media and many more privileges that women have. It urged other nations to follow and change their policies moving one step closer to reaching gender equality<sup>20</sup>.

## Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

### Caribbean Community Strategies to Address the Issue

The Caribbean has generally provided solutions to the topic that mainly suggest the empowerment of already existing mechanisms that will effectively deal with this problem so that it can

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<sup>19</sup> United Nations. *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>.

<sup>20</sup> "Resolution 1 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action\* The Fourth World Conference on Women, Having met in Beijing from 4 to." *the United Nations*, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>.

be tackled and so that already affected victims can feel safe, protected and receive the needed help to recover. Specifically, with the “Draft CARICOM Regional Gender Equality Strategy” a coordinated effort was suggested in order for gender equality to be achieved.

### **Montevideo Consensus (2013)**

The Montevideo Consensus promoted regional cooperation for governments to change their policies so that any crimes including gender-based violence would not be tolerated. It focused on the existence of all people’s rights and focused on gender equality as well as social inclusion. This means that every person regardless of his background identity or beliefs, should have the chance to access education, and healthcare to be involved in development processes<sup>21</sup>.

## **Possible Solutions**

### **Empowering Legal Frameworks**

This can be achieved through both regional and global cooperation between willing countries and organizations that wish to offer means so that already existing frameworks can be empowered, new ones can be created and clear legal protections are established. That way, every country dealing with gender-based violence will be able to strengthen its measures so that those who disobey the law face consequences like fines or prison. Through time and as citizens will be able to see the penalties become stronger and harsher, they will feel safer and paramilitary groups will refrain from such unacceptable activities.

### **Recovery Support to the Victims**

As all victims of this situation will feel vulnerable, their protection has to be ensured. By the creation of shelters where both physiological and physical help will be provided, traumatized women will be able to share their stories and receive the necessary guidance. Specialized organizations like UNICEF can be in charge of setting professional psychologists and doctors so that our goal can be reached. Through recovery seminars led by professionals and talks where the victim can express themselves and receive helpful instructions and guidance from psychologists in order to heal, the wellbeing of the victims will be ensured.

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<sup>21</sup> ECLAC. *Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), <https://repositorio.cepal.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/7b0a9e22-002a-49ec-966e-796a24d468ca/content>.

## Financial Support to the Victims

Apart from the psychological support, victims can be provided with financial support that would allow them to individually evolve. Therefore, women that may feel incapable of living independently and force themselves to stay with their abusive partner because they are unable to provide for themselves, will feel safe to stand alone. The amounts of money that will be given can be collected through organizations that focus on these matters or through fundraisers and events where people can contribute.

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