

NATIONAL STUDY ON SHELTERS FOR Women Victims of Sexual Violence and Gender-Based Violence

SAINT LUCIA



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PRESENTATION

Since 2020, the Follow-up Mechanism to the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women - Belém do Pará Convention - (MESECVI) and its Committee of Experts (CEVI) have undertaken a collaborative effort to delve into the functioning of shelters for women victims of gender-based violence in various countries in Latin America and the Caribbean with the support of the European Union's EUROso-ciAL program.

The national study in Saint Lucia represents a crucial first step for the MESECVI in the Caribbean region to address violence against women, and more specifically to look at service provision to women and girls who are victims of sexual exploitation, including migrant women. This work has been possible thanks to the support of the UK Department for International Development, within the framework of the Organization of American States (OAS) project: Contributing to the Prevention of Sexual Violence against Migrant Women and Girls in the Countries of the Americas. The project is part of a comprehensive approach for strengthening regulatory frameworks by addressing sexual violence and gender-based crimes faced by migrant women and girls across the Americas, with a focus on gender, security, and human rights – through a partnership of the Department of Public Security of the Secretariat for Multidimensional Security of the OAS, the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) in its capacity of Technical Secretariat of the MESECVI and the Government of Saint Lucia.

The MESECVI aims to develop a more comprehensive study for the Caribbean region that would allow the Mechanism to identify the best practices and the significant challenges posed by implementing necessary public policies; and hopes to make the appropriate recommendations to States Party under the Belem do Para Convention.

The current study conducted in Saint Lucia explores the normative and institutional framework of shelters/safe houses, their coverage and location, accommodation capacity, budget for operation, funding sources, as well as monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. The methodology of the study involves an examination of the responses of Saint Lucia to the MESECVI indicators to measure the implementation of the Belem do Para Convention in the last ten (10) years, accompanied by two country visits in March 2024. Through these missions, the Mechanism was invited to make an onsite visit to the Women's Support Centre, the island's only shelter for women; and it was able to launch the data collection tool for its Indicators as part of an exercise to provide training to public officials of various ministries and institutions; and civil society organizations.

The MESECVI also had the opportunity to discuss Saint Lucia's new Domestic Violence Act of 2022 and explore its elements which respond to – and correspond with – the state's commitment to prevent, punish and eradicate violence against women under the standards of the Convention of Belem do Para. Beyond the DVA's application in the domestic space, the revised Criminal Code of 2013 also has legal provisions and remedies for addressing sexual offences against women and girls.

It was noteworthy, that the State's efforts, in some cases, focus on proper regulation through national law, action protocols, operating guidelines, and management models that have been strengthened over time and through experience. Further developing these efforts would also require providing adequate budgetary allocations from the State and increasing specific budget lines to ensure their continuity for their operation according to the country's needs.

The study also identifies some national good practices of Saint Lucia that could be replicated with other institutions responsible for shelters

in different Caribbean countries. These include: i) Existence of Gender-based Violence referral pathways; ii) Mechanisms allowing for confidential submission of complaints or reports within shelters; iii) Providing support to sheltered women to enable them to continue working and providing support for the education of their children; iv) Data collection: Register of clients, monitoring of the number of crisis calls; information gathered from the intake form and the psycho-social assessment of clients, Court Orders and evaluation forms, any information shared with the Department of Gender Affairs.

However, the study presents some of the significant challenges in ensuring proper and effective implementation of related public policy. These challenges include i) The need to streamline the agencies to create different spaces for different clients to help with more effective management of scarce human, financial and technical resources; ii) Given the perceived increase in more vulnerable groups, such as women-headed households; elderly women – and women victims of trafficking, or migrant women; there is need to institute better social protection systems and maximize their coordination; iii) The importance of integrated and comprehensive services and specialized care within these spaces; iv) The insufficient budget and inadequacy in space for proper shelter operation; v) Developing monitoring and assessment mechanisms to help prepare periodic reports that continuously evaluate results and recognize critical points and identify actions for effective management.

This report is expected to help guide various institutions and civil society organizations in the Caribbean at the national and subregional levels. It is hoped that it will contribute to strengthening public policy and provide a decent pathway for women victims of gender-based violence with greater sensitivity to women survivors of sexual violence and migrant women. This form of violence is a complex and

multi-causal phenomenon deeply rooted in our societies, requiring systemic, sustained, and multidisciplinary efforts for addressing its treatment, and eradication.

The CIM/MESECVI and the DPS/SSM/OAS will continue to work in support of organizations and States to help strengthen public policies dedicated to the prevention, care, investigation, punishment, and reparation of women and girls who are victims of gender-based violence.

BACKGROUND

During the last few decades of the 20th century, women's shelters were established in all regions of the world – starting with Europe in the 1970s and Latin America in the 1980s. Despite these efforts, to this date, there is still no centralized database that includes information on the number of shelters that exist, how they are funded, their capacity, their admission criteria, among other important aspects. To address this gap, EUROsociAL+ and the Follow-up Mechanism of the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI) have launched an initiative to evaluate the status of shelters in Latin America.

In the first stage completed in 2020, a study was conducted covering 16 Latin American countries where States provided official information. This was compiled into the *"Regional Study on Shelters for Victims of Gender-based violence in Latin America"* which was completed in January 2021.

SEVERAL TRENDS WERE IDENTIFIED:

- **Growth in the number of shelters:** In 2008, MESECVI reported the existence of 201 shelters in 28 countries, and for this diagnosis (2020), 16 countries reported 568 shelters.
- **Transfer of responsibility from civil society to the State for the supervision and/or management of shelters in most countries, though several show a combination of shelters supported by governments, the private sector, and mixed.**
- **Assumption of management responsibility for most state shelters by municipalities.**
- **Establishment of legal frameworks for shelters and their inclusion in public policies and government programs.**
- **Increasing institutionalization of shelters, with the development of management models, specialized protocols, manuals, and guides for admission, operational criteria, and care for those entering and leaving.**
- **Scarcity of monitoring mechanisms and evaluation reports for shelters as one of the most notable weaknesses.**
- **Incipient efforts to identify shelter budgets, although many remain included in budgets for Gender-based violence or gender equality plans.**
- **Budgetary restrictions and/or limited access to shelters due to the Covid-19 pandemic.**

In the second stage, initiated in March 2021, focused studies were conducted in five Latin American countries. The objectives of these studies to achieve the stated objectives were:

- 1. To deepen the analysis of shelter models and their operation.**
- 2. To gain a deeper understanding of different approaches to these services.**
- 3. To study the objectives that guided their creation and operation.**
- 4. To analyze the context in which they were founded, their current situation, and the paradigm guiding their actions at present.**

The three hypotheses that structured the study were:

- Women and girls experiencing violence face risks to their lives and physical integrity, and in certain situations, the only way to prevent these risks is to leave home and stay in a shelter.
- Shelters are safe spaces for women, girls, and children at risk of life due to Gender-based violence, aiming to ensure safety and promote the empowerment of victims and/or witnesses of violence.
- The State has the obligation to create, support, and guarantee shelters, their accessibility, availability, safety, quality, and efficiency.

