

Group of Latin America and Caribbean Countries 1

Committee Background Guide

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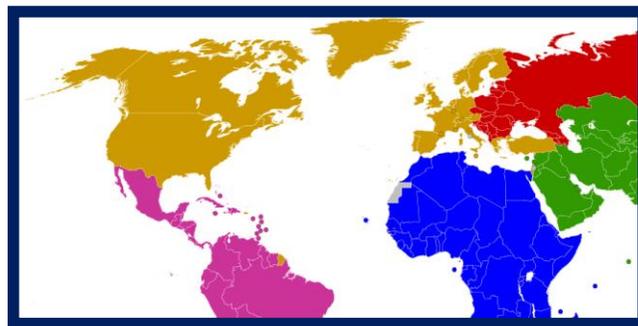
About this Committee

The Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC for short) has 33 members (17% of all UN members). Its territory is almost exactly that of South and Central America and the Caribbean; the differences arise from the presence of dependent territories of European countries. GRULAC has 2 non-permanent seats on the Security Council.

The Group also has 10 seats on the United Nations Economic and Social Council and 8 seats on the United Nations Human Rights Council. In the rotation of the post of the President of the United Nations General Assembly, the group is eligible for having its nationals elected to this post in years ending with 3 and 8; most recently, Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann of Nicaragua was elected to this position in 2008.

There are 33 member states

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|  Antigua and Barbuda |  Dominica |  Nicaragua |
|  Argentina |  Dominican Republic |  Panama |
|  Bahamas |  Ecuador |  Paraguay |
|  Barbados |  El Salvador |  Peru |
|  Belize |  Grenada |  Saint Kitts and Nevis |
|  Bolivia |  Guatemala |  Saint Lucia |
|  Brazil |  Guyana |  Saint Vincent and the Grenadines |
|  Chile |  Haiti |  Suriname |
|  Colombia |  Honduras |  Trinidad and Tobago |
|  Costa Rica |  Jamaica |  Uruguay |
|  Cuba |  Mexico |  Venezuela |



Regional Information

Latin America and the Caribbean is a region marked by great social inequalities. Out of a population of approximately 222 million, 10% of the region's inhabitants receive 48% of all income, while the poorest segment of the population has access to a mere 2% of total earnings. There are profound differences in the freedom, or capability, of different individuals and groups to follow lives of their choosing—to do things that they have cause to value.

Social and political arrangements affect the capacity to participate meaningfully in society, influence decision making, or live without shame.

Women's autonomy is fundamental in ensuring that they can exercise human rights under conditions of full equality. Control over their own bodies (physical autonomy), income generation and ownership of their personal financial resources (economic autonomy), and full participation in decisions that affect their lives, individually and as a group (decision-making autonomy), are three pillars for building greater gender equality in the region.

With respect to education, even though public systems exist in most countries in Latin America, the disparities of attainment are equally striking to those in income. In Mexico, the average person in the poorest fifth of the population has 3.5 years of schooling, as compared with 11.6 years for the average person in the richest fifth. These numbers are likely to underestimate actual educational differences because of marked differences in the quality of education. In many countries, educational attainment also differs among gender, ethnic, and racial groups.

Health outcomes also vary dramatically along with income distribution, resulting in enormous impacts on life opportunities and quality. In Brazil, children born to households in the poorest fifth of the population are three times as likely to die before they reach the age of five as children born to households in the richest fifth. In Bolivia, this figure is more than four times as high, with children in the bottom fifth experiencing under-five mortality rates of 146.5 per 1,000, or as high as the South Asian average. The problem of AIDS continues to affect the region. The estimated number of new HIV infections in 2007 was 140,000, and thus the number of people living with HIV rose to 1.7 million.

