



**COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW**

**OF**

**SAINT LUCIA'S IMPLEMENTATION**

**OF THE**

**BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION**

**REPORT FOR PERIOD 2022 – 2024**

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## Section One

This section provides a synthesis highlighting the core elements of Saint Lucia's review process, main achievements, challenges and setbacks over the past five years, and some promising practices with transformative potential.

### Core elements of the country-level review process

The national review of the Beijing Platform for Action was led by Hon. Dr. Virginia Albert-Poyotte, Minister of the Public Service, Labour and Gender Affairs. The process was coordinated by the Division of Gender Affairs. A comprehensive review of available data and literature was conducted to gain an appreciation of the status of women in the twelve critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. National development actors were consulted through focus groups and national consultations. These included Gender Focal Points; Research Officers; Planning Officers in various Ministries/Departments/Agencies; representatives of Civil Society Organizations, Educational Institutions and the Media. On completion of the draft report a national validation exercise was conducted, leading to the submission of the final draft to the Minister of the Public Service, Labour and Gender Affairs.

### Progress, challenges and setbacks in the implementation of the BPfA

In the last five years of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, progress was most notable in four broad areas: strengthening of legislation; prioritization and visibility of gender equality as a developmental goal; political representation and decision-making power of women; and partnerships for gender equality. Among the greatest challenges are gender pay gap, sex segregation in employment and poor representation of women in the media. These challenges are not new but some have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Push back on gender equality, women's poverty and an increase in violence against women are identified as the most glaring setbacks. These areas of progress, key achievements, challenges and setbacks are explained in Section Two of this report.

### Lessons Learnt:

One of the most powerful lessons learnt in the past five years is the power of strategic partnerships for shared goals. The boost to gender equality awareness in the last five years has been facilitated by two significant developments: the increased visibility of the language and principle of gender equality in multi-lateral financial institutions policy and programmes, resulting in greater emphasis on gender equality in discussions around the economy, nationally, regionally and internationally; and the feminist foreign policies adopted by leading world economies. These

trends have resulted in greater access to finance for gender equality programming in various sectors of the economy and stimulated widespread ownership of gender equality goals.

Another important lesson is the fragility of gender equality gains. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted that structural barriers to women's empowerment have kept the status quo and that the gains made over the decades in women's empowerment were merely surface changes that looked good on the outside but did little to change the substantive inequality between women and men. This insight has led to more targeted goals aimed at dismantling structural barriers to the advancement of women such as changing harmful gender norms and stereotypes. Specifically, correcting the gender inequality of care and unpaid care and domestic work and eliminating sex segregation in employment are now shared goals that are more clearly justified.

#### Useful practices:

Two useful practices accounted for much of the progress made in the last five years. Firstly, the Minister with responsibility for Gender Affairs is a gender equality champion. Dr. Virginia Albert-Poyotte has an extensive history of work in the areas of women's empowerment and gender equality throughout her careers in education and labour relations. In addition, Minister Poyotte has decades of experience in the leadership of civil society organizations at the national, regional and international level advocating for women's rights and gender equality. This background has prepared her for championing gender equality at the Cabinet, Parliamentary, Ministerial, National and Community levels in Saint Lucia and carry this advocacy with greater clarity at the regional and international levels. This has boosted the gender equality commitment of the Government of Saint Lucia and increased the visibility of the national mechanism for gender equality as the coordinating agency for gender equality on the island.

Secondly, over the years, the Division of Gender Affairs has forged strategic partnerships with various regional development partners leveraging each agency's competitive advantage to fill the programming and capacity gaps of the Division. As such, all the strategic priorities of the Division were able to be given attention, thereby increasing visibility and efficiency. This particular practice is both useful and timely given the volume of work already being undertaken by development agencies in the area of gender equality in the region. It cuts back on duplication and allows for more targeted regional approaches that are actually responsive to the national priorities of the country.

#### National Priorities

After reviewing the status of women in Saint Lucia, the progress to date and the persistent challenges, the top priorities selected by national stakeholders for implementing the Beijing Platform for Action for the next five years are, in order of priority: unpaid care and domestic work / work-family conciliation; eliminating violence against women and girls; access to health care, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights; poverty eradication, agricultural productivity and food security; and changing discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes. Research and data management as well as economic empowerment of women are considered cross-cutting imperatives for all priorities. Stakeholders in Saint Lucia note the

interrelation among all the priority areas and how changes in one area can lead to improvements in others. As such attention will be placed on partnerships and coordination for comprehensive programming across priority areas.

The priorities chosen align with the national priorities outlined in the Medium-Term Development Strategy 2021-2025 and the National Adaptation Plan 2018-2028, as well as regional priorities identified by the United Nations Entities such as UN Women MCO for the Caribbean, UNFPA and UNDP; Economic Council of Latin America and the Caribbean; and the Inter-American Commission on Women.

**Unpaid care and domestic work / work-family conciliation:** One great challenge and opportunity presented by the COVID-19 pandemic was the realization that care work, particularly unpaid care and domestic work, was a major impediment to women's advancement in the world of work, creating cycles of poverty. The gendered dynamics of employment and poverty played out in national statistics and in the socio-economic sphere, underscoring the need for national planning efforts to acknowledge this issue as a major structural barrier to women's empowerment and at the same time leverage the opportunities of the care economy to improve gender equality outcomes in national sustainable development.

**Eliminating violence against women and girls:** As a leading indicator of gender inequality and threat to gender equality, the unabated violence against women and girls requires a more strategic and coordinated response that is steeped in partnerships, data and accountability.

**Access to health care, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights:** Although access to health care for women and girls has improved over the decades, challenges persist in some aspects including sexual and reproductive health education. Access to appropriate and adequate sexual and reproductive health education can lead to changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviours as it relates to sexual and reproductive health and can result in positive impacts on women's economic empowerment and economic development for all.

**Poverty eradication, agricultural productivity and food security:** Poverty eradication is at the centre of sustainable development. Leveraging the contribution of women in rural settings to food security is an opportunity that must be prioritized, given the national and regional challenges of food insecurity and poverty associated with women, particularly those in rural settings. Tackling this issue improves the economic power of women and at the same time improves on the accessibility and affordability of locally grown agricultural produce to promote food security. Greater linkages between the Department of Commerce with the Departments of Agriculture and Fisheries need to be forged towards this goal.

**Changing discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes:** Harmful gender norms and stereotypes form the basis of the structural barriers to gender equality. There has been a lack of strategic, systemic and systematic programmes targeted specifically at changing discriminatory social norms and gender stereotypes. The need for change in this regard is considered urgent. The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated how harmful gender norms and stereotypes can cripple an economy. Changing harmful stereotypes can no longer be assumed as an add-on to initiatives but must feature as a national strategy in the context of gender equality programming and national sustainable development.

Partnership is at the centre of addressing these priorities. Strategic partnerships are considered critical for policy development, financing and capacity development, including in data

management and the effective use of information and communications technology. Public/private partnerships, including civil society partnerships; partnerships with development institutions such as the UN Entities, the World Bank and friendly Governments; as well as inter-agency and inter-governmental partnerships are critical as gender equality pursuits require all-of-society, coordinated and resourced operations with robust monitoring and accountability frameworks for any meaningful change to be realized.