Starting from this last hypothesis, if the creation and maintenance of shelters are the responsibility of the State, as provided by international treaties, efforts were made to find out:

- *To what extent is the state obligation to support shelters for victims of Gender-based violence being fulfilled?***
- *How are these facilities functioning?***
- *What are their objectives? Are they being met?***
- *Are there evaluations?***

As in the present Report for Saint Lucia, answers were sought from primary normative and documentary sources, responses to the MESECVI indicators; interviews with key actors, and fieldwork with visits to the sole shelter.

INTRODUCTION TO SAINT LUCIA'S CASE STUDY International framework

The need for shelters and the obligation of the State to guarantee their existence is now enshrined in both international law, regional law and the laws of the country. At the international level, the Committee on the Eradication of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has made clear that violence against women should be interpreted as a consequence of discrimination as defined in Article One of such Convention. In 1992, CEDAW issued General Recommendation 19 on violence against women for States Party to establish or support services for women victims of domestic violence, rape, sexual assault and other forms of violence against women, including providing shelters, specially trained health workers, rehabilitation, and counseling.

In 2011, the United National General Assembly (UNGA) adopted Resolution 65/228, to strengthen crime prevention and the criminal justice response to violence against women. This resolution urges Member States to advance effective crime prevention and criminal justice strategies, including those that prevent revictimization, remove barriers that prevent victims from seeking safety (including barriers related to custody of children); having access to shelter and access to available legal assistance.

CEDAW General Recommendation 33 reiterates the concerns expressed in General Recommendation 19, and referring to the availability of systems of justice, recommends that the States Party "[i]n cases of violence against women, ensure access to crises centers, financial aid, shelters, hotlines, and medical, psychosocial and counseling services." In CEDAW General Recommendation 35, on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation 19, requires that that States provide, "accessible, affordable and adequate services to protect women from gender-based violence, prevent its reoccurrence and provide or ensure

funding for reparation to all its victims/survivors." Further, the recommendation states that "[s]tates should provide specialist women's support services such as free of charge 24-hour helplines, and sufficient numbers of safe and adequately equipped crisis, support and referral centres, as well as adequate shelters for women, their children and other family members as required." In this General Recommendation, the Committee on CEDAW also requires the States to adhere to the principles that should guide the establishment of services for victims, to include shelters, "[e]nsuring all legal proceedings, protection and support measures and services to women's victims /survivors of gender-based violence respect and strengthen their autonomy. They should be accessible to all women, in particular those affected by intersecting forms of discrimination, and take account of any specific needs of their children and other dependent persons. They should be available in the whole territory of the State party and provided irrespective of women's resident status or their ability or willingness to cooperate against the alleged perpetrator."

States that signed on to the Beijing Platform for Action agreed to provide well-funded shelters and relief support to women and girl victims of violence, as well as medical, psychological and other counseling services and free or low-cost legal aid. In 2017, the Special Rapporteur in her report to the United Nations Human Rights Council on violence against women, its causes and consequences, stated that the acknowledgment of the right of women to a life free from violence determines the States' obligations to protect women victims and possible women victims of gender-based violence. This protection should be effective through the enactment of legislation and adoption of practical measures to prevent and combat this violence and the States should provide a comprehensive set of

services including shelters and measures, and access to protection orders. In this regard, it is recommended that States should ensure that the services available facilitate the victim's recovery from the violence suffered and allow her to overcome the numerous consequences of such violence in order to enable her to rebuild her life.

Services must therefore be accessible, affordable, appropriate, acceptable, of high quality, and include protective measures. They must focus on the victim and the human rights of women, as well as the empowerment of the victim, and work to avoid the revictimization of the women and their children. Despite the importance of shelters and the obligation of the States to guarantee their existence, there is no global or regional data available on the number or types of shelters, or on the agreed standards on the number of spaces needed.

To be effectively executed, the right to live a life free from violence for gender reasons, enshrined in Article 3 of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará), requires a series of guarantees from the States party. These governmental obligations include guaranteeing the safety of women victims of violence or those whose physical safety is at risk through a variety of means, including providing access to shelters and safe houses.

Article 8 of the Convention of Belém do Pará, urges States to, "provide appropriate specialized services for women who have been subjected to violence, through public and private sector agencies, including shelters, counseling services for all family members where appropriate, and care and custody of the affected children."

Article 8. The States Parties agree to undertake progressively specific measures, including programs:

d. to provide appropriate specialized services for women who have been subjected to violence, through public and private sector agencies, **including shelters, counseling services for all family members where appropriate, and care and custody of the affected children:**
h. to ensure research and the **gathering of statistics and other relevant information relating to the causes, consequences and frequency of violence against women**, in order to assess the effectiveness of measures to prevent, punish and eradicate violence against women and to formulate and implement the necessary changes; and

Article 9. With respect to the adoption of the measures in this Chapter, the States Parties (sic) shall take special account of the vulnerability of women to violence by reason of among others, their race or ethnic background or their status as **migrants, refugees or displaced persons**. Similar consideration shall be given to women subjected to violence while pregnant or who are disabled, of minor age, elderly, socioeconomically disadvantaged, affected by armed conflict or deprived of their freedom.

The MESECVI uses a system of indicators to direct focus on evaluating the State's progress in compliance with state obligations; especially positive obligations; since each indicator will account for the actions of the State through valuable statistical but also qualitative data, allowing to observe the progress –and eventual setback - of public policies.

The State Capabilities category requires States to provide data on: i) the "Number of shelters, boarding houses, and safe houses for women victims of domestic violence and their children." (Structural Indicator); (ii) the "Accessibility and availability of care for victims of the various forms of violence by jurisdiction and geographical region." (Process Indicator); and iii) the "rate of the request for care (calculated by the number of women seen in the last twelve months, divided by the total female population, and multiplied by 1000)" (Result Indicator).

A more detailed study of the indicators was conducted in a joint MESECVI-UNFPA study in July 2020, comparing the information collected by the UNFPA through the Essential Services Packet for Women and Girls Subject to Violence and the data collected by MESECVI in the States' responses to the Progress Indicators.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes the elimination of violence against women in Objective 5.2 as one of the goals that must be met to achieve equality between the sexes and the empowerment of women. Unfortunately, it was not included in the related indicators (5.2.1 and 5.2.2), which seek to collect data on shelters and orders of protection.

According to the Rapporteur on Violence Against Women as cited in the aforementioned report, having this data would have provided information on availability that is needed to determine the need for additional shelters or Protection Orders.