In the last 25 years, Latin America and the Caribbean have made enormous progress at the level of democratic governance. Among the developing regions, Latin America and the Caribbean are at the forefront in terms of the political representation of women. In Latin America there has in recent years been an increase in both the number and percentage of women in politics - embodied by the rise to power of two female presidents, Michelle Bachelet in Chile and Cristina Fernández in Argentina. Their election has, in turn, generated a renewed debate on the state of women in politics today in the region. The reality, perhaps surprising, is that the progress of women in assuming elected office in Latin America varies considerably: between and even within countries, nationally and sub-nationally.

Why does Argentina have 40% women legislators, while neighbouring Brazil has only 8%?

The choice of electoral system has an enormous impact - perhaps more than any other single factor - on the number of women elected to public office. Both countries have list systems with gender-quotas, but they're only effective in Argentina where parties run "closed" lists and are required to alternate men and women in "electable" positions higher up the list. Brazil, on the other hand, allows parties to present a number of candidates equivalent to as much as 150% of the number of seats being contested and there is no sanction for non-compliance with the quota. Additionally, Brazil's candidate-centred "open" list-system makes success more dependent on access to campaign funding, an area in which women face greater disadvantages.

The region is also still grappling with the effects of violent conflicts in various countries. In parts of the region, social and political stability are threatened by economic and social inequalities, and reforms at the political, social and civic levels have been called for.

Advances in gender equality have never come without cultural struggles against the visible and invisible dimensions of power and the practices that sustain gender inequalities and oppress women.

Struggles to eradicate domestic violence have been going on throughout Latin America. Women's rights advocates have worked steadily and consistently for government legislation and effective public policies. They are also committed to eradicating the patriarchal values within cultural contexts that support gender-based violence, in order to place private violence in the public eye and "denaturalize" it. In 1994, the Organization of American States (OAS) adopted the Interamerican Convention to Prevent, Sanction and Eradicate Violence Against Women. Chile and Argentina adopted similar conventions in 1994; Bolivia, Ecuador and Panama in 1995; Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Peru in 1996; and the Dominican Republic modified its penal code to include legislation against domestic violence in 1997

In Brazil, the process of change started with the creation of special police stations for battered women (*delegacias especiais de atendimento À mulheres, or DEAMs*), ideally staffed by policewomen. The first such police station was created in São Paulo in 1985 and there are now over 300 in the country.

Many states have built reference centres and shelters for battered women, and provided a network of services to assist female victims of violence. However, the major instrument to combat domestic violence was developed fairly recently. Law no. 11.340, sanctioned on 7 August 2006, and named *Lei Maria da Penha* (in honour of a woman shot and crippled for life by her ex-companion 20 years ago), not only increases the period of imprisonment for such violent acts from one to three years but it also allows preventive arrests and arrests for flagrant conduct. In addition, it includes a number of measures to protect the woman.

However, legislation to criminalize domestic violence is not always sufficient. In Brazil, several judges have claimed that the Maria da Penha law is "unconstitutional" because it "discriminates" against men. Some have called for women's submission, as in former times.

Feminists recognize that engaging with culture is essential for eradicating domestic violence and that "cultural factors can be harnessed to bring about change for the better

Challenges

Challenges:

Latin America and the Caribbean have the following pending tasks:

- With respect to excess *deaths of girls and women*, the combination of inequalities among disadvantaged segments of the population – inequality due to gender, ethnicity, distance and income – has created some pockets, such as in the case of the maternal mortality rates in Haiti and rural areas of Andean countries, despite the elimination of excess female deaths, even in lower-income countries.
- The same could be said for disparities in girls' schooling. In disadvantaged segments of the population, girls' enrolment in primary and secondary school continues to be below that of boys. In Guatemala, the illiteracy rate among indigenous women is 60%, 40% higher than that among non-indigenous women.
- Although women in the region have increased their labor market participation, they continue to face *unequal access to economic opportunities*:
 - a. Nearly 70 million women have joined the labor force in the region in recent decades. However, they are more likely than men to work as unpaid family laborers or in the informal sector. They also frequently work in traditionally "female sectors" with lower earnings. Women farmers tend to farm smaller plots and less profitable crops than men, or work in smaller firms in less-profitable sectors.
 - b. Even with higher education levels, women earn less than men. In Mexico, women earn an average of 20% less than men. In Argentina, 12% less. In Brazil, the figure is 25% less.
- Finally, the region faces the daunting challenge of eliminating *differences in voice in households and in society*:
 - a. Women – especially poor women – have less say over decisions and less control over resources in their households than men. Forty percent of women in the region do not participate in decisions concerning major household expenses.
 - c. Women continue to be victims of domestic violence. In Cusco, nearly two of every three women are victims of some type of domestic violence in their lifetimes; in Sao Paulo, this is a reality for one of every four women.
 - c. Women participate less in formal politics than men and are under-represented in its upper echelons.