## Section Two- Priorities, achievements, challenges and setbacks

### Priorities

During the period 2020 – 2024 the top priorities identified for implementation of the BfPA were: ensure equality and non-discrimination under the law and access to justice; provide access to affordable quality health care, including sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights; eradicate poverty, and increase agricultural productivity; provide quality education and training and life-long learning for women and girls; and change negative social norms and gender stereotypes. There was a mixture of achievements, challenges and setbacks experienced, both in the implementation of priorities and in general national gender equality efforts, not specific to the priorities for this period of review. Some of the progress, challenges and setbacks were identified in Section One. It is important to note that due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic programming had to respond to new and emerging priorities. As a result, not all priorities originally identified received the level of prominence expected in programming. In light of this, not all the achievements, challenges and setbacks outlined in this section are specific to the priorities identified for the period but impacted overall implementation of the BPfA.

### Achievements:

The strengthening of legislation for Domestic Violence was one of the most widely acknowledged achievements in the last five years. The Domestic Violence Act No. 11 of 2022 increased the scope of the offence of Domestic Violence, both in terms of its definition and the types of domestic relationships it covers. It outlines the responsibility of the police and other state actors for prevention and response, and mandates regular training and adequate resource allocation for its implementation.

During the five years under review gender equality rapidly advanced from being a side-line issue to becoming a national development imperative. A Parliamentary Caucus on Women established in 2022 and a Gender Focal Point System for the Public Sector implemented in 2023 allowed for more focused conversations on gender equality in national decision making. The budgetary allocation of the Division of Gender Affairs has almost doubled in the past two years, from 0.06%<sup>1</sup> of the national budget in 2022/23 to 0.08%<sup>2</sup> of the national budget in 2024/25.

A demonstrable increase in the visibility of gender equality considerations in national reports was noted in the period under review, specifically the most recent reviews of the Nationally Determined Contributions 2021<sup>3</sup> and the Universal Periodic Review of 2022<sup>4</sup>. The number of projects with planned gender equality outcomes in various Ministries, Departments and Agencies, Civil Society and other Organizations, in particular, in the Departments of Commerce, Education, Agriculture, Fisheries, Equity and Health<sup>5</sup> increased.

<sup>1</sup> Total budget of the Division of Gender Affairs in the fiscal year 2022/23 was EC\$899,204

<sup>2</sup> Total budget of the Division of Gender Affairs in the fiscal year 2024/25 is \$1,651,890

<sup>3</sup> <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/Saint%20Lucia%20First%20NDC%20%28Updated%20submission%29.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g20/351/23/pdf/g2035123.pdf?token=tS1Irp6moySqFgg3SQ&fe=true>

<sup>5</sup> Table 1 outlines a list of projects with GEWE outcomes



Publicity of clearly articulated and implemented gender policies of development agencies and policy-based lending initiatives with a focus on gender equality implemented by multi-lateral financial institutions are noteworthy developments which, coupled with the increased public awareness and sensitization of gender equality as a development goal, create a more enabling environment for gender considerations in a wide range of development projects from various sectors. Thus, partnerships between financial or lending institutions with gender-transformative policies and national development partners can be powerful in creating gender equality outcomes at the national level.

Through the deliberate efforts of the Government of Saint Lucia, women's representation in decision making has been boosted. Increased representation of women in the upper house of parliament is the most glaring example of this. Parity has been achieved in the Senate with a 50-50 representation of male to female Senators and an overall 55% representation of women in the Senate as the President of the Senate is also a woman. Government appointed boards have led the way in ensuring gender parity in the appointment of public boards. Although private boards continue to have a more traditional composition as it relates to gender, the example set by the Government of Saint Lucia is a gender transformative decision that gives permission to other private institutions to invest more in women's leadership.

Given the blow to women's employment during the pandemic, the Government of Saint Lucia has provided increased access to opportunities for entrepreneurial and business development, including to women-led micro, small and medium businesses, post pandemic. Since the implementation of the MSME Loan Grant Facility <sup>6</sup> and the Youth Economy Agency (YEA)<sup>7</sup> more women have access to finance to start or grow their micro, small and medium enterprises. Through capacity development in various women's economic empowerment initiatives, women in rural communities, single mothers and unemployed women, including those engaged in agro-processing and vending on a very small scale in the informal sector, have acquired business skills in pricing, marketing and leveraging information technology. Thus, women have been able to expand their livelihood activities and gained access to the formal sector, enabling easier access to the MSME Loan Grant and YEA facilities as well as other opportunities such as access to markets, facilitated through the She Trades initiative.

In addition to the broad gender equality achievements highlighted above, there were other notable achievements in the priority areas for the period under review. In particular: training of the Police and introduction to gender-responsive policing in the context of the Domestic Violence Act Police Training; the first-phase implementation of Universal Health Care that provide free health care and services for pregnant mothers; increase in sector-specific and integrated gender-responsive projects for women in agriculture eg. Skills to Access the Green Economy (SAGE), the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS) and the Enabling Gender-Responsive Disaster. Recovery, Climate and Environmental. Resilience in the Caribbean (EnGenDER) projects; increase in efforts at STEAM and TVET programming for girls; and provision of scholarships for women and girls in male dominated settings, including in Agriculture and

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<sup>6</sup> The MSME Loan Grant Facility is an EC\$10m facility providing post pandemic relief in the form of 30% loan and 70% grant to successful applicants of registered MSMEs.

<sup>7</sup> The Youth Economy Agency was established by the Government of Saint Lucia to provide access to finance and skills for young people to develop and their businesses.

Engineering were noteworthy achievements for this period. These specific initiatives are discussed in greater detail in Section Three.

### Main Challenges:

Notwithstanding the gains of the last five years, some challenges persist. Sex segregation in employment continue to exist, resulting in significant income gaps between men and women or gender wage differential gaps as it is referred to by the UN agencies. Most recent assessments for Saint Lucia estimate an average of 22% gender wage differential in favour of men<sup>8</sup>. Women are overrepresented in the Care Sector which is characterized by low paying jobs, in contrast to the technical fields such as construction and manufacturing where predominantly men enjoy considerably higher compensation even including in jobs requiring lower levels of educational certification and attainment. Because of this, women particularly in the tourism sector, were more vulnerable and susceptible to job losses during the COVID 19 pandemic. According to the UNDP Future Tourism Diagnostic Report for Saint Lucia<sup>9</sup> “Tourism has been one of the most affected economic sectors due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Travel & Tourism Gross Domestic Product (GDP) contribution in Saint Lucia declined 71.7 per cent, and tourism employment dropped 34.3 per cent, costing 21, 800 individuals their jobs in 2020. Women were particularly impacted as female workers account for 57. 4 per cent of the accommodation and food services sub-sectors.” These sub-sectors experienced the largest job cuts.

Linked closely to the challenge of sex segregation in employment, resistance to the principle of gender equality due to gender stereotypes is a continued challenge. Such gender stereotypes hold that domestic work and the care of children, elderly and persons with disabilities are the duty and obligation of women. Because of this social norm, more women were kept away from gainful employment during the pandemic and their return to the world of work was much slower than their male counterparts. Some women were never able to return to work, including in the informal sector where several micro businesses were lost altogether.<sup>10</sup> Gender stereotypes continue to influence subject selection at schools and the acceptance of women in traditionally male-dominated fields, including in elective politics where the percentage of women to men is still below the 30% critical mass and way below the parity levels aspired to by governments of the region.