Background on Shelter Monitoring from the Committee of Experts of the MESECVI

The First Hemispheric Report, published in 2008, noted that, "[t]he majority of States have at least one shelter to admit women victims of violence." Eighteen (18) States report the existence of shelters within their territory to receive women victims of violence, with significant differences in quantities. Some States report the existence of one shelter, while others, such as Brazil, report up to 87. In total, this report identified 201 shelters.

The CEVI expressed the following concerns based on the information provided by the States in the First Hemispheric Report: a) In nine (9) States, existing shelters were established by or are managed by civil society organizations due to a lack of State-run shelters. While the work of civil society in this regard is commendable, it does not absolve the State of its responsibility to provide services and shelter to women victims of violence; b) The number of shelters reported is not sufficient to meet national demand, considering the number of complaints of domestic violence and intimate partner violence. At least eleven (11) States reported the existence of three (3) or fewer State-run shelters, while another large group notes that its shelters can only accommodate fewer than 20 people; c) The majority of States provided little information on whether the shelters also accepted the children of women victims of violence. This was identified as a serious problem, because women often continue in a situation of violence for fear of being separated from their children.

In the Second Hemispheric Report (2012), the CEVI highlighted the scarcity and lack of clear protocols for shelter reference networks and pointed out the obstacles impeding the application of protective measures. In doing so, it references the following statements: "One of these is the scarcity and limited capacity of shelters and safe houses, which are primarily located in the capital city or large urban centers. Another

issue is the public's awareness of the physical location of these centers, which facilitates the perpetrator's ability to locate the victim; and the lack of protective measures for the woman's family and other witnesses."

However, the report noted an increase in the number of shelters in most States and their location outside of the capital cities clearly indicated an expansion in coverage. Twenty-six (26) States reported a total of two-hundred and ninety-eight (298) shelters. Similarly, "a number of States, especially in the Caribbean, are partnering with civil society organizations to run shelters (...). Similarly, in other cases... the State signs agreements with shelters and boarding houses run by civil society organizations to secure the safety of women, in the belief that State-run shelters could be targeted for attack." The CEVI recommended that additional information on the maintenance and sustainability of the shelters be provided and urged the States to continue to increase the number of shelters in existence.

Additionally, given the low levels of awareness of the existence of these resources by broad sectors of the population, it was recommended to increase the public awareness of these spaces. The CEVI also stressed the need for States to establish free, specialized services for women victims of violence and their children. At a minimum, these services should include additional shelters, homes for women and comprehensive care centers; pre-trial legal counseling; legal representation at trial; health services that also cover a woman's sexual and reproductive health and legal interruption of pregnancy; psychological counseling, therapy, and self-help groups.

Other recommendations included conducting studies on shelters, not only for analysis, but also to determine their suitability for their purpose and to identify the amount or percentage of the national budget dedicated to services for women victims of violence, such as: (...) shelters, safe houses, etc.



These services should include additional shelters, homes for women and comprehensive care centers; pre-trial legal counseling; legal representation at trial; health services that also cover a woman's sexual and reproductive health and legal interruption of pregnancy; psychological counseling, therapy, and self-help groups



The data tables in the Second Hemispheric Report depict the increase in the tendency of States to make agreements with boarding houses and hotels to house at-risk persons, who are, in many cases, accompanied by their children. This need to respond rapidly to high-risk situations is understandable given the lack of shelters or situations wherein shelter capacity has been exceeded. However, it is important to note that housing persons or families who have suffered violence, or who are still at risk of violence, in hotels without the comprehensive services and specialized care they need, does not fulfill the obligation of the State to prevent violence and support victims.

The Third Hemispheric Report, published in 2017, focused primarily on the prevention of violence against women. In this report, the States Party reaffirmed the key role shelters play in prevention efforts into the human rights of women, in conformity with the Belém do Pará Convention.

CONTEXT IN SAINT LUCIA

Gender-based violence (GBV)

According to an official Government report¹, all available data on the prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV) in St. Lucia come from local administrative sources, such as the Royal Saint Lucia Police Force, the healthcare system, the Social Security system, the Social Protection System, or from organizations created to address gender-based violence. The data are primarily collected by the following institutions:

- 1. Vulnerable Persons Team of the Royal Saint Lucia Police Force: Data on the number of complaints filed by type of case and location;**
- 2. Department of Human Services and Family Affairs: Data from the health sector and social protection agencies;**
- 3. Department of Gender Relations: Agency which administers the policies and programs to prevent and address gender-based violence;**
- 4. Women's Support Centre: Provides state-funded shelter and psychosocial services and compiles data on the women who seek assistance from the Centre;**
- 5. St. Lucia Crisis Centre: Provides non-governmental services and compiles data on the women and girls who contact them or use their services.**

The law recognizes the sexual assault of men or women as a crime, punishable by fourteen (14) years to life imprisonment. Marital rape is considered a crime only in cases of divorce or legal separation or when there is an existing order of protection issued by the Family Court. While 'roungement' (the practice of a victim's

parents accepting monetary compensation to settle cases of rape and sexual assault out of court) is illegal, it is rarely prosecuted and remains a common practice.

In general, the authorities in St. Lucia enforce the law and, high-level government officials support the strengthening of family law and resources for victims of gender-based violence. However, NGOs still report difficulty in obtaining government data on complaints of sexual assault.

Domestic violence is also a serious problem and during the mandatory COVID-19 shutdown, NGOs reported an increase in domestic violence complaints. Through October 2020, NGOs reported forty-seven (47) cases of gender-based violence, of which only three (3) were taken to trial and the remaining cases were awaiting processing, being stuck in a slow judicial system.

It is worth noting that while the police force is ready to arrest suspected perpetrators, the Government will only pursue cases of violence against women when the victim herself files charges. The Department of Gender Relations notes that some employees lack the specialized techniques needed to interview trauma victims, which negatively impacts their ability to collect evidence.

Penalties for the crime of Domestic Violence range from five (5) years to life in prison, and in general, these are enforced. The Government has established one shelter specifically dedicated to protect survivors of DV against women, and a toll-free rape crisis hotline for victims, and provides training on domestic and sexual violence to police officers. Notwithstanding, victims with little to no financial resources are reluctant to leave abusive situations. Additionally, the police are sometimes confronted with a lack of transportation, which can delay response to calls for assistance.

¹ Ministry of Education, Gender Relations, Innovation, and Sustainable Development (2019). Beijing +25 Report on The Comprehensive National Level Review of The Status of Implementation of The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

The Ministry of Labour, the Public Service, Home Affairs and Gender Affairs, which is responsible for providing support to victims of domestic abuse, has implemented programs to prevent gender-based violence in schools and groups within the community.

The Family Court hears cases of domestic violence and crimes against women and children and can issue orders of protection and mandate training programs to rehabilitate perpetrators. Social workers are assigned to assist victims of domestic violence. According to the Saint Lucia Crisis Centre the client must be referred to the Ministry of Equity before being directed to the Family Court, where there is a fee of \$20.00 for a Protection Order.