Availability of gender statistics

The World's Women 2010 has benefited from an increase in the availability of gender statistics in the last 10 years. The majority of countries are now able to produce sex-disaggregated statistics on population, enrolment, employment and parliamentary representation.

In addition, gender statistics in some newer areas are becoming available. For example, statistics on child labour are now collected by a larger number of countries. Similarly, surveys on time use and on violence against women were conducted in both developed and developing countries although international standards in these two statistical fields have not yet been fully developed.

However, the preparation of *The World's Women 2010* was hampered by the fact that statistics in certain domains are not available for many countries. Furthermore, even the statistics that are available are often not comparable because concepts, definitions and methods vary from country to country. Data are also lacking in detail in many cases.

In other areas, the absence of internationally agreed measurement standards and methods has resulted in a lack of gender statistics relating to disease prevalence, home-based workers, access to credit, the worst forms of child labour, human trafficking, femicide, intrahousehold poverty, individual ownership of land and losses associated with natural disasters.

In conclusion, increasing the capacity to produce reliable, accurate and timely statistics, in particular gender statistics, remains a formidable challenge for many countries.

Questions for Research:

1. What are the key issues for your country and region?
2. What action has your country taken to promote the equality and empowerment of women on a national and international level?
3. How is your country promoting the economic empowerment of women?
4. How is your country promoting participation of women?
5. How has your country implemented legislation that promotes equality and empowerment?
6. What legal safeguards are in place for women in terms of key issues such as trafficking, 'honour' crimes, VAW and other issues?
7. Do national polices take account of gender ('Gender Mainstreaming')
8. Does your country keep and submit data on gender equality and the empowerment of women?
9. Does your country promote the sharing of family roles and responsibilities?

Read the relevant guides to the '12 Areas of Action' from the Beijing Platform on the delegate preparation website and the 'useful websites' as a starting point for research

Useful Websites:

Information specific to Latin America and the Caribbean

<http://www.cepal.org/oig/default.asp?idioma=IN>

http://www.un.org/womenwatch/directory/latin_america_10474.htm

[http://www.eclac.cl/publicaciones/xml/3/40123/What kind State What kind equality.pdf](http://www.eclac.cl/publicaciones/xml/3/40123/What%20kind%20State%20What%20kind%20equality.pdf)

Summary information on NAPS and strategies for implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and global gender data:

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/country/national/westsum.htm>

<http://web.undp.org/latinamerica/>

http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2011.pdf

Gender mainstreaming

UNECOSOC formally defined concept:

Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality

Gender equality, women's empowerment and the MDGs

Gender equality and women's empowerment is central to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Yet, while there are some positive trends in gender equality, there are still many areas of concern. Girls account for the majority of children not attending school; almost two-thirds of women in the developing world work in the informal sector or as unpaid workers in the home. Despite greater parliamentary participation, women are still out numbered four-to-one in legislatures around the world.

Gender equality is a condition for inclusive, democratic, violence-free and sustainable development.



Keywords

Empowerment: increasing the spiritual, political, social, or economic strength of individuals and communities.

Development: planning and building to help improve communities and lives.

Discrimination: unfair treatment of a group based on a certain characteristic.