Whereas during the period under review an increase was noted in the number of women who are anchor news on local television stations host local talk shows, portrayal of women in the media continues to be a challenge. Notwithstanding initiatives to increase awareness of the gender sensitivity in the media, women continue to be portrayed in the media as objects of pleasure, particularly in advertisements, the use of images of half-dressed or nude women to

<sup>8</sup> The Human and Economic Assessment of Impact for Saint Lucia prepared by UNDP in July 2020 calculate the wage gaps in the following sectors to be: Agriculture 30%, Manufacturing 26%, Construction 34%, Wholesale and Retail 27%, Accommodation and Food services 16% and Education 14%. This translates into a national wage gap of approximately 22%. The complete report can be accessed here” <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/bb/undp-bb-Human-and-Economic-Assessment-of-Impact-Report-Saint-Lucia.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2022-09/undp\\_diagnostic\\_report\\_st\\_lucia\\_2022\\_insides\\_singles\\_6.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2022-09/undp_diagnostic_report_st_lucia_2022_insides_singles_6.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> A complete report of the economic effects of the pandemic in the region can be found here: <https://repositorio.cepal.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/0a1dcb1c-f163-414e-803b-d3f57759de01/content>

promote alcoholic beverages, cars and a host of other merchandise targeted mostly for men continues to be commonplace.

There is renewed concern about women's safety in light of the increase in inter-personal violence including violence against women. Women have become targets in ongoing gang violence resulting in the unprecedented killing of women in gang style gun violence in the last five years. During the pandemic the number of reports of grievous harm and death of women at the hands of their intimate partners increased when compared to previous years. In 2021 alone eight (8) women were killed, twice the rate of the highest number of murders committed against women in any previous year in recorded history. In addition there was an increase noted in the number of women allegedly perpetrating the killing of their male intimate partners.

In addition to these highlighted challenges, there are multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination (both direct and indirect) that still affect women, including lack of social protection for women who engage in unpaid care of children, older persons and persons with disabilities; lack of employment opportunities for women living in rural settings with poor educational attainment and early pregnancies; adolescent pregnancy and neglect of the girl child; and higher rates of poverty in women-headed households.<sup>11</sup>

Other challenges hindered the work of the Division of Gender Affairs and other entities engaged in gender equality programming. These include but are not limited to: unstable staffing and increasing mandate of the National Mechanism for Gender Equality and Advancement of Women; lack of accountability for gender equality evidenced in the absence of monitoring indicators and results-based management and reporting on gender equality across government; and access to timely data and use of data analysis for decision making. These challenges are discussed in greater detail in Sections Four and Five of this report.

### Main Setbacks:

One of the greatest setbacks for the period under review was the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges that were experienced from the national response measures. These challenges were exacerbated in the pandemic and new challenges emerged during that period.

Perhaps one of the greatest risks to sustaining the gains already made is the push back on gender equality planted in the misguided view that equality between men and women has been achieved. The concept of the "marginalization of men" is gaining popularity, even outside of the context of research in male violent behavior and male academic achievement, which are considered evidence of this marginalization. There are anecdotal reports from the media and social agencies of a perception among both men and women that women's empowerment is a threat to the stability and empowerment of men. This challenge was exacerbated during the pandemic as the specific concerns of women, particularly the reversal of gains already made, were highlighted frequently in national, regional and international media. There was growing complaints of men and the issues specific to men were being left out of the conversation.

Another factor setting back the implementation of the BPfA is the still inadequate prioritization of gender equality priorities in national instruments, resulting in inadequate allocation of resources and capacity for mainstreaming gender in sector-specific development

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<sup>11</sup> Challenges highlighted in National Consultation for preparation of the Beijing +30 Report

planning. Low visibility of gender considerations in high-level policy and legislative development sets back the priority of gender equality outcomes in national development planning. Although there is a marked increase in the visibility of gender in the public sphere, this must be translated into the articulation of specific gender equality goals in development planning, the identification of accountability indicators and regular national reporting on gains, challenges and setbacks. A greater emphasis on sector-specific gender action planning is possible given the establishment of the gender focal points system and the growing capacity of gender focal points to develop and implement gender action plans in their respective sectors.

Finally, there is concern from civil society of a lack of enforcement of laws that facilitate the empowerment of women, particularly in relation to domestic violence, notwithstanding the passage of the Domestic Violence Act. Clear regulations on the Domestic Violence Act and capacity building on gender responsive policing are measures that have the potential to improve enforcement of existing laws.

#### Prevention of discrimination and promotion of the rights of women and girls:

Over the past five years there have been efforts at protecting women and girls from discrimination both in the public and private spheres, including through civil society action. This report focuses on two initiatives, both in the public sector, one protecting women from discrimination in the environment and another protecting girls from discrimination in the education sector. Both of these measures have implications for ripple effects to accelerate progress for gender equality both nationally and on the broader regional and international scale.

**Saint Lucia becoming party to the Escazu Agreement:** Saint Lucia became party to the Escazu Agreement on April 22, 2021. This Latin America and Caribbean agreement guarantees every citizen, rights of access to environmental information, public participation in the environmental decision-making process and access to justice in environmental matters, as well as the creation and strengthening of capacities and cooperation, contributing to the protection of the right of every person of present and future generations to live in a healthy environment and to sustainable development<sup>12</sup>, among other things.

This is considered an important instrument and possible game-changer, to prevent discrimination against women in the environmental sector and to nurture, stimulate and encourage participation of women in decision-making in all spaces related to environmental matters, including where they are presently underrepresented because of social norms and gender stereotypes. Three decades into the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, , men are still overrepresented in most sectors associated with environmental resilience such as water, agriculture, fisheries, infrastructure and special engineering, and many associated technical fields and industries such as technology, engineering and construction, all of which have direct implications for resource allocation, including for environmental resilience, climate adaptation and disaster recovery. And this male domination of the space continues even with the measures recommended in the critical area of concern of Women and the Environment.

Whereas women are increasingly represented in environmental management such as leading in Government Departments for development, monitoring and implementation of

<sup>12</sup>More information on the agreement can be accessed here: <https://www.cepal.org/en/escazuagreement>

policies, men continue to dominate the decision-making spaces related to resource allocation, for environmental resilience, climate adaptation and disaster recovery in particular. Environmental resilience, climate adaptation and disaster recovery budgets are disproportionately skewed towards male dominated components such as physical or infrastructural resilience, adaptation and recovery whilst equally important, female-dominated components such as psycho-social resilience tend to receive grossly inadequate attention and financing.

Guaranteeing greater participation of women in decision making at all levels in environmental matters, as stipulated in the Escazu Agreement, can lead to greater representation of the needs of sectors dominated by women in all spaces, including in prevention, adaptation and recovery and result in more integrated environmental solutions that take into consideration all aspects of environmental management and all people affected by environmental matters equally.

Another measure directly contributing to the prevention of discrimination of girls was the development and implementation of Gender Policies initiated by two educational institutions, the National Skills Development Centre and the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College. The policies themselves and the participatory processes employed in the development of the policies highlighted specific barriers to gender equality in the education sector and propose gender equity measures to ensure equal access to educational opportunities and treatment. More information on this measure is offered in Section Three.