NGOs report challenges for victims of abuse, including a lack of adequate shelters, backlogs of judicial cases, lack of resources to process cases, insufficient technical resources in forensics laboratories, and a lack of police training on assistance to victims.

For this study it is important to highlight the work of the Organization Raise Your Voice² in Saint Lucia. RYV is an NGO which advocates for and assists women and children victims of domestic violence and gender-based violence in Saint Lucia. Founded in 2012, with the services of over 60 volunteers, RYV-SLU has helped to empower over 4000 women by providing the necessary social, legal, psychological, medical, and economic support to them.

This NGO provides safe-house accommodation, assistance in finding a new home and financial support to women to strengthen their economic empowerment in situations of gender-based abuse. It also fosters personal development through counselling services, assistance with job placement, interview training and self-empowerment

workshops. Just over three thousand (3000) women and children have benefited from the Food Box Program; and in 2023, about 100 women were assisted with utilities and rent expenses, household and school supplies for children.

Data on gender-based violence is collected by Raise Your Voice St. Lucia for the year 2023, indicated that 450 women were clients of the NGO along with 126 children.

	WOMEN	MEN	CHILD -18
JAN	23	1	11
FEB	06	1	5
MAR	27	0	9
APR	19	1	7
MAY	11	0	5
JUN	32	1	9
JUL	45	0	13
AUG	63	1	19
SEPT	82	1	17
OCT	44	2	7
NOV	36	1	5
DEC	62	1	19
	450	10	126

Source: DV in Saint Lucia, 2023, Raise your Voice

Sexual Violence

On a survey conducted by the CIM/MESECVI in 2021, Saint Lucia identified sexual violence against women and girls to be its top priority. Monitoring and analyzing data on reported cases of sexual violence are crucial for the State to understand trends, identify hotspots, and assess the effectiveness of its interventions. In Saint Lucia this type of data is recorded by various governmental agencies and NGO's. Howe-

² Source: <https://ryvslu.org>

ver, the reliability and accuracy of data can be a challenge, given the possibility for duplication with the same cases being reported to more than one agency. Data collection has posed a challenge in many ways and is cited as being a major issue for all agencies.

To assess the efficiency of the legal system in handling cases involving sexual violence against women and girls, their prosecution rates and the timeliness of legal proceedings, Saint Lucia needs address this data gap by developing a reporting mechanism with the Criminal Court and the DPP's Office to obtain data on prosecution rates; time from reporting to prosecution; and conviction rates.

Saint Lucia provides access to support services such as counseling, legal aid, and medical assistance for survivors from government agencies such as the VPU, the Women's Shelter, the Family Court, Saint Lucia Legal Aid Authority, NGOs such as RYV, the Crisis Centre and Girls of a Feather.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The legal framework that protects women and girls from gender-based violence includes the Constitution, Acts of Parliament, and rules from Common Law. Some acts of violence that cause physical harm constitute a criminal violation (for example, assault, wounding) and can be prosecuted under both the Criminal Code and Common Law. Domestic violence legislation offers protection from both physical and sexual violence but is not intended to exclude prosecution under the Criminal Code or replace criminal proceedings. Rather, it is meant to expand the options and remedies available to victims of domestic violence.

Saint Lucia passed a very comprehensive Domestic Violence Act in March 2022 which shows the state's commitment to prevent, punish and eradicate violence against women – and at-

tempts some alignment with the Convention of Belem do Para. The new Domestic Violence Act of 2022 addresses a wide range of forms of gender-based violence, provides Protection Orders, ensures support for survivors and training for the police and the judiciary, *inter alia*.

The new DV Act has been touted as the most comprehensive piece of legislation in the Eastern Caribbean and possibly throughout the Caribbean in its coverage of manifestations of gender-based violence and measures taken to prevent and punish domestic violence. It goes beyond the scope contemplated by the OECS Domestic Violence Bill of 2016, in that it addresses the issue of coercion prior to the act of domestic violence occurring. Some of the Act's revisions include provisions for cyberstalking and stalking, deprivation and damage to property, EC\$10,000 in reparations for DV, mandatory reporting of DV by officials and penalties for failing to report. Moreover, more services have been included and now fall under the direct remit of the Minister with responsibility for Gender Affairs. Beyond the domestic space, however, the revised Criminal Code of 2013 also has legal provisions and remedies for addressing sexual offences against women and girls.

Still, it is important to review the new Act for possible gaps and opportunities to advance new and emerging areas that have been overlooked. . For instance, the MESECVI has identified two notable areas for improvements of the new DV Act: The lack of provisions that specifically address trafficking in women and girls, especially for sexual exploitation; and its failure to cover social media and technologically facilitated abuse, beyond cyberstalking.

The country authorities have also highlighted to the MESECVI that public education is at the heart of the implementation of the Act, since on some occasions, information is still being withheld from public officials from victims. As a result of that, the Department of Gender Affairs has announced that it will be rolling out radio

and television PSAs as part of a project being done in partnership with the French Embassy to sensitize the public and socialize the Act.

A robust legislative framework is essential to combat sexual violence and various laws and provisions address the issue of sexual violence in Saint Lucia. Below is a general overview of other relevant laws:

a. Criminal Code: The Criminal Code in Saint Lucia includes provisions related to sexual violence, including offenses such as rape, sexual assault, and sexual abuse of minors, among others. The penalties for these crimes can vary depending on the severity of the crime and the specific circumstances of the case.

b. Domestic Violence Act: This law applies if the sexual violence occurs within the context of domestic violence. The law can include protective measures for the victims and punish the perpetrators.

c. Protocols and Procedures: In addition to laws, there are protocols and procedures established by the pertinent authorities to investigate and process cases of sexual violence. These protocols can include guidelines for medical and psychological treatment of victims, as well as for evidence collection and prosecution of the aggressor.

Relevant to our study on shelter and service provision to migrant women is an examination of the legislative framework that governs how immigration is regulated in Saint Lucia – and the regulations that address different aspects concerning entry, residence, and deportation from the country. Below is a general overview of the relevant laws to date:

1. IMMIGRATION ACT: This is the main legislation governing the entry and stay of foreigners in Saint Lucia. It establishes the conditions and requirement for granting visas, work and residency permits, and citizenship. It also ad-

dresses issues related to the deportation and expulsion of persons who violate the country's immigration laws.

2. ALIEN (LICENSING) REGULATIONS: These regulations complement the Immigration Act and provide details on the specific processes, tariffs, and requirements for the granting of residency or work permits for foreigners in Saint Lucia.

3. REFUGEE ACT: This law addresses the treatment of individuals who request asylum in Saint Lucia.

To date, Saint Lucia does not have specific legislation that addresses asylum or refugees. However, as a member of the international community and party to various agreements and conventions, Saint Lucia may be subject to certain asylum and refugee-related obligations derived from international instruments.

In general, the principles and international standards concerning asylum and refugees, such as those established in the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951 and the United National High Commissioner for Refugees Protocol of 1967, apply to Saint Lucia. These documents define who qualifies as a refugee, what their rights are, and what obligations States have with respect to refugees. In addition, Saint Lucia may have policies and practices that specifically protect persons seeking asylum or refuge in the country, even while those protections are not codified in legislation.

SHELTERS FOR WOMEN SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE: SAFE SPACES TO PROVIDE PROTECTION AND SUPPORT FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN

At a regional level, the regulatory vacuum that existed at the beginning of the 1990s was gradually replaced by national legislation, public policies, action plans, and specific programs to build and maintain shelters, receive women victims of domestic violence, and develop services. In general, the existence of shelters is regulated by law – either national law, provincial regulation, or municipal ordinance. Public policies regulating the creation and management of shelters; as well as national plans against violence against women and associated programs, exist in every country analyzed, without exception.

The Committee of Experts of the MESECVI has defined shelters as "A physical space that provides protection and specialized care to women and children at risk due to domestic violence." The term "shelter" is commonly used and understood, encompassing various facilities such as support centers, safe houses, temporary housing units, or comprehensive care centers.

Shelters or safe houses can be structured in a variety of ways, follow different organizational models, and provide differing coverage and services³. Regardless of these differences, the State must ensure that, in addition to protecting life and physical safety of women, it enables them to overcome the numerous consequences of gender-based violence and allows them to rebuild their lives. States must focus on the victims and their human rights, as well as their safety and

possibility for empowerment and work, to avoid revictimization of the woman and her children.

The first domestic violence shelter was built in Brazil in 1964 (Lar Espírito Esperidão Prado, Rio Claro, Brazil). Within almost thirty (30) years, shelters began to appear in other countries in the 1990s - and the numbers have only multiplied since then. Initially, shelters were set up by groups of women in response to the growing awareness of the issue of domestic violence. They were not, at first, included in legislation, national plans, or specific national policies, but in the intervening years, countries have gradually assumed responsibility for women's shelters.

In an effort to review the legal and regulatory framework of shelters in Saint Lucia, as part of the DPS/SSM/OAS project, the MESECVI met on March 1st, 2024 with about 15 stakeholders from government and civil society who work with survivors of gender-based violence, to discuss the situation of shelter and service provision in Saint Lucia. Coming out of that meeting an invitation was extended to the MESECVI to make an onsite visit to the island's only shelter for women victims of domestic and intimate partner violence and their children; upon a return visit.

On Wednesday, March 20th, 2024, the MESECVI Team went to visit The Women's Support Centre which was opened in 2000, but became fully operational in 2001 to respond to the urgent need for shelter for women and children caught in high-risk situations of domestic and intimate partner violence.

³ UNFPA 2021, Guidelines for the Management of Safe Shelters for GBV survivors in the English and Dutch speaking Caribbean A SURVIVOR-CENTERED APPROAC

TESTIMONIAL: FORMER FEMALE CLIENT OF THE WOMEN'S SUPPORT CENTRE

"My name is N.S.R. I am a resident of Bishop's Gap. I thought this could never be me. I was a victim. A victim of society, also domestic violence as a mother, a friend, a teacher. I would often wonder: How could I make it out? Until I came across this opportunity – and might I say, the best. It came from, let's say, something that one could never expect since we think that society has forgotten. The Women's Support Centre who changed my life with just one phone call. Sisters, do I say again, they were there! I was given a shelter, food, clothing – and most importantly, emotional support. Thanks, thank you to this Centre. I am now strong enough and I can now say there is a Centre who shows love, family and unity to women of those such issues I, myself faced. Thank you, Women's Centre!"

The three-member team was escorted by Managing Director, Ms. S. E., to the confidential location. Upon arrival at the Women's Support Centre (WSC), the team was introduced to a male administrative staffer with responsibility for maintenance of the site.

Staffing: The WSC has 9 members of staff and 1 volunteer: Five of these staffers are onsite; but the 3 drivers are not. There is a Managing Director, an Office Secretary, and Counselling staff.

Both the residential staff and the clients must be picked up to be taken to – and brought out of – the residence, to preserve its secret location. These staffers work through a series of shift hours: 7:00am-3:00pm, 1:00pm-9:00pm and 9:00pm-7:00pm. When clients are in the residence, nightly staff is on premises throughout the night with these clients. However, when there are no clients in residence, the nightly shift

consists mainly of operating the 24-hour crisis hotline. Night staff work virtually, using their cellphones to which the calls forwarded and handled. The staffers are mainly women, except for the drivers, so the WSC has been advocating for additional security and additional drivers especially to support the 9pm-7am night shift.

Clients: Ms. S.E. explained that at full capacity the WSC can hold up to 25 people which would comprise 4 women with their respective children – with 4 children in a room. Altogether, there are 4 rooms including a downstairs unit for interim housing for clients requiring more privacy due to social and/or professional status. This basement unit has a self-contained kitchen, small seating area, bedroom, and washroom. In the Centre, all clients are expected to prepare their own meals – even with a shared kitchen space - with the groceries supplied by the staff and to care for their own families.

TESTIMONY: FORMER FEMALE CLIENT OF THE WOMEN'S SUPPORT CENTRE

"My name is K.R. and I was a client of the Women's Support Centre in the year 2015. I came with my four kids and they were very young and the shelter assist by offering a safe place to stay. The staff was very helpful to me and my kids. They provided me with all what I needed and my stay. They staff provide me with food, with transportation to work – and also my kids was transported to school. Thank you!"

Shelter: The shelter facility is strictly for high-risk cases where the lives and physical integrity of women and their children are in danger due to intimate partner violence. Clients who call the hotline and are not in immediate danger - or who present for help and are of lesser risk - are referred to the various agencies after an initial assessment has been made through telephone counselling to determine the level of risk. Depending on where the client presents in the time of emergency and after a point of safety has been established (hospital, police station, social service agencies, including Family Court), arrangements are made to pick up the high-risk client. Clients cannot be brought to the shelter during the night, so there are arrangements in place with the police for transportation to assist the Centre in getting these clients to temporary alternative housing.

The normal length of stay at the WSC is 21 days, but case management can determine stays beyond this time frame, at the discretion of the caseworker. There have been cases where clients have stayed up to 3-4 months in duration. Clients are assisted in accordance with their needs and goals whether it is for housing, rent payment for up to 2 months, job placement, furniture and household needs; food, post-shelter; books, supplies and school uniforms for school children; or child-care. The Shelter is currently advocating for funding to assist with child-care and has been looking to expand its children's room. A safety plan for children is also arranged to manage school pick-up and drop off and for the mother regarding her safety at work.

TESTIMONIAL: FORMER FEMALE CLIENT OF THE WOMEN'S SUPPORT CENTRE

"I want to thank the Women's Support Centre for what they do for me and my children. This is ... and I am calling on behalf of all what they do for me and my children. Thank you for all what they doing. They helping us with school supplies, food, talking to us, counselling us. Is like my children have another mother, a big sister and a good friend. Thank you for everything they have done for us – the Women's Support Centre!"