### How crises have affected the implementation of the BPfA

During the period under review there have been multiple crises affecting women and girls in various ways. The main crisis was the COVID-19 pandemic but other crises include the food and fuel crisis, the debt crisis and the climate crisis. All these crises are inter-related as they were occurring at the same time. The pandemic dealt a significant blow to women's economic empowerment across the globe and in the case of Saint Lucia, exacerbated existing challenges. For decades, unemployment rates among women surpassed that of men. During the COVID-19 pandemic the unemployment gap was widened. Average unemployment rate for women in the two years, before the pandemic 2018 – 2019, was 20.56% (3.84% higher than that of men). During the pandemic period of 2020 – 2021, average unemployment of women rose to 24.41% (5.06% higher than that of men) for the same period.<sup>13</sup>

Much of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is drawn from two reports, the UNDP HEAT Report of 2020 and the publication, Voices of Saint Lucian Women: A study of the impact of COVID-19 on frontline workers, small entrepreneurs, pre-school teachers and hospitality workers published by UN Women in 2021<sup>14</sup>. The Government of Saint Lucia responded with various measures during the pandemic including: Extension to individual tax return; Extension to file Corporate tax; Moratorium on bank loans interest/principal; Utility Assistance; Waiver of interest/penalties on taxes; Tax Credit to Companies retaining 30% staff; Duty free barrel concession; Concessions for production of health and sanitation products; Rent waiver for MSMEs

<sup>13</sup> Source: Central Statistical Office

<sup>14</sup> [https://caribbean.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/Voices%20of%20Saint%20Lucian%20Women%20COVID19%20Impact%2020211011\\_digital.pdf](https://caribbean.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/Voices%20of%20Saint%20Lucian%20Women%20COVID19%20Impact%2020211011_digital.pdf)

renting from Gov't; Fuel Rebate; Gov't Assistance to produce hand sanitizers, liquid soap and rubbing alcohol; Unemployment Subsistence Allowance; Employment Subsistence Allowance; Distribution of meals; Moratorium on public debt repayment, grant funding, policy based loans and budgetary support from Development Partners/regional and multilateral institutions; Government Support; and Bulk purchase of flu related medicines for distribution at low cost.

The measures employed benefited a wide range of groups of individuals including: National Insurance Corporation (NIC) contributors; Self-employed non-NIC contributors, including taxi-drivers, vendors, MSMEs, persons in the informal sector engaged in the creative industry; Registered businesses; Underprivileged persons; Manufacturers of household cleaning items and other individuals. Although both women and men benefitted from the measures, there were no specific measures targeting women, notwithstanding the differential impacts of the pandemic on men and women.

The study of the women engaged in small and microbusinesses in the service industry, *Voices of Saint Lucian Women: A study of the impact of COVID-19 on frontline workers, small entrepreneurs, pre-school teachers and hospitality workers*, found that women employed innovative means for survival during the crisis. According to the report, "few respondents had received any form of employer or other assistance since the beginning of the pandemic up to the end of October 2020. The most common form of economic action taken to combat the financial constraints was the use by individuals of their personal savings to cover basic needs and to ensure their family's survival. Entrepreneurial ventures were started during the pandemic as an alternative source of income. Similarly, entrepreneurs found ways to repurpose or scale down their businesses to more focused services and products". Since the publication of this report private preschool owners have benefitted from income support from the Government of Saint Lucia. This measure is described in Section Three.

The stay at home policies implemented to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus reduced women's and girls' access to some health services including to sexual and reproductive health services and psycho-social support services. The decrease in access to services had implications for sexual and gender-based violence as the incidence and severity of cases of GBV and violence against girls increased during the pandemic period. Homicides involving women were particularly high during and immediately following the pandemic period with a record eight deaths of women within the context of an unprecedented increase in gun-related offenses and gun-related homicides<sup>15</sup>.

Centres providing GBV services such as the Women's Support Centre and the Crisis Centre reported a reduction in calls for support and shelter and an increase in calls for financial support during and immediately following the pandemic period. The calls for financial support "seemed to have replaced the calls for shelter and protection from abuse," according to one service provider. Such manifestations underscore the economic effects of the pandemic on women and the dilemma women faced in ensuring their survival and that of dependents in their response to this unprecedented crisis.

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<sup>15</sup> Source: Royal Saint Lucia Police Force



## Section Three- Progress across the 12 critical areas of concern

Inclusive development, shared prosperity and decent work

Measures taken to advance gender equality in the world of work:

During the period under review several measures were undertaken that supported women's advancement in the world of work. Three of these initiatives aimed at strengthening gender-responsive job creation; improving financial inclusion and access to credit; and supporting the transition from informal to formal work are discussed here.

**Strengthening gender-responsive job creation through education of women and girls:** At the tertiary level, strides were made to encourage and provide women and girls incentives to access skills and certification in sectors traditionally dominated by men. The largest of these initiatives is the Renewable Energy Sector Development Project (RESDP) Scholarship and Apprenticeship Programme. The World Bank is supporting the Government of Saint Lucia through the implementation of the RESDP to explore the viability of its geothermal resource for power generation and strengthen the enabling environment to scale-up clean energy investments with the private sector. The energy sector globally is dominated by men and this reality is also represented in the Saint Lucian context, even within the Public Sector where women's representation is high. The World Bank Gender Score Card for Saint Lucia identifies women's underrepresented in STEM graduate programs and careers as a persistent gender gap.<sup>16</sup>

The RESDP Scholarship programme seeks to reduce the gap in employment opportunities for women in the energy sector, by providing scholarships and apprenticeships to Saint Lucian women and girls interested in pursuing studies within the Engineering Unit of the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College (SALCC). Scholarships are awarded to women and girls who wish to pursue studies in areas traditionally dominated by men including specifically: Associate Degrees in Computer Systems Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Automotive Engineering and Mechanical Engineering; and Certificate Courses in Electrical Installation, Motor Vehicle Mechanics and Air Conditioning Systems. The scholarships are over a four-year duration and cover the cost of fees, primary tools, including a laptop and uniform and transportation of recipients to and from classes, throughout the duration of the programme.

In addition to the scholarships, apprenticeships attached to these courses were enhanced by a 3-month extension (including stipends) in the energy sector for women and girls enrolled in the Electrical and Mechanical Engineering Department. The project further facilitates the careers of scholarship recipients through an annual job fair in the north and south of the island, to support them in finding gainful employment in the energy sector post-graduation. The programme is fully subscribed with thirty-three scholarships (one more than the target number). The initiative runs until 2026.

<sup>16</sup> Saint Lucia Gender Score Card 2023, World Bank:

<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099033403072341039/pdf/IDU0e08c847d05b7204f6a0831901e6a2e41bea1.pdf>

Another initiative targeted at the tertiary level was the Helen's Daughters Scholarship in collaboration with the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College. This initiative was designed to encourage women and girls in pursuing post secondary studies in agriculture. The initiative provided two scholarships covering full tuition for the selected students' programme of choice in the field of agriculture. Helen's Daughters (HD) is a local non-profit organization that focuses on the economic development of rural women through improved market access, adaptive agricultural techniques, and capacity-building.

**Improved financial inclusion and access to credit:** Although not specifically aimed at women, the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise (MSME) Loan Grant Facility and the Youth Economy Agency (YEA) are two initiatives that have improved access to credit for women in business and encouraged women in the informal sector to stimulate and grow their enterprises and enter the formal sector. The MSME Loan-Grant Facility is a project implemented by the Ministry of Commerce, Manufacturing, Business Development, Cooperatives and Consumer Affairs. It is an EC10 million-dollar facility to provide post-COVID-19 pandemic relief to registered Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs). This facility is a combination of 70% grant and 30% loan funding at a 3% interest rate with no collateral requirements.<sup>17</sup> As of March 31, 2024, the evaluation committee of the MSME Loan Grant Facility has approved a total of 344 applicants, of which 175 (51%) are male and 169 (49%) are female. Of the 169 female applicants 155 have been paid out, a total of \$2,248,485. This is significant because the most recent statistics available for Saint Lucia suggest that for every four male-owned business in Saint Lucia there is one woman-owned business.<sup>18</sup> The almost equal participation of women in this initiative is therefore significant and has transformative potential.

The other promising initiative to improve financial inclusion and access to credit is the Youth Economy Agency (YEA), which came into being by an Act of Parliament, No. 17 of 2022.<sup>19</sup> The agency seeks to provide young people an economic space to turn hobbies into entrepreneurship and skills into businesses. It provides special incentives for young people interested in entrepreneurship through: Capacity Building; Creating Opportunities; Awarding of Grants and Loans and Providing Business Support Services.<sup>20</sup> The initiative, financed by the Caribbean Development Bank, is a US\$7.6m project. Over 2300 young entrepreneurs are targeted.