At this time, the Women's Support Centre is not in operation for physical intake, because of necessary repairs to be undertaken due to a plumbing incident on the upper levels which led to extensive flooding even causing damage to the ground floor. The security system was disabled as a result (including cameras, phones and panic buttons) and this had to be re-instated. At the time of the visit, the Centre was still closed and therefore without clients and staffers. The staff members have been working remotely, in this instance, forwarding all calls to the caseworkers' cellphones as an interim measure, to service the DV hotlines which are still up and running. In the last 2-3 years, the Centre has been challenged by recurrent flooding downstairs after heavy rains possibly due to topographical factors. However, as the Managing Director assured, this has been fixed and they are preparing to re-open the shelter by mid-to-late year.

Location: The shelter is in a semi-secluded, scenic area in a gated, split-level building. On the upper level there are 4 bedrooms with assigned bathrooms; and two shared living/dining areas and two verandah areas. All clients are expected to cook for themselves and care for their families for the duration of stay. There

is also a Children's Room and a small library with a narrow selection of books.

On the ground floor, one-on-one counselling is carried out in a modest office space dedicated to this work. Two other small offices are located within tight, but easy access of the other in the same vicinity for the office Administrator and the Managing Director.

The site visit revealed that given the layout of the Centre, it would be hardly possible for the Centre to have clients with mobility issues. The upper levels are only accessible using a flight of stairs and even on the ground level, there are a couple steps to access the ground level room.

At the time of the visit, the bus that services the Centre was also down and in need of repair – and has been so since October/November 2023. The Centre will re-open once these challenges have been remedied projected to be in June to August of 2024, when a new bus has been secured. Meanwhile, it still operates its crisis lines – and although not open to intake of clients until then – makes arrangements for temporary alternative housing and provides food packages.

Data on the Shelter

In its 23 years of operation, from 2001-2024, the Centre has housed 313 clients. While the client numbers vary with the years, they tend to be more concentrated around festivals such as Carnival and Christmas. For instance, in 2002, two years after opening, the Centre had 31 clients; while in 2004, it had 26. More recently, the numbers have dropped to the following (mindful that the years 2021-2022 were those where Saint Lucia was in the throes of the COVID-19 pandemic):

- 2020: 10 clients
- 2021: 9 clients
- 2022: 2 clients
- 2023: 5 clients
- 2024: Centre is temporarily closed for repairs

Following the site visit to the Women's Support Shelter, the MESECVI Team, upon invitation, visited the Saint Lucia Crisis Centre located in Castries Saint Lucia, the Capital City of Saint Lucia. The Saint Lucia Crisis Centre is located on a main thoroughfare, Chaussee Road, opposite the George V Park. It has been in this location for at least 20 years having received the donation of a building from a member of the private sector, but it is evident that the old building is in dire need of refurbishment to make it more fit to purpose. Citing the massive human, financial and infrastructural deficits – which were very much in evidence to the MESECVI team – the Crisis Centre has been lobbying for land and/or a building to permanently rehouse the Centre. As part of this crusade, its management has met with both the minister responsible and the Assistant Commissioner of Crown Lands to lobby for this.

At the Centre, the MESECVI team was met by Managing Director, Ms. L.I. and introduced to two Board Members, Mr. A.S. and Ms. G.J. – as well as Ms. J., the Administrative Officer/Secretary; Social Worker, Ms. J.S.; and Counsellor, Ms. F.S.C. Currently, the Centre receives a subvention from government for EC\$6000.00 monthly,

despite having 3 full-time paid staff members, a part-time Counsellor; and a Social Worker.

Staffing/Services: Ms. J.S. is trained in handling child sexual abuse with 20 years of experience. Since 2000, upon her second stint with the Centre, Ms. J.S. has coordinated the afterschool program for vulnerable children – including those with disabilities – for about 11 children, with 1-2 coming from situations of DV. She also does psychosocial work with clients, counselling and makes referrals to agencies as needed. In 2023, the focus on young school-aged girls prioritizes internet safety to prevent and protect them from perpetrators of online gender-based violence, including grooming and internet revenge porn. She also works with young girls who have been sexually assaulted by making referrals to the Vulnerable Persons Unit within the Saint Lucia Police Force. In 2024, she has been working primarily with primary schools to advance the Centre's after-school program. Ms. J.S. also collaborates with the Department of Gender Affairs in providing Domestic Violence training – and along with Ms F.S.C – provides counselling to DV clients who come into the Centre. Originally, back in the mid-1980s, the St. Lucia Crisis was established as the first NGO to handle cases of battered women and their children. However, it never operated as a shelter. Today, it does not focus primarily on DV, it still receives DV calls frequently. While the Crisis Centre does not have sheltering capabilities, it directs such clients to the Family Court and other agencies that offer services in this area.

Among the variety of services that the gender-neutral St. Lucia Crisis Centre offers, include parenting skills especially for young people, skills in budgeting and empowerment for single women, help with parents with children with disabilities or with disabled mothers; and work with older persons. Ms. F.S.C also works with couples for prevention of DV and SV; and with perpetrators on behavioral issues stemming from anger management.

Lately, the Centre has had an uptake in male clients since the Probation Department has been sending clients for counselling and a lot of focus is given to the rehabilitation of young male offenders, including those on charges of manslaughter. The Centre also receives a lot of cases from the Vulnerable Persons Unit and has been commended by the Unit for its work with these referrals. The Centre also gets migrant women among its many referrals.

TESTIMONIAL ONE: MALE CLIENT FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF PROBATION AND PAROLE WITHIN THE MINISTRY OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE, HOME AFFAIRS, LABOUR AND GENDER AFFAIRS (SPEAKING ABOUT THE ST. LUCIA CRISIS CENTRE) –

"I am here on behalf of the young women from Probations and Parole who have walked through the doors of the Crisis Center. I am aware that I am not a young woman, however, they could not be here today. But I am quite privileged to represent them because we are in this together. The St. Lucia Crisis Center has provided tremendous support for the girls and the boys of the Department of Probation and Parole and we are grateful for the tremendous work that is being done in helping us. The Center provides a safe space for young women to express themselves freely and openly. In a judgment-free environment, they can explore their thoughts, emotions and experiences without fear of criticism or stigma. Furthermore, the Centre equips young women and men with invaluable coping mechanisms and problem-solving skills. Whether grappling with anxiety, depression, relationship issues, or career uncertainties, the Crisis Center offers practical strategies to navigate life's complexities with confidence and clarity. Through guidance and reflection, young women learn to confront challenges head-on and emerge stronger from adversity.

Additionally, we foster meaningful connections and a sense of community among young individuals. Group therapy sessions, support groups, and workshops create opportunities for shared experiences, mutual support, and collective empowerment. Through solidarity, young women realize they are not alone in their struggles and triumphs, fostering a sense of belonging and sisterhood.

The Crisis Center is not just a resource; it's a lifeline for young people especially young women navigating the complexities of today's world. By providing support and empowering young women to cultivate resilience, foster well-being, and unleash their full potential."

Intake Data: The Centre handles about 500 clients annually – sometimes more and sometimes less. About 50% of these cases are about inter-personal conflict among couples and the other 50% involve young girls in cases of SV and IPV. There is an emerging and growing number of cases coming from the Department of Probation with young offenders who are perpetrators of inter-personal violence.

Safety: Given the open access to this public building, security for the all-female staffers is a big concern since there is only a locked wrought-iron gate for security and burglar bars on the windows. There have been a couple of minor incidents of stealing of personal effects, but nothing yet involving staff safety and need for use of personal safety buttons.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR SHELTERS AND SAFE HOUSES UNDER THE BELEM DO PARA CONVENTION:

Women's safe spaces should reflect the range of needs, experiences, ages, and comfort levels of those who choose to access. While targeted and nuanced support for survivors of various forms of gender-based violence should be prioritized at all times, there are opportunities to support women and girls through a variety of activities and interventions. These services can be categorized into individual support, group psychosocial support, prevention and outreach, and mobile-based support, and should be designed and implemented considering the context and assessment of the overall environment, challenges, and constraints.

If possible, safe spaces should provide gender-based violence specific case management services for women survivors of GBV. Case management should include the following:

- **Needs and Experiences Assessment.**
- **Creating a response plan, based on survivors' resilience and available resources.**
- **Implementation of the response plan, with ongoing support from Center staff.**
- **Follow-up sessions to determine the effectiveness of the response plan and identify any changes.**
- **Closing the case.**

1) Individual Support for Survivors of Gender-based Violence and Sexual Violence

A clear pathway should be established to articulate specific services for the needs of adult survivors and girls. Referral pathways should provide information to survivors and/or their social workers/focal points explaining the range of health, psychosocial and legal support available to them, as well as how they can access these services. These services should be presented in a way that allows survivors to make an informed decision about how, when, and where to seek support. All safe space personnel should be familiar with the reference pathway and their role within the pathway. Depending on the specific services available in the safe space, survivors may be referred to the following (if desired):

- Medical/clinical care or treatment.
- Specialized Counseling/Wellness Services
- Group Emotional Support Activities organized by the Safe Space.
- Legal Assistance/Assistance in Access to Justice.

Case management services should be individually tailored to ensure that they are age appropriate and specialized for women survivors of GBV. Case management can also incorporate:

- **Provision of individual counseling (or referral to additional, more specialized mental health services) as needed.**
- **Accompaniment to health, other support services, law enforcement, or your family as requested by the survivor.**
- **Safety planning by technically trained staff (particularly for intimate partner violence cases)**
- **Referral to a safe haven (if available and appropriate).**

2) Spaces for Group Empowerment (when feasible)

Group-based emotional support activities should be designed to create a supportive and engaging environment for all women and girls, including survivors (but not limited to survivors). These activities will be guided by the model of empowerment for women survivors of GBV:

- Age-appropriate support group sessions around a “centerpiece.”
- Centerpieces can include creative or social activities. The identification of appropriate and desirable “care centres” should be determined during group consultations with women and girls in the targeted communities.
- Recreational therapy (dancing, singing, drama groups)
- Peer Support Groups
- Childcare services will be provided where possible to increase access to centres for women with young children.

Information and awareness-raising sessions with women and girls on:

- Information about available services and how to access them or risk identification and reduction strategies.
- Prevention of gender-based violence
- Other information relevant to women and girls, including on sexual and reproductive health and rights, HIV/AIDS and STI prevention, infant and young child feeding practices, positive coping strategies and life skills.

The provision of dignity kits or other materials provided by different agencies and organizations can increase the social and economic capital of women and girls, and should be targeted at newly displaced populations, or particularly vulnerable women and girls.

Location & Design

The Centres must be in a location that ensures easy access for women and girls in transit. Banners and signs must be displayed, in the local language, specifying the address and name of the space. It must have a larger room, and have at least one smaller room, to be used as “privacy rooms” (and which may be used for case management or counseling activities) and/or a utility/multi-use room.

Exterior structure

A fence or wall should be built to ensure privacy, safety and to prevent animals and intruders from entering. This will also increase the sense of comfort of women and girls within the space.

Interior Structure

- There should be a room for group activities.
- A privacy room is needed to provide case management and individual counseling services, as well as for breastfeeding or other activities that require privacy.
- The building must be raised to prevent flooding during the rainy season.
- A “nursery” area should be considered.

Equipment

Safe spaces should be equipped with the necessary furniture and materials to ensure women and girls can participate comfortably and effectively in activities. The following supplies and equipment can be purchased for the Center, depending on budget availability:

- Lockable cabinet.
- Some furniture, chairs, and a table for the private room.
- Mats and cushions for the group activity room
- Stove and basic kitchen utensils for making tea/coffee and small snacks.
- IEC materials, including posters, graphics, and visual aids for any briefing.
- Whenever possible, special items and considerations for women and girls with special needs or disabilities should be included.
- Emergency sand, fire extinguisher, or blankets in case of emergency.

Structure of the Centres: Minimum Standards

- Accessible Location.
- Privacy Fence.
- Space for group activities.
- At least one privacy room.
- Information and awareness-raising materials.
- Mats.
- Rainfall/Flood Considerations.
- At least 2 emergency exits.

CONCLUSIONS

Addressing sexual violence against women and girls, particularly those in migratory contexts, requires a multi-faceted and coordinated approach.

To effectively address sexual violence against women and girls, Saint Lucia must continue to strengthen its indicators, public policies, and legislative frameworks. Collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, and community stakeholders is crucial for the successful implementation of comprehensive strategies that protect and empower all women and girls in the country.

This presentation provides a foundation for developing and assessing policies and legislation to create a safer and more supportive environment for survivors in Saint Lucia. Ongoing collaboration between government agencies, civil society, and international organizations is essential to achieving meaningful and lasting change.

Sexual violence is a pervasive issue globally, impacting the lives of women and girls across various contexts. In Saint Lucia, tackling sexual violence requires a comprehensive approach that considers the unique challenges faced by women and girls, particularly those in migratory situations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. REVIEW AND STRENGTHEN LAWS: Regularly review and strengthen legislation related to sexual violence, ensuring it is in line with international human rights standards. Ensuring all new legislation aim to enshrine the principals of international instruments is reflected.

2. CONSENT LAWS: Enact specific laws around consent, ensuring that they reflect a clear understanding of affirmative consent and include protections for vulnerable groups.