By December 31, 2024, only nine months into the implementation of the YEA, 1614 applications for loans and grants had been received, of which a quarter had been disbursed amounting to a payout value of \$1.3m. Loans and grants of up to \$5000 per applicant can be obtained from this facility to develop projects in a range of areas including: agriculture, agro-processing, manufacturing, retail, and for micro enterprises that drive the blue, green and orange economies. The Agency records an equal level of interest from male and female applicants with business ideas generally reflecting the status quo as it relates to sex segregation in employment and sectors. This provides an opportunity to improve access to information and skills to attract

<sup>17</sup> Source: file:///C:/Users/josep/Downloads/Just-the-FAQs---MSME-Loan-Grant-Facility.pdf

<sup>18</sup> Source: <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/economies/st-lucia>

<sup>19</sup> Source: <https://www.youtheconomy.lc/images/Youth-Economy-Act-No-17-of-2022.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> For further information visit: <https://www.youtheconomy.lc>



more women and girls in STEAM fields at early levels of the education system and change gender stereotypes as it relates to occupations.

**Supporting the transition from informal to formal work:** Over the period under review the Government of Saint Lucia with its partners has engaged in several initiatives to facilitate the transition from informal to formal work. One such way has been through the establishment of four new government-operated Early Childhood Development Centers (ECDCs) in four small communities: Jacmel, Micoud, Gros-Islet, and Monchy, as part of a roll out plan to expand access to subsidized early childhood education opportunities in Saint Lucia. In addition to the public centres, four new private ECDCs were established in 2023: Plants and Pillars, Happy Totes, Children's Happy Place, and Christian Operational Revival Centre. Currently, there are 130 registered Early Childhood Development Centers on the island, comprising of 24 government-operated and 106 privately operated. Only one male owner/operator of an early childhood center exists on the island, with a staff distribution of over 99% women, in keeping with the sex segregation trends in employment.

The new centres open up opportunities for women who worked in the informal sector, providing child care services to women in their small communities, to obtain formal employment in providing similar services within the context of the established centres. Moreover, public ECDCs are subsidized and provide more affordable childcare and early education services to parents. Because childcare tends to fall almost exclusively on mothers, women who cannot afford private ECDCs in small communities, tend to work in the informal sector, usually from their homes, to allow the flexibility of childcare. With the increasing availability of subsidized early childhood services, women in the four communities have greater access to formal work.

Another way that women owners of ECDCs impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic have been assisted to remain in the formal economy is through a one-off payment of \$2500 to each of the ninety-three (93) privately registered ECDCs that existed during the pandemic. This grant was provided by the Government of Saint Lucia in the 2024/25 national budget.

Apart from the centres that have been opened up for participation of women in formal work, several agencies have engaged in training of women engaged in micro-enterprises, with a view to expanding their enterprises and registering their businesses. Projects such as the “Building Effective Resilience for Human Security in the Caribbean Countries: The Imperative of Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in a Strengthened Agriculture (and related Agri/Fisheries Small Business) Sector Project” funded by the UN Trust Fund for Human Security and implemented by UNWomen, FAO and the ILO<sup>21</sup>; the Agriculture Climate Resilience Project for Women implemented by the Taiwanese Government; and the OAS Women’s Economic Empowerment Project<sup>22</sup> are cases in point. Although there have been no impact assessments to determine the number of women who have moved from the informal into the formal sector as a result of the training opportunities made possible through these projects, the implementation of the projects in country provide opportunities for participants to develop skills, change attitudes and increase trust and confidence in business processes to enable their transition from the informal to formal sector.

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.undp.org/barbados/projects/building-effective-resilience-human-security-caribbean>

<sup>22</sup> <https://wee-msme-clearinghouse.com/>

**Reducing and redistributing unpaid care and domestic work, promoting work-life and family balance and strengthening the rights of paid care workers:** Like many other places in the world, the COVID-19 pandemic brought to light the gendered dynamics of care and the weight of unpaid care and domestic work on women in Saint Lucia. Regional processes enabled a national discussion on care that have started a body of work aimed at changing the landscape to allow for greater attention to the care economy and particularly to recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care and domestic work to promote the optimum participation of all of the labour force in the economy. Inter-ministerial processes are underway to formalize an inter-agency task force for care in Saint Lucia. At the same time Saint Lucia is participating in the UN Women implemented Build Back Equal project which employs concrete measures to enable Saint Lucia to gather data on time use and develop laws and policies on care.

**Expanding childcare services and making them more affordable:** In 2022 UN Women released a study conducted through the Joint SDG Fund Project, entitled Fiscal Costs of Expanding Early Childhood Development Services in Saint Lucia<sup>23</sup>, which evaluated the fiscal costs associated with increasing public investment in early childhood development services in Saint Lucia. The study found that additional spending on early childhood development services could be seen as an investment that will provide several public benefits to Saint Lucia in both the short and long-term.

Since this assessment, the Government of Saint Lucia has invested in a roll out plan to increase the number of ECDCs in Saint Lucia. As cited earlier the establishment of the new centres increase access to affordable childcare for a growing number of parents in small communities. Four new centres have been established in this new roll out plan, providing both opportunities for paid work for both employees and mothers who may not have otherwise been able to access paid employment due to their unpaid care of their infants.

**Expanding support for the elderly and persons with disabilities:** The Government of Saint Lucia has continued the Home Help Programme that provides day-time care for elderly persons at their homes and the Disability Grant paid to parents of children with severe disabilities. During the period under review a new Department for Elderly Affairs was created within the Ministry of Health, Wellness and Elderly Affairs from 2021. This Department will assist in consolidating the services for elderly with a view to improving support for this demographic both programmatically and in policy. As it relates to persons with disabilities, on June 12, 2020 the Government of Saint Lucia became the 181<sup>st</sup> United Nations Member State to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and acceded to its Optional Protocol. A new Ministerial portfolio for persons with disabilities was created in 2024 and Minister was assigned. The Minister with this portfolio also holds the post of the Minister of Home Affairs and Crime Prevention and he lives with a disability.

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<sup>23</sup> <https://jointsdgfund.org/publication/fiscal-costs-expanding-early-childhood-development-service-saint-lucia>

## Actions taken to reduce the gender digital divide:

During the last five years there have been numerous initiatives to increase the digital literacy and skills of women and girls, most of which have been accelerated because of the urgency created by the COVID-19 pandemic. These initiatives also demonstrate the education sector's adaptation to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to note that unless specifically indicated, the initiatives did not specifically target women, however owing to the gender distribution in the education sector, the large majority of the beneficiaries of these programmes were women. Below is a brief description of the main initiatives<sup>24</sup>:

**ConnectEd (USAID): Maker Space Initiative:** A digital content creation programme that facilitates collaboration using Open Education (OER) to curate, create and modify digital resources for teaching. Although this project was not directed specifically for women, 70% of beneficiaries were women, owing in part to the gender distribution in the education sector.

**iLearn (OECS): Instructional Material:** Training of teachers in the development of their Digital Skills to facilitate the development of age appropriate instructional materials. This project also predominantly benefited women educators.

**Coding for Climate Change: Scratch Coding Competition:** Inter Secondary Schools challenges inclusive of female participants with a focus on using authentic Climate Change issues.

**Coding and Robotics for Vulnerable Schools: Training:** Inclusion of Coding and Robotics Programmes in Secondary Schools in particularly vulnerable communities in Saint Lucia.