3. MANDATORY REPORTING: Implement mandatory reporting mechanisms for professionals who come into contact with potential victims, such as healthcare providers, educators, and social workers. It must be mentioned here that provision exists in the Criminal Code under the Sex Offenses Act, for mandatory reports. Building awareness to this is imperative.

4. ANONYMOUS REPORTING SYSTEMS: Establish anonymous reporting systems to encourage survivors who may be reluctant to come forward due to fear or stigma. DHS had a hotline, crime hotline, as does RYV and the WSC etc.

5. Develop a formal and systematized process to follow-up on the status of women who have accessed shelter services, including post-intervention.

6. VICTIM PROTECTION MEASURES: Implement measures to protect the privacy and safety of survivors throughout legal proceedings, including restraining orders and secure courtrooms. Use of video link and recording of victim statements. The use of video link exists through a project among the Family Court, Court of Appeal and the Division of Human Services for children who have to give evidence in court. This can also be extended to adult victims of sexual offenses together with all attendant support.

7. EDUCATION AND AWARENESS: Measure the effectiveness of educational programs aimed at preventing sexual violence, promoting consent, and dispelling myths and misconceptions. In particular, building community awareness on what is consent. Schools can play such a vital role in this education. Engage the media in developing products that educate and build awareness on consent and the prevention of sexual violence. Building awareness of international instruments such as MESECVI – the Follow up Mechanism to Belem de Para Convention.

8. ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT: Track the economic status of survivors, ensuring that they have opportunities for financial independence and stability. Some work is being carried out by RYV and the Women's Shelter. This would include assisting women in soft skills, writing CVs, applying for jobs, interview skills, job placement; and training in financial managements and budgeting etc. All this will lead to the empowerment of victims that will determine their survivorship.

9. NATIONAL ACTION PLAN AGAINST GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: Develop and implement a comprehensive national action plan that specifically addresses sexual violence, incorporating prevention, support services, and legal reforms.

10. STRENGTHEN INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION: health, employment, income, education, housing and consider forming a Committee for monitoring and evaluation.

11. Guarantee the continuity of employment, social security and labor rights for shelter workers. Guarantee their training and specialization in gender-based violence and in an intersectional approach working with migrant women, with special emphasis on sensitivity to the cultural aspects

12. COMMUNITY-BASED INTERVENTIONS: Support and fund community-based initiatives that raise awareness, provide education, and foster a culture of consent and respect. Continued training and awareness building is vital in the fight against sexual violence against women and girls. Whilst the legislation covers the age of consent there is need to be specific on what is consent. What is needed is a comprehensive campaign on the concept of consent.

13. POLICE AND JUDICIAL TRAINING: Provide specialised training for law enforcement and judicial personnel to handle sexual violence cases sensitively and effectively from a trauma informed perspective. Trauma-informed training for members of the judiciary would involve sensitising members of the judiciary, the Bar Association, other legal professionals; and the police about the impacts of trauma on victims of sexual violence who come into contact with the legal system. This type of training would provide a deeper understanding of how trauma affects the individuals' behaviour, reactions and decision-making processes.

14. HEALTHCARE PROTOCOLS: Establish clear protocols within the healthcare system for the treatment and support of survivors, ensuring access to medical examinations, counselling, and follow-up care.

15. PROTECTION FOR MIGRANT WOMEN AND

GIRLS: Integrate protections for women and girls in migratory contexts into existing policies, addressing vulnerabilities such as language and cultural barriers, immigration status, legal counseling, protection from deportation, and lack of awareness about available services. RYV and the Women's Support Centre have spoken on their procedures for supporting migrant women and girls. Bearing in mind that this population is within their specific mandate, yet support is given for their special needs, such as shelter and safeguarding, and at times, repatriation to their home countries.

16. INCREASING BUDGET: Include specific, adequate, and publicly accessible budget line items in the annual estimates of expenditure and administration of national budgets.

17. Ensuring adequate infrastructure and spaces to receive clients, covering all the territory (north and south of the island); accessibility (removing physical barriers), and ensuring transportation for clients and their families.

18. Guaranteeing security for workers, providing counseling and wellness support when needed.

ANNEX

Analysis of the progress made in the realization of women's right to live a life free of sexual violence

- 1. **Number of cases of sexual violence reported**:** This indicator evaluates the number of cases of sexual violence reported to the pertinent authorities or institutions within a determined period of time.
- 2. **Rate of prevalence of sexual violence**:** This indicator examines the proportion of women who have experienced some form of sexual violence within a determined time period, either within the general population or specific subgroups, such as young women, indigenous women, etc.
- 3. **Rates of reporting and processing**:** This indicator examines the proportion of cases of sexual violence reported to the authorities and the percentage of those cases that are actually investigated and prosecuted.
- 4. **Access to victims' support and assistance services**:** This indicator analyzes access of women victims of sexual violence to medical care, psychological counseling, safe shelter, legal assistance, and other support resources.
- 5. **Implementation of prevention policies and programs**:** This indicator evaluates the effectiveness of the policies and programs implemented by the Government and other organizations to prevent sexual violence and increase public awareness of the issue.
- 6. **Training and awareness of professionals**:** This indicator analyzes the degree to which healthcare, justice, police, and other sector professionals are trained to recognize, treat, and adequately respond to cases of sexual violence.
- 7. **Fulfillment of international obligations**:** This indicator evaluates the degree to which States Parties fulfill their international obligations with respect to human rights, including those in the Convention of Belem do Pará and other relevant instruments.

Access to justice for victims of sexual violence

- 1. **Proportion of survivors of sexual violence who are aware of their legal rights**:** This indicator evaluates women victims of sexual violence awareness of their legal rights and the resources available to assist them to access justice.
- 2. **Rate of reporting of cases of sexual violence**:** This indicator examines the proportion of cases of sexual violence that are reported to the competent authorities.
- 3. **Rate of prosecution**:** This indicator evaluates the percentage of cases of sexual violence that are investigated and prosecuted.
- 4. **Average response time in the legal system**:** This indicator measures the time it takes for sexual violence cases to make it through the legal systems from the time they are first reported to the time they are resolved.
- 5. **Access to low- or no-cost legal services**:** This indicator analyzes the degree of access survivors of sexual violence have to low- and no-cost legal services, including legal advice and representation during legal proceedings.
- 6. **Proportion of survivors who receive support during the legal process**:** This indicator evaluates the proportion of survivors of sexual violence who receive emotional support, counseling and assistance during the legal process.
- 7. **Protection for survivors during the legal process**:** This indicator evaluates the availability and effectiveness of protective measures for survivors of sexual violence during the legal process, such as orders of protection or security in court.
- 8. **Survivors' satisfaction with the legal system**:** This indicator evaluates the level of satisfaction survivors of sexual violence have with the legal systems and the results they obtained. This includes their perception of justice and how they were treated by the legal authorities.

NATIONAL STUDY ON SHELTERS FOR Women Victims of Sexual Violence and Gender-Based Violence

SAINT LUCIA



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