**H5P Tool (OECS): Lesson Development on the Digital Space:** Teacher training with a focus on the development of tools and activities for lessons that are within the digital education space.

**KOTOBEE Training: Ebooks:** Training was conducted in the use of Content Creation Applications for the development of Digital content for students of secondary school level students. This was with a focus on STEM education.

**Obtronics Youth Workshop: Coding Capacity Building:** Annual workshops for students to introduce them to basic and intermediate coding over the course of their Summer Holiday with the possibility of the 1st Global Robotics Competition. Attendance was by subscription and the majority of subscribers were girls.

In addition to the initiatives in the education sector, the Government of Saint Lucia eServices Integrated Platform (DigiGov)<sup>25</sup> expanded during the COVID-19 pandemic providing up to forty-two government services online. Although the service does not target women specifically, the Department of Public Service Modernization has confirmed that women make greater use of the platform than men.

Capacity building initiatives for women in business indicated earlier in this Section of this report included digital skills, cyber safety and leveraging the use of technology for marketing and data management. In addition, the capacity building initiatives of both the Small Business Development Centre of the Department of Commerce and the Youth Economy Agency offer training in technology for beneficiaries of their programmes.

<sup>24</sup> For more information on these initiatives visit: <https://www.education.gov.lc/>

<sup>25</sup> <https://digigov.govt.lc/>

Poverty eradication, social protection and social services

**Reducing poverty among women and girls:** Women’s access to regular training programmes at institutions such as the National Skills Development Centre, the National Enrichment and Learning Unit and the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College continues to be promoted, encouraged and in some cases facilitated through projects that provide scholarships and other forms of financial assistance. Women and girls form the majority of graduates from these technical and vocational training, life skills, workplace readiness skills training and internship opportunities. Training provided by the NSDC and in some cases SALCCC include apprenticeship programmes that often result in job placements for successful graduates. Data shows that more women access and complete the training opportunities. The Learning, Achievement & Development in Enriching Skills (LADIES) programmes offered by the National Skills Development Centre benefit only women and girls.

The tables below show the gender distribution of students enrolled in the various institutions offering skills training:

**Table 1: National Enrichment and Learning Unit Enrollment by Sex – Ministry of Education**

Year	Males	Females	Total
Sept. 2022 - July 2023	308	716	<b>1024</b>
Sept. 2023 - April 2024	348	751	<b>1098</b>

Notwithstanding the higher rates of participation and retention of women and girls in skill development, the gender dynamics in occupations continue to play out in skill training courses with the undersubscription of women in technical fields traditionally accessed by men and the absence of men and boys in courses traditionally associated with women and girls.

**Table 2: National Skills Development Centre (Skills for Youth Employment (SKYE) Programme Enrollment**

Training Area	Enrolled	Male	Male %	Female	Female %
Agro Processing	32	9	28.1%	23	71.9%
Boat Operations & Safety	27	20	74.1%	7	25.9%
Bookkeeping	27	4	14.8%	23	85.2%
Crop Production	23	12	52.2%	11	47.8%
Outboard Engine Repairs	32	31	96.9%	1	3.1%
Sales & Marketing	41	4	9.8%	37	90.2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>44.0%</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>56.0%</b>

**Table 3: Sir Arthur Lewis Community College Programme Enrollment**

<b>ENROLLMENT BY GENDER</b>			
<b>ACADEMIC YEAR</b>	<b>MALE</b>	<b>FEMALE</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
2019 - 2020	704	1206	1910
2020 – 2021	634	1320	1954
2021 – 2022	662	1230	1892
2022 – 2023	621	1221	1842
2023 - 2024	738	1253	1991

**Table 4: Sir Arthur Lewis Community College Programme Completion Rate**

<b>GRADUATION BY GENDER</b>			
<b>ACADEMIC YEAR</b>	<b>MALE</b>	<b>FEMALE</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
2019	189	467	656
2020	155	408	563
2021	179	364	543
2022	196	306	502
2023	149	335	484

In addition to training as a means of increasing skills to access employment, there have been strides to encourage the participation of women, especially in rural settings in agriculture and in the development of microbusinesses into registered small businesses. Some of these initiatives have been outlined previously in this section, including the initiatives that increased access to finance for new and established businesses and the interventions of non-profit companies such as Helen’s Daughters for capacity development and networking of women in rural settings. Export Saint Lucia<sup>26</sup> has engaged women entrepreneurs in training, particularly in branding and assist them to identify and create local markets and for export. Some of these initiatives include trade shows.

**Strengthened social protection programmes for women and girls:** During the period under review, strides were made to strengthen social protections programmes for women and girls. Saint Lucia reviewed and adopted a new Adaptive Social Protection Policy and instituted a National Social Protection Commission and an Inter-agency Social Protection Committee to ensure full and integrated implementation of the policy. In response to the economic fallout during the pandemic, Saint Lucia saw a temporary vertical expansion of the Foster Care, Child Disability Grant and Persons Living with HIV Programmes by additional \$100.00 and horizontal expansion of the Public Assistance Programme (PAP) to accommodate an additional 1000 households. Through the Joint SDG Fund Project, the poverty assessment tool was upgraded to avoid the challenges identified in the previous tool. As a result of the use of the upgraded tool and the reclassification of public assistance clients is now paid to households as opposed to

<sup>26</sup> <https://exportsaintlucia.org/>

individuals. During the COVID pandemic several cash transfers were initiated in the various sectors and other income support and forms of support were provided to poor households.

Universal Health Care package was rolled out for pregnant mothers. This guarantees free primary health care and support for ultrasound during pregnancy for all mothers. In addition, there was a removal of Value Added Tax on sanitary napkins and a subsequent addition of this item to the price control list to ensure the affordability of sanitary products to women and girls in a time of fiscal constraints. Further, effective August 1, 2024 the minimum pensions payable to government pensioners will be increased to \$725.00 and to pensioners paid by the National Insurance Corporation (NIC) to a minimum of \$500 per month. The Prime Minister in his budget address of 2024/25 indicated that about 2400 pensioners, including both men and women, will benefit from this increase effective 1st August 2024.

**Actions taken to improve education outcomes and skills for women and girls:** In addition to the various strides already mentioned in this report on the improvement of education outcomes and skills for girls, four Technical and Vocational TVET Centres were established in the public education system. Four secondary schools were transformed into technical institutes. The Piaye, Anse Ger, Grand Riviere and John Odlum secondary schools now focus on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET).

Students who attended these schools had received the lowest marks at the secondary school entry level examination and the pass rates at the Caribbean Examinations Council (CSEC) examinations had been consistently below national average. This change will therefore allow for a technical and vocational stream during school so that students leaving these institutions will have greater employability and technical and vocational skills on leaving secondary school. Some barriers for successful school to work transition have been removed through this initiative and through the provision of Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ) incorporated in the programmes of the NSDC.

**Increasing gender-responsiveness and eliminating bias at all levels of education:** Strides have been made in the education sector to ensure more gender sensitivity and responsiveness in schools. Some of the initiatives undertaken by the Department of Education with gender considerations include: Education Quality Improvement Project (EQUIP); the OECS Program for Educational Advancement and Relevant Learning (PEARL); The Human Capital Resilience Project (HCRP); Formulation of Gender Responsive Framework for Parent Training and Support Services for Families of SEN Children, the main objective of which is the provision of a gender-sensitive training and support services framework to provide services to families of children with special education needs; Development of a Special Needs Education Policy with a Gender-responsive Action Plan; Review and enhancement of the current Policy for Psycho-Social Support Services of May 2022, which seeks, among other things, to develop a framework for the establishment of gender-responsive and socially-inclusive psycho-social support services to serve Saint Lucia's education system; and Teacher training in the area of "Teaching to Reach Boys". Over 350 educators are benefiting from the training, the majority being women.

**Gender equality and human rights training for teachers and other education professionals:** Through the Skills to Access the Green Economy (SAGE) project, gender equality and human rights training has been made available for the staff of the two participating institutions, the National Skills Development Centre (NSDC) and the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College (SALCC). Focus groups and sensitization sessions were also held with students to develop gender policies for both organizations. These policies are already being implemented in the institutions.

**Facilitating menstrual hygiene management in schools and other education/training settings:** During the period under review there was greater emphasis on and visibility of programmes aimed at facilitating menstrual hygiene management in schools. HerStoire Collective continued their sensitization efforts on menstrual hygiene online. May 28<sup>th</sup> was observed as Menstrual Hygiene Day. Various non-governmental and civil society organizations partnered with schools, targeting girls in Grade 6 and form one to teach menstrual hygiene and distributed free hygiene products to the girls.

Through the SAGE project, Algonquin College did a gender-based analysis for SALCC and NSDC and found that access to menstrual hygiene products was a barrier to gender equity and participation of women in agriculture programming, due to the remote location of the working farm. Additionally, the learners from NSDC tend to be drawn from lower socio-economic groups, who are more vulnerable to period poverty. In an effort to promote gender equity, donations of an Aunt Flow machine and products were made to both NSDC and SALCC. This important gesture supports, not only gender equity, but sanitation, quality education, good health and well-being, poverty reduction and climate action.

Other initiatives aimed at reducing poverty include the provision of meal support, transportation support and child care programming for all NSDC course. This has been included in the training policy of NSDC in consideration of the socio-economic backgrounds of youth who access the courses. First aid, self defence and parenting courses are also offered by NSDC to improve resilience of the women and girls particularly who access the courses. Parenting programmes as well as community-based mentorship programmes for women and girls are ongoing through Social Transformation Officers.



## Freedom from Violence, Stigma and Stereotypes

### Forms of GBV prioritized for action the specific contexts or settings

The Domestic Violence (Summary Proceedings) Act was repealed and Act No.11 of 2022 was passed. This new Domestic Violence Act protects more categories of people and defines more acts as domestic violence than the previous. In addition, it defines domestic relationship so that an offence of Domestic Violence can be committed among various types of family members in various settings. According to the Act “domestic relationship” means relations between an applicant and a respondent where the applicant and respondent — (a) are or were married under any law, custom or religion; (b) are or were cohabitants; (c) are the parents of a child or are persons who have or had parental responsibility for the child, whether or not at the same time; (d) are family members related by consanguinity, affinity or adoption; (e) are family members related by affinity where the cohabitants referred to under paragraph (b) were married; (f) are or were in an engagement, dating or visiting relationship; (g) share or shared the same household or residence; or (h) are in or have been in a relationship determined by the court to be a domestic relationship.

The definition of domestic relationship in this new Act addresses the concerns raised by service providers that victims of violence committed by an ex-partner or a visiting partner could not obtain redress under the law because of the nature of their relationship.

**Sexual harassment and violence in public places, including educational settings and workplaces** is being addressed in several ways. Three entities: The Department of the Public Service; Royal Saint Lucia Police Force; and the Saint Lucia Fire Service have sexual harassment policies in draft. During the period under review, consultations were held on the draft policies with the Public Service Management Team and the members of the Royal Saint Lucia Police Force. Up to the time of reporting neither of these nor the draft policy of the Saint Lucia Fire Service have been adopted.

The Employee Assistance Programme of the Department of the Public Service engaged in a campaign on bullying in the workplace in an effort to raise awareness of various forms of bullying in the workplace. The strategy included public service advertisements, provision of material and resources on bullying in the workplace, an ongoing survey of bullying in the public service and training sessions with public officers. Although this initiative is not specific to sexual harassment, promotion of appropriate work-place behavior assists with prevention of sexual harassment and violence in the workplace.

During the period under review there was greater publicity of prosecution of perpetrators of sexual violence in educational settings in particular. During the period at least three cases of teacher-perpetrated sexual misconduct were prosecuted and justice was served. Although small, this increase in justice can serve as an important deterrent to would-be perpetrators and act as a protective factor for women and girls.



**Violence against women and girls facilitated by technology:** The Computer Misuse Act, Cap 8.14 of the Revised Laws of Saint Lucia has been in force since 6th July 2018, and creates the following offences that are relevant to protection of women and girls against violence facilitated by technology: Indecent photographs of children and Malicious communications. In addition, the Domestic Violence Act includes cyberstalking and harassment as acts of Domestic Violence.

**Gender-based violence in the media:** A gender-sensitive training for media practitioners was conducted in 2022 and again in 2024 by the Division of Gender Affairs through its partners, the Canada-Caricom Expert Deployment Mechanism (CCEDM) and Cuso International respectively. Reports on GBV continue to be accompanied by graphic portrayal of violence against women, notwithstanding the gender sensitivity and training efforts. Media discretion is therefore considered a work in progress.

**Trafficking in women and girls:** Saint Lucia stands at Tier Two in the World Rankings as the island is evaluated every year by the US State Department. This means that Saint Lucia satisfies some but not all the requirements set for International Organization for Migration (IOM) Member States to abide by or fulfill in country. Saint Lucia became a member of the IOM in 2015. For the period under review there are two trafficking in persons matters in the courts. Both suspected traffickers are male Saint Lucians and all victims are women and foreign nationals. The five alleged victims range from 21 to 36 years of age. The incident occurred between 2022 to 2023. In 2023 two male Saint Lucians were allegedly labour trafficked outside of Saint Lucia. This matter is before the Courts in the country where the offence was prosecuted. This is the first time the island had to deal with a trafficking case for nationals who were on foreign soil.

#### Actions prioritized to address GBV

Gender-based Referral Pathways were developed and implemented in Saint Lucia in 2021 within the context of implementation of the Essential Services Programme for Women and Girls subject to Gender-based Violence. Over one hundred service providers in the health, policing, social and education sectors were trained in the use of the referral pathways and the survivor centred approach. These instruments are in use by public agencies and civil society organizations. Training has begun with police officers in the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act. This process is ongoing. The French Embassy in Saint Lucia partnered with the Government of Saint Lucia, a Raise Your Voice Saint Lucia, a Civil Society Organization advocating for the rights of women and children, and the Organization of the Eastern Caribbean States Secretariat to implement a project called “Stop Gender-based Violence”. It is aimed at accelerating the implementation of and raising awareness of the new domestic violence legislation in the public sphere.

As part of this project a national campaign dubbed “Know Your Rights” was launched in 2023 with billboards, radio and television advertisement and knowledge products distributed among government entities and civil society to increase public knowledge of Domestic Violence and the provisions in the Act to protect all citizens’ right to live lives free from violence.

The Forensic Laboratory engaged in a series of workshops for service providers to raise awareness and appreciation of the role that the Laboratory plays in GBV justice. These training workshops improved inter-agency dialogue on pertinent issues including proper management of evidence, medico-legal services, and challenges in prosecution of offenders. The certification of the Forensic Laboratory during this period was an encouraging highlight.

A Technical Working Group for Mental Health and Psycho-social Services was established during the pandemic period through the Ministry of Health and other agencies to improve networking and sharing of information and best practice among service providers in country. In addition, frontline workers in the health, policing and agricultural sectors were trained in Psychological First Aid to provide empathic listening and referral for victims of GBV during the pandemic.

In the civil society space, new services were created to address psycho-social services including for victims of GBV through Girls of a Feather, a non-governmental organization providing services for girls in Saint Lucia. Public sensitization and education are ongoing among both public sector and civil society organizations with schools and community groups. Periods such as the Sixteen Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence are utilized by such groups to increase public awareness and activism against GBV.

### **Resourcing women's organizations working to prevent and respond to GBV**

Through the Stop Gender-based Violence Project, civil society organizations providing services for GBV had an opportunity to apply for grant funding to implement GBV prevention and response initiatives within their communities. The maximum value of each grant was EC\$30,000. Six civil society organizations received grants through this initiative for implementation of their successful projects. This initiative included a capacity building component in grant proposal writing. All civil society organizations who applied for the grants were coached in finetuning proposals to meet set standards. Efforts continue to foster networks and partnership for the implementation of shared gender equality imperatives.

## Participation, accountability and gender-responsive institutions

### Promoting women's participation in public life and decision-making:

In the past five years there have been strides to improve opportunities for participation of women in public life and decision making. The newly established Women's Parliamentary Caucus prioritizes outreach to younger women to nurture interest in political representation and leadership. The Caribbean Women in Leadership (CIWIL) rekindled a Saint Lucia chapter and convened training and capacity building events for women involved or interested in leadership roles. In addition, the Young Women in Leadership (YWIL) conducted a training programme for young women engaged and interested in leadership in various organizations and sectors. Girls of a Feather was also among other civil society organizations implementing capacity building and mentorship programmes for young girls and women desiring to be leaders.

### National Mechanism for the Advancement of Women

During the period under review the Division of Gender Affairs benefited from an increase in budget from the Government of Saint Lucia, including for programming, specifically training. The space allocation has increased to allow for an extension of service offering. The staff composition has increased by one administrative staff. Staffing however remains unstable, affecting the functioning of the office and its ability to deliver on its mandate. The Division has devised innovative ways through partnerships, to fulfil its mandate.

### Peaceful and Inclusive Societies

For the first time, a woman was appointed Police Commissioner in Saint Lucia. This is the highest rank that a woman has occupied in the Royal Saint Lucia Police Force. The police force human resource base however continues to be dominated by men. An escalated crime zone was declared for a southern town in Saint Lucia amid unprecedented gun violence in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has interrupted normal business activity in the district, causing displacement of some residents and widespread fear in neighbouring communities. Women in civil society organizations such as Raise Your Voice and others have partnered with men in peacekeeping efforts, including both in providing psycho-social support for grieving and traumatized members of the community and engaging rival groups in restoring the peace. This effort is ongoing and as such no impact assessments have been conducted.

### Environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation

The past five years have been transformational in the area of environmental conservation, protection and rehabilitation and in particular in incorporating gender considerations in sectors involved in environmental management at all levels. Saint Lucia was one of nine countries participating in the Enabling Gender-Responsive Disaster. Recovery, Climate and Environmental.

Resilience in the Caribbean (EnGenDER) Project<sup>27</sup>. The project has produced several resources including reports, assessments and tools to assist with mainstreaming gender in priority sectors in Saint Lucia's National Adaptation Plan.

An ongoing gender-responsive sector adaptation project is underway in two rural communities in Saint Lucia through the EnGenDER project. This aquaponics project provides aquaponics units and training for farmers with disabilities to promote this industry and provide livelihood activities for persons with disabilities in the two communities. Men and women with disabilities in the communities benefit equally from this initiative.

Sectors such as the Agriculture, Fisheries and Energy, sectors have benefitted from various other initiatives with gender equality outcomes or that include some degree of gender considerations. Some of the initiatives in the Agriculture and Energy sectors have been discussed in earlier sections of this report. Three additional projects in the Fisheries Sector are worth noting in this section. The Mainstreaming Gender Equality in Caribbean Fisheries Project, through which the Gender Analysis, Strategy and Action Plan on Gender Mainstreaming in Fisheries for the Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM) States (Gender ASAP) was developed. The Gender ASAP stressed the importance of gender mainstreaming in the fisheries governance arrangements and enabling framework as well as the daily fishery and fisheries-related operations, administration, management, and programming at all stakeholder levels.

Another important project in the Fisheries sector was the COASTfish Project which focuses on establishing a framework in which local fisher folks, their organizations, and fisheries authorities can work together to manage fishery resources around coral reefs for sustainable use. Another Clear Caribbean Project focuses on sustainable development, environmental management and restoration, community livelihoods and adaptation to climate change. Finally the CC4Fish Project seeks to increase resilience and reduce vulnerability to climate change impacts in the Eastern Caribbean fisheries sector, through introduction of adaptation measures such as capacity building of fisherfolk and aqua-culturists and mainstreaming of climate change into fisheries governance. These projects employ a participatory approach allowing concerns and needs of women fishers to be incorporated in solutions.

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<sup>27</sup> The Enabling Gender-Responsive Disaster. Recovery, Climate and Environmental. Resilience in the Caribbean (EnGenDER) Project

## Section Four: National institutions and processes

Although aspects of a draft National Gender Equality Strategy have been in implementation since 2022, consultations continue on the National Gender Equality Policy Statement and Strategy. Since January 2023 a formal Gender Focal Point System was established to ensure that all Ministries and Departments have a conduit and support to mainstream gender in their respective processes, programmes and policies.

Collaborative inter-agency institutional mechanisms continue to exist, such as the Coordinating Committee for Climate Change and the Country Coordinating Committee for Social Protection. Major project steering committees include representatives from across various Ministries, Departments and Agencies, often including Civil Society partners.

## Section Five: Data and Statistics

Gender data and statistics continue to be underutilized in decision making. This is mostly due to capacity challenges for analysis. There are opportunities through the Gender Focal Point System to develop capacity for data analysis and use across the various Ministries and Departments. During the period under review regional processes prioritized gender data capacity development in national statistical offices. Saint Lucia benefited from these exercises.

The establishment of an inter-agency coordination mechanism is a priority to facilitate greater use of gender and sex disaggregated data in the development of policy and programmes across all of Government. Moreover, for the next five years efforts will be made to make greater use of the sex disaggregated data already being collected administratively in various Ministries and Departments to analyze trends and prioritize for gender equitable outcomes in legislative, policy and programme design, implementation and evaluation.

## Section Six: Conclusions and next steps

### Key takeaways and Reflections

The last five years of implementation of the BPfA have been characterized by a mixture of achievements, challenges, opportunities and setbacks. The achievements and gains of this period bring hope for sustainability. The challenges are not new to this period however during the period of review many of the challenges experienced in previous times were clearer and unavoidable to more groups of people, including those with power to effect change. The structural barriers to inequality have been laid bare, creating an excellent opportunity to explore and implement comprehensive, systemic and strategic approaches and methodologies to effect meaningful change and substantive gains.

True progress in implementation of the BPfA requires a shared national goal for gender equality as a sustainable development imperative. It demands a thorough understanding of the objective status of women and men in a national development context through the production and analysis of adequate and relevant data; the commitment to allocate the required resources addressing inequities identified; and a reliable means to continuously measure, monitor and analyze progress and challenges in the national context. Transformative actions are deliberate and go against established social norms, beliefs, attitudes and practices. Push back is an expected outcome of progress. Implementation of the BPfA must therefore consider and cater for this push back and the changing dynamics between men and women created by the transformative actions.

More than ever, the need for a holistic understanding of development and the importance of leaving no one behind can no longer be an option for sustainable development, but an imperative that is shared, understood and considered at all levels. The BPfA offers a reliable and timelines framework for ensuring a holistic approach to development that includes everyone. Implementation of this platform therefore requires greater attention and commitment by national actors in the next five years within the context of the 2030 development agenda and the Decade of Action for Sustainable Development.